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Beyond Sightseeing:

The Learning Effects of Excursions within a Study Abroad Context

Introduction

Supervised cultural excursions are often included in the offerings of study abroad immersion programs. Such excursions have the potential to achieve a depth beyond sightseeing. Under certain conditions, excursions can foster foreign language and intercultural learning as well as skill acquisition in a

setting that has advantages not only over the traditional classroom, but also over daily unsupervised immersion.

I intuitively came to these conclusions during my experience as both a program participant and later, as an organizer and leader of such cultural excursions with the Boston University (BU) Dresden Programs in Germany. In academic literature on study abroad topics, excursions are generally viewed as being beneficial for students (Dahl; Fry; Hansen, Bohn, Smithers; Thies 86; Zeilinger 10, 16). However, to my knowledge, the above statements have never been supported by empirical evidence. Therefore, the questions which guided my research were:

What are the potential learning effects of immersion program excursions?
What are the actual learning effects of immersion program excursions?

I attempted to answer the first question with a literature review of immersion programs and excursions, and the second question with an empirical case study of the cultural excursions offered by the BU Dresden Liberal Arts Program. My findings will be described in condensed form below.¹

The accompanying Appendix for this article can be [downloaded here](#).

Literature Review

Study Abroad Immersion Programs

There are many educational benefits of immersion programs. “Learning is not isolated in a classroom, but involves a total experience. Learning takes place outside of the study abroad classroom in the student’s living situation, associations with peers, and participation in extracurricular activities” (Steinberg 210-211). According to the *Model Assessment Practice for Study Abroad* (IES), the *Standards of Good Practice* (The Forum on Education Abroad 10) and empirical surveys of program participants (Mendelson “The Best Laid Plans”; Grotjahn; Opper et al.), planners and participants of immersion programs generally have learning goals that fit into three categories:

- (1) linguistic and communicative goals
- (2) cultural and intercultural goals and
- (3) social and practical goals.

There are ample opportunities to work towards these goals, both during class time and during leisure time. “As efficient means of language education, these programs are designed to maximize communicative language-use opportunities in a culturally authentic (or approximately authentic) environment” (Aveni 1).

The immersion environment has risks, however. When program participants cannot sufficiently express themselves in the target language, they could experience foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope 31). Empirical studies indicate that foreign language anxiety during a period of study abroad is connected with a negative attitude towards the target language and lower motivation, which in turn negatively affect subsequent performance in the target language (Grotjahn, Raatz, Wockenfuß 141). Some program participants gradually avoid the target language in order to retain a more confident self image; others fear making mistakes or suffer communicative failures in the target language (Aveni 2; Engel, Engel 9; Grotjahn 5; Grotjahn, Raatz, Wockenfuß 134–135; Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope 31; Mendelson “Hindsight is 20/20”, 58).

Problems in navigating the target culture can also cause negative reactions. For example, despite speaking grammatically or lexically correct, students could be communicating in a way that is culturally or socially inappropriate (Zeuner 62). If they are reflected upon, such experiences and misunderstandings can create a basis for comparison and discussion, which aids intercultural learning (Pauldrach 12–13; Zeuner 30–32). However, extreme or unreflected cases can trigger culture shock, especially when the students don’t resolve the problem or are unaware of the misunderstanding (Pauldrach 14; Wagner 31-34).

Because of these risks and their consequences, there is the possibility that students stick with other program participants instead of integrating themselves into their host country (Engel, Engel 9; Lutterman-Aguilar, Gingerich 43; Mendelson “Hindsight is 20/20”, 56–58; Mendelson “The Best Laid Plans”). Students must be self-motivated in order to overcome the social

and psychological hurdles and take full advantage of the learning possibilities around them (Aveni 1-2).

