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ABSTRACT

Exchange programs of a month or less are unlikely to have many of the positive outcomes of more extended intercultural experiences. Worse, very short exchange programs (VSPs) may even have some undesirable outcomes. Positive outcomes not attainable through VSPs are: (1) development of long-lasting positive relationships and attitudes toward the people of the host culture; (2) change, to some extent, in the identity of the reference groups thought of as one's own; and (3) development of an intercultural perspective. One potential undesirable outcome of VSPs is that pre-conceived views and prejudicial attitudes can be strengthened. Another undesirable outcome is that participants are more likely to attribute the behavior of others to personal traits rather than to situational factors. Thus, participants return home with what they think is a well-founded set of opinions about why their hosts act in the way they do, but actually these opinions are based on incomplete or erroneous information. Because the quality of an intercultural exchange experience is directly related to the quantity of time involved, VSP sponsorship should be avoided. (RM)

WHAT RESEARCH AND INFORMED OPINION HAVE TO SAY ABOUT VERY SHORT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS (VSPs)

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It has come to my attention that an increasing number of proposals are being put forward for exchange experiences of unusually short duration, that is, for programs lasting one month or less. Such exchanges, which I shall designate "VSPs" for "Very Short Programs," hold little promise of accomplishing those high goals that most of us in the business of intercultural exchange hold dear. Research and informed opinion suggest strongly that, in the case of a VSP, (a) some important positive outcomes are not attainable, and that (b) some undesirable outcomes are a likely result. In the following pages I will attempt to explain and substantiate these possibilities.

Some Important Positive Outcomes Are Not Attainable

Although each of us might devise a somewhat different list were we asked to enumerate the positive outcomes we expect from most intercultural experiences, it is likely that many of us would include the following in one way or another:

1. Development of long-lasting positive relationships and attitudes toward the people of the host culture.
2. Change, at least to some extent, in the identity of the reference groups thought of as one's own.
3. Development of an intercultural perspective.

Goals such as these are unlikely to be attainable within the extremely short period of time available to program participants during a VSP.

In his monumental review of the literature in the intercultural field, Richard Brislin (1981) notes that a goal of many sponsored programs is to promote smooth face-to-face relationships among the culturally different

people whom the program brings into contact, and that program administrators often attempt to achieve this goal by discouraging controversial topics in conversations. However, such an approach substitutes superficial friendliness for the development of long-lasting positive attitudes and relationships, which can only be based on full mutual understanding. Brislin points out that superficial friendliness and the deliberate avoidance of "unpleasant possibilities" is appropriate for the early stages of a sojourn, and should continue until the participants feel settled in their new environment and comfortable in the presence of their hosts. Then, if mutual respect and positive attitudes based on deep understanding of each other are to become the basis of long-lasting positive relationships, controversial issues and significant differences in lifestyles and values can begin to be dealt with openly. (Controversial topics can be discussed early on, of course, but at much greater risk of undermining even the superficial friendliness.) Anyone who has sojourned in an unfamiliar culture knows that feelings of being settled and at ease with one's hosts do not occur within a few days, and seldom within a few weeks. It requires time, repeated contact, and the sharing of a variety of experiences to get beyond what has been called the "So nice to see you" phase of interpersonal relations. It is almost inconceivable that long-lasting positive relationships and attitudes can be built from the ground up in four weeks or less.

Research carried out by John Hofman in Israel lends support to Brislin's view. While working with a variety of ethnic and religious groups in Israel over a period of four years, Hofman (1977) found support for his hypothesis that intergroup perception, and eventually new group ties, start with a growing awareness of group differences. Subsequently, there is a move toward ambivalence, which can take a number of forms: One is seeing the positive and negative aspects of old and new reference groups; another is understanding why cultural differences are seen one way by in-group members and another way by out-group members. Finally, there is a synthesis, or the development of a unique set of feelings toward the old and new groups. This three-step process — differentiation, ambivalence, and finally integration — requires a great deal of time to accomplish. It is doubtful that even the first stage, awareness of differences, can be completely accomplished during a VSP.

