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**We Teach Languages Episode 125: Trends and Research in Study Abroad with Peter Ecke**

**Stacey Margarita Johnson**:  [0:00] This is "We Teach Languages," a podcast about language teaching from the diverse perspectives of teachers.

[0:10] [background music]

**Stacey**:  [0:08] I'm Stacey Johnson. Today, on Episode 125, Melanie Forehand is back on the podcast with her second interview, this time with Dr. Peter Ecke to talk about study abroad.

[0:25] Before we jump in to the episode, I just want to remind you of a few things. First, we have a website which show notes for every episode. If you hear about resources, or you want to read some of Dr. Ecke's research, or you just want to know more about the participants, I would encourage you to go to the show notes and check this out.

[0:46] There's always a lot of links, and interesting things, and recommendations for other We Teach Languages episodes on the same topic. There's just a lot to see there for this episode and for all of them. Check that out if you're interested.

[0:59] Second, I want to make sure everyone knows that We Teach Languages is a podcast that features as many voices as we can. If there is someone you admire that you think would be a good guest for the podcast, I want to encourage you to consider interviewing them the way Melanie interviewed Peter in this episode.

[1:22] There's more information on our website, or you can reach out to us by email. All of our contact information is at the end of this episode or on our website at weteachlang.com. Without further ado, here is Melanie.

[1:36] [music]

**Melanie Forehand**:  [1:41] Hello, my name is Melanie Forehand. Today, I'm here with Peter Ecke. He is a professor in the Department of German Studies at the University of Arizona where his research focuses on second‑language acquisition, multilingualism, applied linguistics, and intercultural competence.

[2:02] He is the author of numerous articles on L3 acquisition, German as a foreign language, and study abroad. He joins me today at the Center for Second Language Studies at Vanderbilt University where he will be giving a talk titled "Perception of Host in Own Cultures and Intercultural Competence in 10 Generations of Short‑term Study‑Abroad Students."

[2:28] Welcome to the podcast.

**Dr. Peter Ecke**:  [2:30] Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

**Melanie**:  [2:34] I thought we could talk a little bit, to start out with, about trends in study abroad. Your talk today is about 10 generations of study‑abroad students. How have trends in study abroad shifted in recent years?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [2:51] Usually, we envisioned of study abroad as opportunities for students to study languages, primarily, and perhaps culture. Nowadays, more and more programs offer also opportunities to study content or in students' major, minor areas of specialization. We may find programs for engineers, for music students, for singers elsewhere in the world.

[3:21] These are good opportunities for students to advance in their academic careers while exploring or while studying in a different culture. That's one change that I see.

[3:37] Other changes are that we have more and more short‑term programs that may have different reasons, perhaps financial reasons for students, maybe more expensive to study abroad for a semester or a year than just a summer.

[3:54] It may be easier to just add relatively short summer program to their busy schedule than spending a whole semester abroad. Over 66 percent of students nowadays that go abroad and study abroad for credit do so in short‑term study‑abroad programs.

**Melanie**:  [4:19] That's very interesting, what you mentioned about the short‑term study, particularly for our students that are double majors or, even now, some people that are triple majors. Having a short‑term program that's between a month and maybe eight weeks is a good option for them.

[4:36] I have noticed in some of the research and some of the materials about study abroad that these short‑term programs often are untethered from local universities.

[4:50] I was wondering, when we have our students that are going for such a short period of time and if they're staying in hotels instead of that traditional homestay model, how can we set an academic tone for those kinds of programs when they're not attached to a university space?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [5:12] There are many different program types, some of the type that you just described. There are probably also still a good number of programs housed at the university with a base in a certain city.

[5:27] The program that I've directed for quite some time is housed in one city and based in another university. It has lots of advantages. If you really want to establish relationships, make lasting friendships, you need to stay in a place for longer period of time.

[5:52] If you just travel from one place to another or from one country to another in three weeks or so, then it's a lot more difficult to make these lasting friendships.

[6:06] Yeah, I share your concern. Sometimes, we may think of interesting programs that are more like tourist programs. They may be interesting and rewarding as well, but they may have disadvantages. I shared these concerns with you.

**Melanie**:  [6:31] When we're talking about some of these short‑term programs in terms of second‑language acquisition, we're probably not going to see more than a slight shift in terms of language development. What are some of the developments that we can see as benefits in these short‑term programs?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [6:53] This is a very good point. Many of our students have high expectations for going abroad, even for short‑term programs. They may think that they come back quite fluent, that they significantly increased their language proficiency, learn about the culture, etc.

[7:17] Their expectations may actually not be met. At the end of the program, they may realize that they have learned something but probably not as much as they expected at the beginning.

[7:30] We have to promote more realistic expectations, what can be achieved in these relatively short periods abroad. There is research evidence that language skills can be developed quite significantly. There is evidence that in oral proficiency, interview, students may increase from one level to another.