Excursions within a Study Abroad Context

Goals

The academic literature provides few explicit goals for cultural excursions. These goals are often both vague and intuitive, or they are directly related to specific programs. This is presumably because immersion programs can vary greatly from one another and therefore have different conditions, student needs and goals. One vague and general statement comes from the *Model Assessment Practice for Study Abroad*: “Guided field trips help students take advantage of the region and result in more learning than if students attempt to travel on their own” (IES 12–13). How students take advantage of the region, what and how they learn is not explicitly stated. The statement is presumably vaguely formulated so that it is applicable to many types of programs and many possible sites.

In my research, I applied the general goals of study abroad immersion programs (see above) to their cultural excursions. I found only one instance in which a communicative goal – about interaction in the target language – was directly linked with excursions. It was formulated as a question in the *Standards of Good Practice*: “Are students encouraged to use the host language as much as possible in the program, in class, and on excursions?” (The Forum on Education Abroad 10). There were also only a few cultural and intercultural goals in the academic literature on study abroad topics. “Excursions were organized to expand student cultural awareness” (Hansen, Bohn, Smithers S1D-10) “[and] reinforce [...] academic goals and students’ intercultural development.” (IES 12–13). Practical goals prescribed for excursions were to introduce program participants to the host region and to make them familiar with practical things in the target culture, for example with public transportation (Fry; IES 12–13).

Since the academic literature provides few explicit goals for excursions, I will outline holistic learning as an experiential approach toward achieving the three types of study abroad goals (see above). In this, I will focus on learning outcomes within the scope of foreign language acquisition and intercultural learning. I will then apply this approach towards excursions in a study abroad context.

Holistic Learning and Foreign Language Acquisition

Pestalozzi, an 18th century Swiss reform pedagogue, formally developed the holistic learning method to include the “head, heart and hand” of learners. This learning method calls for learners to be stimulated cognitively (thinking and logic), affectively (emotions) and physically (senses and movement) in natural contexts, just as one is stimulated in daily life. Pestalozzi based learning on dealing with concrete objects and experiences. Moreover, “[t]he intent [of Pestalozzi’s holistic method] was not to present a multitude of materials, facts, and experiences and then leave to chance what each pupil would do with it, but to prepare each pupil for life” (Jedan 64).

This practical orientation of holistic learning on life, action and experience retains its validity to this day. “[R]esearch indicates that students learn best when they make emotional connections with the content being studied through concrete experience or form relationships with people who make the content come alive” (Lutterman-Aguilar, Gingerich 50–51). Neurological research shows that holistic learning activates both hemispheres of the brain and produces an interactive connection between rational and creative thought (Betz 81–85; Hüther; Rozenberg 99; Timm “Ganzheitlichkeit als Anliegen” 12). This multi-sensory process leads to emotional associations and motor connections, which support long-term memory of things learned (Betz 85; Huneke, Steinig 106).

Language acquisition is learning a language through life; that is, learning a language through authentic linguistic actions.² Therefore, language acquisition is holistic. Authentic linguistic actions are communicative, interactive, occur within a social context and are made with the intention of accomplishing something (Timm “Englischunterricht zwischen Handlungsorientierung und didaktischer Steuerung”, 47; Rozenberg 154–155). These actions include not only the productive skills, speaking and writing, but also the receptive skills, listening and reading.

Foreign language acquisition occurs in natural contexts in which the foreign language is not a subject to be learned, but a tool which is used spontaneously and unreflected in order to communicate (Timm “Ganzheitlichkeit als Anliegen” 12). The place of learning changes, the senses are stimulated, linguistic actions are authentic and varied (Huneke, Steinig 93). In addition, inner thinking processes ideally occur in the foreign language (Steinig 69). Foreign language acquisition most often occurs in countries in which the target

language is also the official national language, and/or daily life takes place in the foreign language and culture.³

In the academic literature about foreign language acquisition, there are a few concrete descriptions of action-based and holistic methods for learning a foreign language in the authentic and intensive context of daily life in a country where the target language is widely spoken.⁴ Foreign language acquisition in this context provides a different experience in comparison to the traditional foreign language classroom. For example, it is usually difficult to integrate authentic actions from daily life into the traditional foreign language classroom.⁵ There is a risk, however, that without the guidance provided by traditional foreign language classes, the language learner can “fossilize”, i. e. become stuck with a low competence in the foreign language, because he or she can more or less communicate at this level (Huneke, Steinig 93). In this case, accuracy is sacrificed for communicative fluency (Huneke, Steinig 97).

