

Abstracts

Dr Angela Leahy and Juliette Péchenart - The Year Abroad: then and now and where to?

For more than thirty years, NIHE/DCU has been sending students abroad and receiving their counterparts for a Year Abroad (Year 3 of the BA in International Marketing and Languages, BA in Applied Languages, BA in International Business and Languages, BSc in Applied Computational Linguistics, BSc in Chemistry/Physics with French/German, BA in Applied Languages and Intercultural/Translation Studies, Bachelor of Business International).

We sent our first students to France and Germany/Austria in 1983, added Spain in 1987, Japan in 1989 and China in 2010.

We will recap on how the experience has changed for students (and coordinators), what approaches/initiatives we have considered to respond to the changing realities of recent years and what aspects of the Year Abroad we think will deserve attention in the coming years. In particular we will provide an overview of some features of our Year Abroad requirements, e.g. Cultural Projects, Career Development Module, International Engagement Project, On-line module 'Languages in a connected world' as well as ideas for future developments.

Catherine Jeanneau and Marta Giralt - The I-Tell Project (Intercultural telecollaborative Language learning): Preparing for the period abroad

The period abroad (on Erasmus or work experience placement) is a significant part of the Higher Education student experience. While it is crucial to increase the opportunities for students to go abroad, it is also paramount to prepare them for their stay in a foreign country through reflection and analysis so that they can fully benefit from this experience (Byram & Dervin, 2008). The better prepared they are before their placement, the better their experience will be. In this respect, the I-Tell Project aims at raising intercultural awareness amongst students and promoting language practice before the period abroad. The objectives of the project are to develop the participants' intercultural, linguistic and digital skills while preparing for their experience abroad.

In this presentation, we will introduce some preliminary results of the pilot phase of the I-Tell project. For this phase, a group of Second Year students learning Spanish at the University of Limerick, Ireland who were set to go to Spain on Erasmus or work placement were paired up with students from the University of León, Spain. These latter students were learning English and were also preparing to travel to either the UK or Ireland.

As part of the project work, the students had to conduct a series of telecollaborative tasks covering a range of intercultural topics. At the end of the project, the students completed a questionnaire about their experience.

Some conclusions and recommendations on the value of this project will be drawn from the data analysis and the importance of telecollaboration in raising intercultural awareness in preparation for the period abroad will be discussed.

Odette Gabaudan - Don't cut ties yet! Online Journaling as a Tool to Enhance Students' Learning Experience of their Study Visit Abroad

Students who spend a full academic year on a study visit abroad experience many new challenges. This paper shows how the maintenance of an online journal via a blog/e-portfolio structure can support students in their new learning experiences, alert the home coordinator to any potential difficulty before it escalates, provide them with regular online feedback on their progress and enhance their final reflective paper submission. The paper is of interest to Erasmus coordinators and educational institutions whose programmes include a study visit or a placement component.

Dr Kristin Brogan - The Stay Abroad Experience: Potential development of Components of Proficiency and Cultural Learning during the Year Abroad

This paper investigates the possible benefits of the Study Abroad programme in relation to language proficiency development and cultural learning. In total, 143 students participated in this research from seven third level Irish universities (DCU, NUIM, NUIG, TCD, UCC, UCD and UL) who all studied German as part of their degree. The majority of participants availed of the opportunity to study or work abroad in Germany or Austria, while 13 students stayed at home and formed the control group.

A combination/inter-relationship of factors (linguistic, inter-cultural, personal and socio-cultural) is considered significant to acquisition of receptive and productive language and is exploited in the elicitation and analysis of data. The author has enquired systematically into the factors that may positively advance language acquisition and cultural learning. Data from students who went abroad is compared with a control group to analyse the possible combination/inter-relationship of factors that may positively enhance language proficiency development and make cultural learning possible.

The presentation includes a brief literature summary of language acquisition and intercultural communication during the SA. The methodology of this research is both qualitative and quantitative and the specific assessments instruments are also discussed. This research includes questionnaires, interviews in English, and German aural and oral tests in order to measure any difference before and after the residence abroad.

The findings clearly show that not all students improve their language proficiency nor are able to move beyond a stereotypical view of the host country. Self-confidence as a language speaker and "outsider" while abroad are important factors for successful learning. The presenter would like to highlight the fact that educators must assist learners to become more aware of how to make the implicit learning of the year abroad more explicit. Despite the fact that not all students improve, there is plenty of evidence about self-discoveries and increased awareness about their own culture and the majority of them evaluated the SA experience in a positive way and would like to return to the host country in the future.

Dr Claire O'Reilly - From myth to reality: Year Abroad experiences of past students and implications for teaching and learning initiatives

Based on a critical appraisal of three undergraduate courses designed to prepare students for the cultural and intercultural side of the Year Abroad, and on feedback with students themselves both in oral and in written form, this paper will examine students' feedback of the Year Abroad both before and after their year in Germany or Austria. It was found that students have the very best of intentions in terms of learning culturally and linguistically before leaving for their place of study, but that often these hopes and aspirations don't materialize in the way they envisaged. The obstacles to learning will be aired, and reflections on this will be made in terms of teaching and learning suggestions extrapolated from the research. It is therefore hoped that such suggestions can help students purposefully follow-through and achieve their year abroad goals, thereby avoiding unintended and less-than-hoped for academic and linguistic outcomes.

Mary Catherine Murray - *A Petite Promenade* around Working in a French Diplomatic Environment

Mary Catherine Murray works in European Union Division in Department of the Taoiseach. She trained as an international human rights lawyer and in the field of international law, a knowledge of French is often expected. In 2002 the Department of Foreign Affairs sent her to the French Government School, *L'École Nationale d'Administration*, in Paris and this presentation will give a flavour of the experience of an English speaker from Ireland working in a French diplomatic environment.