A slightly different perspective on the same process is offered by R. Ashmore (1970), who argues that mere face-to-face contact is not enough to lay the groundwork for an informed appreciation of people from another culture. He suggests that intimate contact is necessary if an individual is going to develop a reasonably differentiated view of out-groups. Intimate relationships, in contrast to casual ones, involve the sharing of personal feelings, concerns, values, and goals for the future. Intimacy breaks down the barriers between an individual and the amorphous bunch of others called "them." Ashmore writes that

> Intergroup friendship causes a redeployment of motivation with respect to the intergroup attitude. The prejudiced person wants to hang onto his prejudice; but becoming friendly with a member of an out-group makes him more amenable to information that favors tolerance. (p. 320)

Ashmore also suggests that the range of contact situations is a factor in enabling people to develop tolerant, even respectful, attitudes towards people who previously constituted an out-group. If interaction takes place in multiple settings over time, prejudiced people are less likely to confine favorable attitude change to one setting. Intimacy in relationships, and a wide range of settings in which that intimacy can develop, both require an extended duration in which to occur. Yet time is precisely what is in short supply in a VSP.

Specific support for the notion that the broadening of a sojourner's mind requires considerable time and effort is provided by D. Szanton (1966). In analyzing the experiences of Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) in the Philippines, Szanton observed:

> After some while in the field, many PCVs did finally begin to accept emotionally the idea — and its extraordinary implications — that a people could be equally human, could be equally entitled to consideration, while at the same time they were significantly different in their values and behavior. Difference, in short, no longer implied inferiority. And to respect cultural differences meant first to understand them, which required one to take one's time, to empathize, to comprehend. (p. 51)

Preconceived views, in other words, do not die easily. They have to be deliberately discarded because repeated experiences have shown them to be simply not true. Time is required for those experiences to occur, and time is required for their cumulative impact to be registered and for the necessity for an adjustment in one's attitudes to be admitted.

An intercultural perspective is one in which one's mental categories are able to serve as links between one's home culture and the host culture(s). The dangers in a VSP are twofold. First, the neophyte sojourner may become aware of certain categories employed by his hosts, but may attempt to apply them in inappropriate situations because of his inability to appreciate the extremely subtle distinctions that are second nature to his hosts. The second and more likely danger is that the sojourner will attempt to impose his own-culture categories in understanding situations where host-country conceptualizations are far better, leading to classic cases of cross-cultural misunderstanding. As defined by Gudykunst, Hammer, and Wiseman (1977), a true intercultural perspective is a complex amalgam of the home-culture and the host-culture perspectives:

> This perspective is a psychological frame which aids the trainees in better understanding the unfamiliar situations that are encountered in a foreign culture. The psychological viewpoint is neither from the trainees' own culture nor from the host country. Rather, this perspective acts as the facilitating "psychological link" between the trainees' own cultural perspective (i.e., assumptions, values, patterns of thought, learned behaviors, etc.) and the perspective of another culture. It is hypothesized that this intercultural perspective facilitates effective functioning in another culture. (p. 106)

It seems obvious, at least to this writer, that so complex an ability as is designated by the term "intercultural perspective" cannot be developed in the relatively brief period of time encompassed by a VSP. And yet, in talking of intercultural experiences such as those we provide in sponsored sojourns, we frequently refer to the development of an intercultural perspective as one of the most desirable outcomes of our programs. We must, then, sponsor sojourns of sufficient duration to allow abilities of this nature of develop.

Summing up the views and findings thus far presented, it should be noted that the essential message has been widely recognized ever since Gordon Allport published his seminal work, The Nature of Prejudice, way back in 1954. That message is simply this: Contact between groups or individuals is, in itself, not a panacea for the problems of intergroup prejudice or international misunderstanding. The fact is that mere contact is at least as capable of intensifying intergroup hostilities as it is of ameliorating them, for the attitudes of many people concerning out-groups are so strong that contact can actually reinforce prejudice or discrimination. Hostile people are able to interpret

any behavior in negative terms. It is easy to forget this, however, because those who call for massive — and often very short — international exchanges tend to espouse motives, such as the promotion of worldwide peace and understanding, that we all very readily adhere to. Saying "no," then, ostensibly puts us in opposition to a very popular and very visible goal. But this is a time in which we must have the courage of our convictions. Surely, it is not for nothing that research has addressed issues and problems of this type since the early 1950s. With this knowledge in hand, we must be willing to stand up and say, "Yes, we support your goal, but the method you propose to achieve it is unlikely to have the effects and outcomes you intend. Exchange programs of a month or less are unlikely to have some of the most important positive consequences known to be potentially available from intercultural experiences. Worse, very short programs may even have some undesirable outcomes that neither you nor we would want to promote."