Holistic Learning on Excursions

Excursions can contribute to foreign language acquisition and the acquisition of a cultural competence in a way that lies between the traditional classroom and authentic “real life”. Excursions can provide a space for authentic communicative action and interaction within the target language and culture. Active language learners can use the target language both receptively and productively, for example by listening to tours or through interaction in free conversation during the excursion.

While holistic foreign language learning should be close to “real life,” it should also be anxiety-free (Betz 85), which is not always realistic. Therefore 100% authentic actions are not always desirable for language learners. During excursions, the communicative space can be experienced not only without the anxiety and pressure to perform well for grades, as is often the case in the traditional foreign language classroom, but also without the risks that come from “real life” communication. Linguistically or culturally inappropriate actions and misunderstandings can be mediated by an excursion coordinator in order to water-down or prevent negative consequences, which can help prevent negative feelings and culture shock. In addition, program participants can ask the excursion coordinator linguistic and cultural questions in order to then speak or act appropriately. Therefore, program participants enjoy the advantages of authentic linguistic action with regards to their foreign language acquisition, yet they have “expert guidance” which allows them freedom from

the negative consequences of possible mistakes. Negative experiences can be filtered out when possible, which can decrease the fear of making mistakes in the future. Thus program participants can build up their self confidence in the foreign language and culture in this protected, anxiety-free space.

Excursions in the target country also open up possibilities of authentic sensual experiences and emotional associations that are only possible outside of the traditional classroom setting (Hey 244). Places and manifestations of culture can be experienced authentically instead of through media. The holistic experiences while on excursions stimulate Pestalozzi's "head" with knowledge about the culture and with competence in the target language. The "hand" is stimulated through constant movement and perceptions by the senses. The "heart" is stimulated with feelings of group belonging, with freedom from foreign language anxiety, and with associations with the history, nature, charm and impressiveness of the destination.

Case Study

Background

The BU Dresden Liberal Arts and Internship Programs share a six-week orientation phase. During this phase, the programming is set up like an island program and is intended to prepare the students for a semester of direct enrollment at a German university, internships within German institutions, and everyday cultural immersion. The program offerings include five cultural excursions outside the host city. All of these excursions are led by an excursion coordinator; in this case, the resident director. Three excursions are to local sites of interest: Meißen, Königstein and Radeberg. The other two are to the nearby capital cities Berlin and Prague. Each official excursion includes transportation, a tour and lunch and lasts one day; however, students often choose to extend their stay in Berlin and Prague through the weekend. These excursions are loosely connected to the students' intensive language and culture course. While no explicit student preparation or assignments are expected for the excursion, participation is mandatory and the students are required to speak only German within the group for at least half of the official excursion. The explicit goals of the excursions are to encourage immersion and student interaction in German, and to expose the students to specific regional destinations (BUIP, Fimmel).

During the spring semester in 2008,

⁶ three students participated in the BU Dresden Liberal Arts Program for one semester. While this small sample cannot be considered representative, it allowed for the collection of detailed, personalized data using several different approaches.

According to the students' placement exam results, the students' language levels at the start of the orientation phase corresponded to levels B1 (low intermediate), B2 (high intermediate) and C1 (low advanced) of the Common European Framework of Reference. Although all three students studied full time at the BU College of Arts and Sciences, they came from quite different backgrounds. The level B1 student was an Ecuadorian native speaker of Spanish and was studying as a foreign student at BU. The level B2 student was Mexican American and was raised bilingually (English/Spanish) in a town on the US-Mexican border. The level C1 student was an English native speaker with limited previous experience abroad, who had participated in a German language immersion camp as a high school student.

