

Sonia Gallucci  
University of Birmingham

What does it mean to be prepared for the Year Abroad? And who can really benefit from this experience?

In this paper, I shall give an overview of the Year Abroad (YA) research context, highlighting a number of studies carried out within and outside Europe and considering current issues in this field, among which the need of more intercultural pedagogic preparation for people embarking on the YA experience. These will be treated in relation to my research study, whose overarching questions are: *What does it mean to be prepared for the Year Abroad (YA)? And who can really benefit from this experience?*

The paper is divided into four main sections. I will start with a brief overview of the recent phenomenon of student mobility across and outside Europe and the EU student mobility scheme in which my participants took part for one academic year, that is the ERASMUS exchange programme (Coleman: 1995, 1998; Roberts et al: 2001; Papatsiba: 2006, Alred & Byram: 2002, 2006; Freed: 2008).

Secondly, I shall talk about the cultural turn in studies of residence abroad that embraces the theorisation of intercultural communicative competence (Hymes: 1972; Wiseman: 2001; Deardoff: 2006; Byram & Feng: 2006), intercultural awareness (Hanvey: 1976; Hall & Toll: 1994) and intercultural sensitivity (Bennet: 1986, 1993) as separated but mutually dependant key concepts that can lead individuals to a successful intercultural interaction (Chen, 1997: 9).

Thirdly, I shall provide some examples of intercultural encounters of my participants during their stay in Italy, with the main aim of highlighting the particular ways in which they experienced and dealt with cultural difference, and the extent to which they adjusted or/and adapted to the new Italian surroundings.

Last but not least, I will present some *work-in-progress* materials that I developed and used in Higher Education, with the main objective of raising intercultural awareness among learners of Italian in preparation for their YA experience as ERASMUS students. These are based on my research findings and on pre-existing materials in English translated by me into Italian (Jenks: 1997; Byram: 1997; Hall & Toll: 1994; Paige: 1993; Landis et al: 2004).

#### References

- Alred, G. & Byram, M. (2002) "Becoming an intercultural mediator: a longitudinal study of residence abroad". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Volume 23 (5), 339-52.
- Alred, G. & Byram, M. (2006) "British students in France: 10 years on". In Byram, M. & Feng, A. (eds) *Living and studying abroad*. 210-31.
- Bennett, M.J. (1986). "A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 10 (2), 179-95.
- Bennet, M. J. (1993) "Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity" in Paige R. M. (ed.) *Education for the intercultural experience*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

- Byram, M. & Feng, A. (eds) (2006). *Living and studying abroad*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (1997) *Crossing frontiers: The school study visit abroad*. London: CILT.
- Chen, G.M. (1997) "A review of the concept of intercultural sensitivity". Paper presented at the biennial convention of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association. January 1997, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Coleman, J. A. (1995) "The current state of knowledge concerning student residence abroad". In Parker, G. & Rouxville, A. (eds), 17-42.
- Coleman, J. A. (1998) "Language learning and study abroad: The European perspective". *Frontiers* 4, 167-203.
- Deardoff, D. K. (2006) "Assessing intercultural competence in study abroad students". In Byram, M. & Feng, A. (eds), 232-56.
- Freed, B. (2008) "Second language learning in a study abroad context" in Van Deusen-Scholl, N. & Nornberger, N. H. (eds). *Encyclopedia of Language and Education: Second and Foreign Language Education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, volume 4, New York: Springer, 113-125.
- Hanvey, R.G. (1976) *An attainable Global perspective*. New York: Global Perspective in Education.
- Hall & Toll (1999) "Raising Intercultural Awareness in preparation for the periods of residence abroad", report of a sub-project of The Intercultural Project, University of Central Lancashire and St Martin's College, Lancaster, pp. 20-6.
- Hymes, D. (1972) "On communicative competence". In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (eds) *Education* 27 (1), 57-68.
- Landis, D., Bennett, M. & Bennett, J. (2004) (eds). *Handbook of intercultural training*. London: SAGE.
- Papatsiba, V. (2006) "Study abroad and experiences of cultural distance and proximity: French Erasmus students". In Byram, M. & Feng, A. (eds), 108-33.
- Parker & Rouxville (1995) (eds) ' *The Year Abroad': Preparation, monitoring, evaluation*. London: CILT.
- Paige, M. (1993) (ed). *Education for the intercultural experience*. USA: Intercultural Press INC.
- Roberts, C., Byram, M., Barro, A., Jordan, S. & Street, B. (2001) *Language learners as ethnographers*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Wiseman, R.L. (2001) "Intercultural Communication Competence" in Gudykunst, W. & Mody, B. (eds) *Handbook of intercultural communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1-15.