[7:57] There's quite a bit of individual variation too. Some students do better in a new environment than others. One of the most important rewards of study abroad is culture learning and insights into different ways of life, experiencing these different ways of life, and also overcoming challenges of adapting to a different kind of life.

[8:30] This kind of cultural learning should be one of the main objectives of study abroad in these shorter periods abroad.

**Melanie**:  [8:42] One of the things that I heard you mention in your comment that I thought was very interesting was talking about how we can prepare our students' expectations and also differences in motivation.

[8:55] What do you think is a good model for preparing our students for going abroad, whether that is something like a pretravel course or meetings beforehand? What have you found that is successful for that?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [9:10] Pretravel courses or general education courses that help prepare students for study abroad by introducing them to concepts of intercultural communication are excellent ways of preparing students. Not every student may be able to take these kinds of courses.

[9:33] If that is not possible, then at least some orientation sessions will be useful to help the student prepare and learn about the host city, culture, environment, potential challenges. Yes, preparation is important and what exactly can be done, or student will choose will depend on the options that are out there.

**Melanie**:  [10:02] Another thing that you were just mentioning was forming the long‑term connections to a place, establishing friendships in a place. What are some activities or programs that you have found that are particularly useful for helping our students get out?

[10:21] I remember reading in one of your recent articles that students that had gone to Germany were particularly troubled by having a hard time finding friends and integrating into the social scene, with the exception of...I think there was one student who was particularly motivated to try to make those connections. What are some ways that we can help our students do that?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [10:46] I know other programs are doing similar things as having what we call a tandem program, language exchange partners, students from the partner universities that team up with our students and help our students use, practice, German and get access into the German‑student community.

[11:18] Then in turn, our students help them learn about the US and use, practice, English. It's a 50/50 exchange. These are good opportunities to help students make connections, and perhaps make friends, and get access into these student communities.

[11:41] Here, oftentimes, things depend on the student, themselves. We encourage students to make connections based on interests and hobbies they have. You may have singers or musicians that we would encourage to get in touch with musicians over there or people interested in sports and soccer who may join a soccer team.

[12:13] We had one case of a student who was interested in streetcars. He got in touch with people who managed this streetcar system over there and renovated old streetcars. These kinds of students will have more opportunities to form lasting connections, and also get intensive language input, and learn about the culture.

**Melanie**:  [12:42] I love to hear that, that students that are motivated or that they have an interest are able to make those connections abroad. I never would have thought about somebody that was interested in streetcars.

[12:53] That's wonderful, because a lot of places that our students are going have very robust public transportation systems. It's a real chance for our students to be able to see the inner workings of some of that or to observe different activities. That's great.

[13:12] I was wondering do you know any resources that can be particularly useful for listeners that are thinking about starting a study‑abroad program for their students or that want to help make their programs more robust?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [13:30] There's some literature out there. Actually, years ago, I wrote a little article addressed to new program directors and people who create a new program in which I shared the process through which we went in developing our own program.

[13:52] Some challenges that were out there, options that one could choose from like homestays versus dorms, etc., and the decision‑making process that we underwent in order to develop our program over time, and then the journals out there.

[14:13] There is one called "Frontiers." That's a journal particularly about study abroad, also for program administrators, teachers in those programs that share experiences and research about study abroad.

[14:31] There is another relatively new journal, more research‑oriented, about study abroad and second‑language acquisition. There are statistics that are published by the Institute of International Education on enrollments and trends.

[14:52] The next one called the "Open Doors Report" will be published the coming Monday about the most recent data on study abroad of US students internationally and international students in the US.

**Melanie**:  [15:11] Great. By the time this podcast comes out, there will be fresh data for all of our listeners to hear and to check out.

[15:19] Thank you so much for taking your time to talk to us. One trope here at this podcast is that we often ask people what excellence in language teaching looks like.

[15:30] I was wondering if you could talk to us about what excellence in study‑abroad teaching or study‑abroad programming looks like for you. How do you define excellence in study abroad?

**Dr. Ecke**:  [15:42] Very good questions. Let me think about this briefly. I would say providing excellent opportunities for learning in terms of language and culture, I want to ask we need to facilitate.

[16:07] First of all, it's the learners', the students' task to progress to learn to make the best out of study‑abroad opportunities, but it's our duty to provide them with the opportunities, with the framework in which this learning can happen.

**Melanie**:  [16:27] Thank you so much. I appreciate you stopping by to talk with us.

**Dr. Ecke**:  [16:33] Thank you.

[16:34] [background music]

**Stacey**:  [16:34] If you have questions or comments related to today's episode, we would love to hear from you. You can reach out to us multiple ways. All of them are available at our website, weteachlang.com/contact. You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter @weteachlang.

[16:58] We would like to say a very special thank you to the PEARLL Foreign Language Resource Center for partnering with us to provide transcripts and other professional development resources related to the episodes. You can learn more about PEARLL by to going to pearll.nflc.umd.edu.

[17:24] Thanks so much for listening. Bye‑bye.

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