Objective and Hypotheses

The objective of my case study was to empirically investigate the learning effects of cultural excursions within the context of the orientation phase of the BU Dresden Liberal Arts Program. I used the term "learning effects" instead of "goals" to allow for unplanned content and learning processes that could occur in context or by chance. Therefore, the study focused on what actually happened during excursions instead of what was specifically planned.

My assumption was that these excursions would provide much more than just sightseeing in the host region. Beneficial outcomes would be similar to overall goals and outcomes of immersion programs and include linguistic and communicative learning effects in the target language, cultural and intercultural learning effects as well as social and practical learning effects. I also predicted that a benefit specific to excursions would be the creation of a protected, action-based learning environment in which students experience the target language and culture holistically and in non-intimidating, yet mostly authentic situations.

Instruments

I independently developed and administered three instruments to collect data:

- Qualitative participatory observation based on observation criteria: I observed each of the five individual excursions as an active participant. Observation data was collected and organized corresponding to a list of potential learning effects (see appendix 1).
- Quantitative and qualitative questionnaire: The questionnaire was administered in English, six times per student: once before the first excursion and immediately after each of the five excursions. I also filled out the same six questionnaires (see appendix 2).
- Qualitative interview: I interviewed each student in English at the end of the orientation phase, after all five excursions. (see appendix 3).

Limitations of the Case Study

This case study was limited by a number of factors (see Donohue-Bergeler 82-83):

- The data collection instruments could not be pre-tested.
- There were not enough program participants to create a control group; there was only an experimental group that could not be randomly selected. This allows for many individual factors to influence the results.
- Not all of the questionnaires were returned, and not all of the questions were answered on each questionnaire. Because I decided to only use quantitative results for items which were answered for at least three out of the five excursions, I could not to use any of the quantitative data of the B1 level student.
- Qualitative participatory observation warped the results because of my influence on the situations. For example, I naturally contributed to conversations both in German and in English. However, to stay uninvolved would have been artificial for such a small group and could have alienated the program participants.
- Data was collected multilingually, which means that the data could have different cultural associations. This makes the qualitative data especially open to interpretation.

- There were sometimes differences between my observations and the students' self assessments. This could be because some learning takes place at an unconscious level that the students cannot accurately assess; conversely, I cannot observe the inner processes that occur for each individual student.
- Because the students were taking an intensive foreign language course parallel to the excursions, and also because they were living in dorm-style housing where immersion was possible, it was difficult to determine the exact cause of the students' progress.

Despite these limitations, the case study yielded results that could inform the direction of further research.

Findings

A thorough report and analysis of the results in German, as well as an extensive appendix documenting the collected English and German language empirical data, is accessible online (see Donohue-Bergeler).

Learning Effects

Over the course of the five excursions, the three students experienced many of the expected learning effects and beneficial outcomes. Some of these are listed and briefly discussed below.

German language immersion and interaction within the group

German language immersion and interaction helped students improve their oral skills in German. However, German conversations within the group only occurred when the excursion coordinator and I were there to encourage and enforce the German language requirement (Donohue-Bergeler 57-58). The students readily admitted this because of the difference in language levels among them.

Linguistic contact with native speakers

The most intensive and interactive contact was with the excursion coordinator. The students also had contact with tour guides, but this was usually one-sided and consisted of listening (Donohue-Bergeler 58). Contact

with wait staff was common as well and provided the students with simple linguistic exchanges in order to accomplish a goal (ordering at restaurants).

Increased passive and active vocabulary specific to the particular sites, to transportation and general conversational topics

The two stronger students felt that they made significant progress in improving their vocabulary. The B1 student, however, did not (Donohue-Bergeler 53-54). This could be due to individual factors, or it could indicate that vocabulary building on excursions is only efficient after one has reached a certain language level.