Some Undesirable Outcomes Are a Likely Result

To begin with, one potential undesirable outcome already has been suggested. Pre-conceived views and prejudicial attitudes actually can be strengthened in the course of a VSP. By extension, of course, I am admitting here that the same effect may occur during the early weeks of a longer sojourn experience. But in a longer experience, opportunities (in the form of growing friendships and unexpected occurrences) that are capable of undermining old attitudes and assumptions present themselves, one by one, over time. More host country people are met. Intimate friendships begin to be formed with a few of them. An ever wider range of experiences provides the sojourner with an increasingly variegated view of the same people in different situations, and of different people in the same situations, so that the range of personality traits in the culture begins to become evident. Sooner or later, most sojourners will be challenged to adjust their stock of mental categories by this plethora of experiences. But during a VSP, when opportunities for personal contacts and diverse experiences remain constricted by time, some participants may be able to integrate what they see and hear into their existing categories. Their undifferentiated beliefs then take on the character of informed judgements, simply because they've been there. "Frenchmen are arrogant," they may say, or "Latins do ignore the clock." We've heard this from tourists, and we cringe. It is because our programs provide so much more of significance and

depth than the ordinary tourist adventure that we rail against anyone who dares to class international student exchange with mere tourist junkets. Yet, in considering an increasing number of proposals for three- and four-week exchanges, are we not in danger of lending credibility to that view? After all, I believe that many tourists, perhaps most, spend three to four weeks abroad.

It may be objected, however, that a sponsored exchange is bound to increase the knowledge of the participants to an extent that never could be achieved by anyone staying at home. Granted. But is increased knowledge the goal we are all striving for in this business? Of course not. We are intending to make it possible for participants to undergo far more important changes in their perspectives, attitudes, and assumptions. In an article entitled "The Roots of Prejudice: Cognitive Aspects," H. Tajfel (1973) discusses the difficulties associated with attempts to change people's attitudes. He argues that even if the motives for other people's behavior are understood, this knowledge, by itself, is insufficient to form the basis of any large-scale attempt to change attitudes. He concludes that programs dealing with information have the least chance of success. Brislin (1981) has the following to say about striving to increase knowledge:

> As a possible outcome of intergroup contact, increased knowledge has a unique difficulty. It is mentioned too frequently when no other positive benefit comes to mind. After diplomatic negotiations, governmental representatives who can claim no policy developments report that "there was a frank exchange of views." Knowledge alone, then, has achieved the unfortunate status of a cliché. While I feel that increased knowledge is a laudable outcome, administrators should realize its negative connotations when writing their progress reports. (p. 196)

In short, increasing the knowledge of program participants amounts to an achievement devoid of significance. If we want to have an impact on the youth we send abroad, we must see to it that they have a reasonable chance of returning home with a deeply revised outlook on life as a consequence of their intercultural sojourn. To agree to sponsor VSPs is to settle for less — much less. And to sponsor VSPs in the name of striking a blow for increased tolerance and mutual understanding and global perspectives and the like is to play fast and loose with informed, documented opinion in the field of intercultural learning. Since we at AFS know this, we have a responsibility to act accordingly.

A final undesirable outcome of VSPs concerns the process whereby people make attributions regarding the behavior of others. Attribution theory holds that when an individual behaves in a certain fashion, his motives for doing so may

