What lessons are we to take away from the various studies of education abroad? If our goal is to promote intercultural learning or deep learning of another culture, research needs to point to directions we can take to further that learning. Two recent volumes of research on study abroad—one from a U.S. and one from a European perspective—attempt to make this connection. Both are anthologies of related chapters organized thematically, however, the different approaches deliver very different books.

The Savicki anthology begins with theory, presents some research (the shortest section), and then proceeds to discuss applications for improving U.S. university-level education abroad programs, by far the largest section and probably the one most interesting to readers. From the research prospective, I found some interesting studies—but less focus than I had hoped for. Most of the studies focused predominantly on the adjustment process and psychological stress, and less focus on learning outcomes. To be fair, the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) used in the Savicki, Binder, and Heller study in chapter seven measures flexibility and critical thinking, which could easily be considered learning outcomes as well as selection criteria or predictors of adjustment. It is also a concern, even to the authors, that even the quantitative studies involved rather small samples. And the “Tuscan Dreams” ethnography in chapter eight by Chambers and Chambers reveals some of the ways in which students’ learning is fairly limited in a popular 11-week education abroad program.

On the other hand, particularly for those looking for activities to engage students in developing a broad and interculturally sensitive outlook, there is much to offer. For example, in chapter eleven, Binder highlights some of the issues facing the education abroad students and ways of thinking that helped them reach a new understanding of the host culture. In addition, she reviews the use of some of the old standards of intercultural training such as the D.I.E. method and simulations like Barnga and Bafá Bafá.

Byram’s volume is really a research book, with the interesting addition of some self-assessment by the researchers about the methods they used. The “practice” in the title, it should be noted, is the practice of research. While various learning models are studied here, this book is less concerned with giving advice on how to work with students or others on sojourns in other countries than it is to assess the value and challenges of particular research approaches. Not
surprisingly, given Byram’s background, there is a focus on language and on qualitative assessments of learning. Ethnography, grounded theory, and text analysis are featured. This book is also excellent for those who want to know more about the field of sojourner research in Europe.

Papatsiba’s research in chapter six on French ERASMUS students has become fairly well known in Europe but much less so in the United States. She based her findings on a set of 80 reports written by French ERASMUS students at the request of the local government authorities that had sponsored their education abroad program. Her results show how much the ERASMUS students remained distant from their host culture, while forming strong bonds among themselves and with other ERASMUS students in the host country. Many parallels can easily be found between the ERASMUS program and models of education abroad used at many U.S. colleges and universities, making this a particularly interesting study for NAFAAns. In another really unusual study by Burnett and Gardner in chapter four, Chinese students in a university in the U.K. were asked to draw pictures of their adjustment. The drawings and the students’ explanations about them are analyzed and the rich set of data that emerged is studied next to the acculturation and developmental models of Berry, Bennett, and Yoshikawa.

Though I would characterize the Savicki volume as more practitioner oriented and the Byram anthology as more theory oriented, both books are thought provoking and relevant for international educators hoping to understand more how to work with and support international students and to enhance the educational value of education abroad programs.