Exposure to aspects of German culture through sightseeing and tours

The students got to know regional attractions near Dresden and could answer content-related questions about them with relative ease (Donohue-Bergeler 61). The excursion coordinator also transmitted cultural information through explanations of specific things. For example, when students asked about the small houses near the train tracks they saw on the way to Meißen, she told them about the development of “Schreber gardens” and their function in German society (Donohue-Bergeler 61). Later during the Meißen excursion, the group passed a bridal couple sawing a log together. The excursion coordinator explained this particular German tradition, which then led to a longer discussion (see below) (Donohue-Bergeler 73-74).

Exposure to aspects of day-to-day German culture through food, language, and other manifestations of culture

In the questionnaires, the program participants agreed that they got to know bits of day-to-day German culture through its manifestations during the excursions. For example, restaurants were chosen for their regional authenticity. The excursions coordinator added to this with her own comments, stories and explanations as they applied to the particular situation (Donohue-Bergeler 61-62). For example, when the program participants were surprised to see school children going home at a time they considered to be too early, she referred to a common saying about work and school ending Friday at midday: “ab um eins macht jeder seins” (Donohue-Bergeler 62). In this case, she used the German language as a key to everyday German culture.

Development towards an intercultural competence through comparisons

Intercultural learning most often occurred spontaneously through comparisons and discussions. For example, coincidentally seeing a wedding couple in Meißen spawned conversations about relationships and marriage in different cultures (Donohue-Bergeler 73-74).

Among the group, deeper reflections and critical comparisons were often limited to English language conversation. The first evidence of this was during an English language conversation on the train back from the first destination. In the B1 student's home country, she often instinctively replied in English when foreigners initiated a conversation in Spanish (Donohue-Bergeler 63). She began to experience this situation in Germany, although she wanted to practice her German. As a result of the conversation, she was able to empathize with this other position and she rethought how she would interact with foreigners at home.

Both the C1 and B2 level students indirectly and directly confirmed the usefulness of English for some intercultural learning. In his questionnaire after the excursion to Prague, the C1 student answered the following for the item about intercultural perspectives: "During [the] return trip, we had a very long and wide-ranging conversation. Topics included cultural conceptions of race/ethnic identity, prejudices, language origins/development/spread/change" (Donohue-Bergeler 64). As the B2 student states during his post-excursion interview, this conversation was exclusively in English because the content would have been too difficult to discuss in German.

DDB: [H]ow openly were you able to communicate within the group, in different languages, I have here German, and English, and then Spanish.

B2: Hmm. Spanish, rarely. English, I think was used, but with things we couldn't say in German. And German, yes of course.

DDB: Yeah. And like, did you feel like you could say whatever you needed to?

B2: Yes, I, uh, yes and no. On the way to, the trip back from Prague, we were speaking to each other in English. We were talking about anthropology and all this other, cultural things, and I had absolutely no

German vocabulary to converse on that topic.” (Donohue-Bergeler 63-64)

Social and Practical Learning Effects

All three students gained practical experience for future travel in Europe. While the excursions coordinator took care of the logistics, she still guided the students in a way that they could later use both long-distance and local transportation systems on their own. For example, while using subways, buses and commuter trains during the excursion in Berlin, the students learned through experience to exit quickly at their stop so that they don't have to fight the flow of incoming passengers (Donohue-Bergeler 68). The students all stayed in Berlin after the official part of the excursion and were able to navigate their way around the city and back to Dresden.

Further Discussion

Individual factors played an important role as to what learning effects were experienced to what degree by which students. For example, as the program participant with the lowest German language proficiency, the B1 student had high levels of foreign language anxiety in German at the start of the program. She made the most considerable progress of the three participants in overcoming this anxiety. During the first excursion, she tried to avoid speaking in German (Donohue-Bergeler 181). During the next few excursions, she was gently coaxed into casual conversation by both the excursion coordinator and by her peers (Donohue-Bergeler 181-183). By the last excursion, she was quite talkative and made great efforts to contribute to German language conversations.

