

In the experiential/constructivist paradigm, learning occurs through immersion and mentoring by someone from either the home or the host culture. In this paradigm, meaning does not reside exclusively in the environment as a given to be discovered (positivist) or in a set of immersion activities to be experienced (relativist) but rather in the provision of intercultural *learning interventions*, a cultural mentoring process that guides and supports the students in developing their intercultural competence. The learning assumption is that students gain more from the study-abroad experience when they are provided with intercultural expertise along the way than they can on their own. Cultural mentoring emphasizes reflecting on intercultural experiences and thinking beyond the lens of understanding provided by one's own cultural background. The longer term goals are to learn how to shift perspective to more closely approximate that of the host culture and to adapt behavior to the new cultural context. Immersion remains a key component, but cultural mentoring is now added to the process.

The experiential/constructivist version of a study-abroad program includes interventions such as the following: (a) the provision of culture content (e.g., cultural-general patterns); (b) guided cultural immersions and opportunities to engage with the host culture; (c) ongoing, regularly occurring reflection on the lived experiences of being in a new culture; (d) an intercultural course or seminar; and (e) regular use of the host country language. All of these interventions represent ways in which intercultural expertise is used to support the intercultural learning experience. All of them require an interculturally knowledgeable cultural mentor, a person who may be serving in a formal role as a course instructor or informally in group or individual meetings with students. Through these processes, students construct meaning through interactions with one another, their hosts, the culture, and their mentors. This process of experience and reflection leads to making meaning that is increasingly more intercultural and better aligned with the meanings the host culture people would hold of their own culture. Intercultural competence is an explicit and central goal of study-abroad programs conducted in the experiential/constructivist framework.

Cultural Mentoring and the Cultural Mentor

The process of cultural mentoring and the role of the cultural mentor are central to the experiential/constructivist intervention model. In this model, the cultural mentor needs to be a person with significant intercultural knowledge and skills, a person who is interculturally competent. The cultural mentor helps organize and drive the intercultural learning process. This is done in a number of ways.

First, the mentor provides ongoing support for intercultural development. Learning activities are designed such that they are systematic, developmental, deliberate, and intentional. In the CIEE program, for instance, students have the option of taking an intercultural "Living and Learning" seminar, where teaching is done in a manner that is *developmentally appropriate* to the learner's level of intercultural competence. The seminar provides numerous opportunities for students to reflect on their intercultural experiences, and the instructor provides regular feedback regarding their cultural observations.

Second, the mentor provides culture concepts and ideas to anchor the learning. In virtually every on-site or online course, students are introduced to a variety of culture-general concepts, such as value patterns or communication styles that they can use to explore the patterns or styles that are specific to their host culture.

Third, the cultural mentor suggests strategies that can be used to learn a culture. These can include learning from a host culture resource person, from the media, and from observing how people interact and communicate. In the Maximizing Study Abroad/Global Engagement course, University of Minnesota students take the Culture-Learning Strategies Inventory at the beginning of the term. They discover new culture learning strategies that they might not yet be employing, as well as approaches that they are already using. This process helps students become more strategic and mindful of how they can learn about the host culture.

Fourth, the mentor provides opportunities to put learning into practice. For example, students can be asked to attend and observe a cultural ritual such as a wedding or a national holiday, reflect on the experience, and draw provisional lessons from it. The point here is that in addition to the everyday experiences of the student, the mentor is setting up directed learning opportunities with specific lessons to be gained from the experience.

Fifth, the mentor provides structured opportunities for students to reflect on their intercultural experiences. This can be done through reflection assignments, maintaining reflection journals, and meeting together with students to discuss what they have been experiencing and learning.

Sixth, the mentor helps the students connect what they are learning to their future: professional, educational, and personal. These conversations and activities are particularly helpful just prior to departing from the host country and during the reentry phase of the cycle. At the University of Minnesota, students explore the requirements of the employment positions they are seeking and practice articulating how what they did and learned abroad might be relevant to that particular position.