stem from his personal traits, or from factors present in the situation, or from a combination of trait-based dispositions and situational factors. The research of L. Ross (1977) has revealed a general tendency for people to attribute the behavior of others to their personal traits rather than to situational factors, especially when judging behavior of others who are not members of their own primary groups. Trait attributions are preferred because other people's behavior is much more visible and salient than the situational factors that are involved in eliciting that behavior. Tremendous amounts of time and effort would be necessary for an individual to discern fully and completely the complex situational pressures faced by another person. Furthermore, there is a readily available language to describe people's traits — aggressiveness, dependence, intelligence, paranoia, and so forth — whereas there is no comparable set of terms in common use to describe situational variables. Ross coined the term "fundamental attribution error" to describe the general tendency to prefer trait attributions and to underestimate situational factors. The works of E. Jones (1979) and of Taylor and Jaggi (1974), as well as that of Ross, have demonstrated that there is an interesting, and indeed revealing, relationship among these three variables: (1) whether a behavior is accepted as intrinsically desirable or undesirable; (2) whether that behavior is performed by a member of one's own in-group (including oneself) or by an out-group member; (3) whether the behavior is attributed to personal traits or to the pressures of the situation. This relationship can be best summarized in chart form:

	Behavior is desirable	Behavior is undesirable
Actor is member of one's in-group	Behavior attributed to positive personal traits	Behavior attributed to situational pressures
Actor is member of an out-group	Behavior attributed to situational pressures	Behavior attributed to negative personal traits

What does all this have to do with VSPs? Brislin (1981), commenting on the findings discussed above, points out that an important goal of cross-cultural programs should be to encourage sojourners to make an increasing number of situational attributions regarding the behavior of their hosts. But this is extremely difficult to do in the early weeks or even months of an intercultural experience because the sojourner is immersed repeatedly in unfamiliar situations about which he possesses little understanding, and because the sojourner is under the stress associated with the early stages of cross-cultural

adjustment. Discussing in particular the problems faced by American businessmen who are posted overseas, Brislin makes these points:

> When faced with culture shock, there is a tendency to make negative trait attributions about the behavior of hosts. In reality, since stress is most often a product of coping with unfamiliar situations, negative trait attributions are maladjustive and may destroy potentially helpful interpersonal relations. . . . Situations can sometimes be manipulated before a person actually goes about completing task assignments. This point is especially important in cross-cultural interaction. A very common complaint about American businessmen is that they start work before developing warm and cordial relations with hosts. Wise administrators allow extra time for Americans to do little but interact with hosts in the early months of their sojourn. Much stress will never occur if good sojourner-host relations have been established. (p. 170)

Brislin also discusses the dangers of "personalism," a type of fundamental attribution error. Personalism is the tendency to perceive that another person's actions are directed specifically at oneself. Brislin writes:

> Sojourners sometimes perceive personalism when it is not meant by the host. Especially in the early stages of cross-cultural contact, a sojourner knows few hosts. The behavior of the hosts is likely to be so salient that non-trait explanations are hard to consider. Further, the normal anxiety associated with adapting to another culture is likely to interfere slightly with clear thinking. In familiar settings, a person is able to examine calmly a number of reasons for behavior. On the other hand, a sojourner is more likely to see negative behavior directed at "me, personally!" (p. 97)

The essential point I am trying to make, of course, is that during a VSP participants are unlikely to have the time or the opportunities required to enable them to begin making more and more situational attributions about the behavior of their hosts. They are likely to return to their home country with what they think is a rather well founded set of opinions about why their hosts act in the way they do. These opinions have a high probability of being trait attributions. This incomplete or erroneous information about the host nationals is all the more unfortunate because those who disseminate it are able to dignify it by their justified claim that "I know; I was there and saw it for myself."

Concluding Statement

Since this paper has been short, I will not review the basic points that I have presented. I wish only to add that I suspect that some who read this will regret that I did not present the findings of some study or another that conclusively established that very short programs are bad while longer programs are good. To

my knowledge, no study of this kind exists. We must look at other kinds of findings, and we must listen to the judgements of experienced people in our field, if we are to be guided in our reaction to proposals for programs of one month or less. I have provided information about appropriate findings and opinions in these pages; I believe that this information strongly counsels us to avoid the sponsorship of any very short exchange experiences. For although VSPs may add hundreds or even thousands of individuals to the rolls of those we have sent abroad, the probability is that they will fail to attain the higher goals that we all want for those whom we sponsor on an exchange.

I leave you with this thought: The quality of an exchange experience appears to be directly related to the quantity of time involved. Since the worth of orientation programs has never been conclusively established, we must assume that improved orientation can compensate only marginally at best for a short duration of the sojourn itself. In short, quality depends on quantity.

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