Interview with B1: “[T]he first excursions I felt like really, it was really weird for me to hear German and to be like, only German and it was really awkward in the beginning and I was like, I don't know, but then I got comfortable, I got used to like hearing German all the time.”

(Donohue-Bergeler 52)

There were also some unexpected results. For example, the students did not make significant friendships within the group of program participants. This can be explained, however, by the difference in language level, background, and personality of the individual students, and by the low number of program participants during the semester in which the study took place. Also, all three of the students placed a higher importance on interaction in German than on making friendships during the excursions (Donohue-Bergeler 66-67).

In some categories, there was not enough data to support or disprove progress. Improved student pronunciation of German, improved understanding of German dialects, and the development of soft skills during excursions could not be conclusively determined from the collected data.

Protected, Action-Based Learning Environment and the Role of the Excursion Coordinator

As expected, a protected, action-based learning environment was created in which students could experience the target language and culture holistically and in non-intimidating, yet authentic situations.

This environment is unique to the excursion setting. It differs from the traditional foreign language classroom setting in its intrinsically motivated, pragmatic focus on communicative success (perhaps at the expense of complete linguistic accuracy) as well as in its natural opportunities for holistic and authentic learning. It is notable, for example, that many of the above mentioned learning effects and beneficial outcomes were not the explicit goals of the excursions. Because of this, the students were not under pressure to perform and could let their individual needs, interests and natural curiosity guide their learning. At some points, however, the students found the partial German language requirement during excursions tedious or intimidating. Despite this, the holistic and authentic stimuli motivated the students to use the German language as a communication tool in order to fulfill authentic communicative needs. For example, if students didn't understand a difficult passage during a tour intended for native speakers of German, they would often ask the excursion coordinator, me, or each other for clarification in German. As a result, the program participants became more comfortable with and accustomed to target language interactions over the course of the five excursions, especially within the group. Participants overcame foreign language anxiety in German, especially the level B1 student (see above). Towards the end of the orientation

phase, communicating in German on excursions felt more natural and less intimidating for all three students than during classroom interactions.

The excursion environment differs from daily immersion in the host country in that there is a defined structure, target language requirement and approximate schedule of activities. Also, the learning effects of daily immersion depend on each student's motivation and on the resources (people) available. On excursions, the excursion coordinator plays a crucial role in providing native speaker input at an appropriate level.

Vande Berg compares direct enrollment in a foreign university with swimming in a swimming pool. The shallow end and deep end correlate to the level of linguistic and cultural immersion. He describes the mediating role that resident directors fill for direct enrollment study abroad programs in a way that can also be applied to excursion coordinators:

I've come to think of well-trained Resident Directors as talented swimming coaches. They understand that students need to learn to swim in the deep end of the pool, and to do so on their own. They also understand that throwing students into the deep end when they arrive doesn't work for most of them—they've seen some who've drowned outright, and too many others who have desperately dogpaddled to the shallow end. There, in safe waters, these frightened swimmers congregate with others who've had trouble in deep water, frequently reminding each other how unpleasant it is out there. For the remainder of their time in the pool, they stay close together in the shallows, doing all they can to avoid the deep end. Accomplished Resident Directors have learned to introduce most students into shallower parts of the pool. They work with the students throughout the program, helping them learn new ways to swim, and throwing them a life line or swimming out to them when they're getting into real trouble. As students become more aware and reflective, and start to swim with skill and ease, they move into the deeper parts of the pool. The great majority of the students I've met abroad do want to swim into these deep cultural waters. They simply need an effective Resident Director to help them get there. (Vande Berg 4)

Supervised cultural excursions can provide an effective means of introducing study abroad students into the "shallow end of the swimming pool". Excursion coordinators can create a positive environment which facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and skills that students need to progress toward the deep end – unsupervised immersion situations like internships and direct enrollment – on their own.

In this case study, the personal biography of the excursion coordinator was essential. The excursion coordinator was a native speaker of German who both experienced and is knowledgeable about history and daily life in Dresden, thus making her an authentic source. She has also had practical experience as a foreign language instructor both in Germany and North America, and is therefore sensitive to the needs of foreign language learners. In addition, she possesses such personal qualities as patience and good communication skills, which makes it easy for her to involve each student individually and within the group. During excursions, she provided the students with structure and native speaker input, engaged all students in conversation, and made sure that the students stick to the target language requirement. These circumstances resulted in optimal learning conditions for the immersion program participants, despite variant student backgrounds, language abilities and interests. In future semesters, the use of German student interns to accompany the group on excursions could provide additional help to the excursion coordinator and allow for more separate conversations appropriate to individual language abilities and interests.

A unique result of the excursion environment and of the role of the excursion coordinator is that a situation was created in which students could experiment with the target language without fear of negative repercussions. Students were largely protected from situations in which substandard language use or intercultural misunderstandings could cause real problems, which could trigger foreign language anxiety or culture shock. For example, one of the students had a pocket knife in his bag during the trip to the Reichstag in Berlin. This was discovered by a security guard at the metal detector, and the student had to react quickly. He admitted in his interview that it was a tense situation in which he temporarily went “brain-dead” (Donohue-Bergeler 204). This could have caused problems if this student had frozen or said something unfitting, but the excursion coordinator was there as a “safety net” to iron out misunderstandings that could have had serious consequences. In the end, the student was able to successfully negotiate the situation on his own.

Because of this protected environment, program participants could develop a positive relationship to the target language and culture during the first six weeks of the program without fearing the potential consequences of making mistakes. Despite (or perhaps because of) this slightly limited environment, the students could experience authentic language and culture cognitively, emotionally and through the senses.

Conclusion

Using a theoretical foundation and empirical data, this case study demonstrated that cultural excursions within a study abroad context can contribute to the foreign language acquisition and intercultural learning of program participants in a holistic, action-based, low-stress environment. The learning effects, however, are highly dependent on individual factors of the program participants and of the excursion coordinator. In this particular case study, the strongest learning effects could be detected in German oral communication, interaction and increased cultural knowledge and skills.

The study can be understood as a broadly conceived pre-test for short-term or long-term studies testing the learning effects of cultural excursions within one or more study abroad immersion programs. Future research could be carried out with more narrow research questions. For example, studies could focus on individual learning effects, on certain types of learning effects, on holistic learning, or on students with specific language levels. Further studies could also be conducted in which researchers examine which learning effects were useful during the immersion period of the study abroad program, upon return to students' home universities, and beyond in participants' professional and personal lives. Other aspects, like the role of the excursion coordinator, could also be more closely studied. A control group could take unsupervised excursions, while several experimental groups could go on excursions to the same destinations, but each group with a different excursion coordinator with different strengths and weaknesses. Individual factors, like the influence of participants' expectations and intrinsic motivation on learning effects, could be further researched as well.

Excursions are an attractive part of study abroad programming, but are often carried out intuitively. If this field could be further explored, excursions based on research could enrich current and future study abroad programs and the experience of the individual participants.

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¹ See Donohue-Bergeler for a thorough report and analysis of the results, as well as an extensive appendix documenting the collected empirical data.

² The opposite of authentic language is artificial language, which is language whose content is not intended to create a change in "real life". An example is a simplified text that is written to serve a purpose for foreign language learning, such as teaching a grammatical structure (Beile 315; Edmonson 179).

³ Foreign language acquisition can also occur in other places through intensive interaction in the target language and culture, for example within a family (Huneke, Steinig 97) or during immersion programs in one's own home country.

⁴ Bauer, Freed, Hodel und Stadler cover this topic in detail.

⁵ Exceptions include bilingual subject-related classes or projects in which learners have direct and authentic contact with target language speakers.

⁶ The spring semester takes place from early February until mid-July.