

What Is It All For?: The Intentions and Priorities for Study Abroad in Canadian Teacher Education

Marcea Ingersoll
St. Thomas University

Alan Sears
University of New Brunswick

Mark Hirschkorn
University of New Brunswick

Lamia Kawtharani-Chami
University of New Brunswick

Jeff Landine
University of New Brunswick

Abstract

Within the research literature and in public discourse on higher education, attention has focused on the need for new graduates to develop 21st century skills for success in an increasingly globalized world. Calls for institutions of higher education to support student mobility abound, with intentions that some have categorized as neoliberal and others ascribe to notions of global citizenship. In this paper, we bring together literature from the fields of internationalization, teacher education, and study abroad to provide a conceptual framing and response to an inquiry into the following research question: In what ways does a study abroad experience support the development of preservice teachers? Through a multi-phase, multiple-perspective case study approach, we draw on qualitative interview data to illuminate how faculties of education and their students conceptualize the role of study abroad in the development of preservice teachers. The intentions for these programs cluster under four themes: global citizenship, personal growth, professional development, and employability. The concept of structured encounters with difference emerges out of these themes as a conceptual frame for future study abroad initiatives.

Keywords

Teacher education; Study abroad; International practicum; Pre-service teachers

Introduction

Calls for greater international mobility and understanding have been prevalent in recent years, resulting in policy initiatives designed to support educational mobility and enhance economic and educational opportunities for students around the globe. Student mobility in the age of globalization has received considerable attention in the popular media and the research literature. More than 570,000 people from abroad came to study in Canada this year, an increase of sixty percent over 2016

(McKenna, 2019). Recent research on the internationalization of higher education highlights this increased student mobility, the need for global skills, and the role of study abroad in international mobility and intercultural understanding (Streitwieser, 2014). While there is a national strategy on attracting international students to Canada (Government of Canada, 2014), there is no reciprocal strategy for sending Canadian students internationally, despite the growing emphasis on the need for global skills to be professionally successful in the

21st century, and on the potential benefits of study abroad. In this paper we contextualize these global calls for international mobility and understanding through qualitative case-study data drawn from our national investigation of study abroad opportunities for pre-service teachers at nine Canadian initial teacher education (ITE) programs.

In a 2009 report on study abroad programs in Canada, researchers noted a national lack of “broad goals and vision of those found in Europe and the US,” adding that while Canada participated in more than 3,000 exchange programs, “no framework or overarching vision is evident” (Bond et al., 2009, p. 11). In that same report, study abroad is defined as student participation “in any internationally based program or experience including exchange, clinical placement, field study, internship, co-op placement, practicum or voluntary service/work placement, which are offered by a post-secondary institution, and for which academic credit may or may not be granted” (Bond et al., 2009, p. 9). Our work falls within this definition, as it begins with our primary focus on how teacher education programs at Canadian universities facilitate student participation in international internships, practicum, or work placements. For the purpose of this paper, we will abbreviate these as study abroad placements, or SAPs.

In our work as teacher educators we became attentive to the number of our graduates seeking international teaching positions as a way of beginning their teaching careers and we began to examine how our own programs and those in our region (Lagace, McCallum, Ingersoll, Hirschhorn, & Sears, 2016) have responded to this kind of teacher mobility. Our work has looked at what it means to be prepared for teaching internationally in a time when there is a global demand for teachers (Ingersoll, Hirschhorn, Landine, & Sears, 2018), and in this

paper we focus on the international practicum as a form of study abroad that plays a role in teacher education. Specifically, the focus of this paper is on framing the intentions and priorities of study abroad initiatives to better understand their underlying assumptions and ideological frameworks, and to give direction to future initiatives. To do so, we bring together literature from the fields of internationalization, global citizenship, and teacher education to frame our qualitative inquiry into the following research question: In what ways does a study abroad experience uniquely support the development of preservice teachers?

Theoretical Framework and Literature

Increasing international mobility and the rise of transnational forms of citizenship have presented complex dynamics. Competing dimensions of internationalization have been framed as providing both challenges and opportunities in terms of international student mobility (Choudaha & de Wit, 2014), and its impact on global classrooms (Faez, 2012; Knight, 2007), with repeated calls for more access to study abroad in Canadian postsecondary institutions (Bond et al., 2009; Biggs & Paris, 2017). Across the globe, universities have responded to and capitalized on the increasing demand for transnational academic credentials (Knight, 2007; Lowe, 1999; Streitwieser, 2014). Toukan (2018) points out that approaches to globalization can align “with a neoliberal, neo-conservative, classical liberal, radical or transformational ideology” (p. 52), among others. These ideologies are not always separate but can exist in conflict or work in tandem. The coexistence of international education as a neoliberal, competitive commodity and international-mindedness as an aspirational disposition are economic and

ideological tensions explored in the literature on international education (Ingersoll, 2018).

Study abroad discourses employ language associated with the dual frames of citizenship and employability, with the first having a more ideological basis grounded in dispositional orientations of global understanding and the second drawing on the neoliberal language of competitive employment outcomes. However, these dual frames are not clearly delineated, and there is overlap between concepts and frames. For example, the language of two concepts within the first frame—global citizenship and global citizenship education—is sometimes used interchangeably. A recent Canadian report on SAPs conflates study abroad with global education, defining the latter as “organized learning experiences for Canadian-based students that take place outside of Canada and are part of an academic program at a Canadian university, college, or institute” (Paris & Biggs, 2017, p. 10). Both global education and global citizenship are complex and contested concepts, however, and understanding them requires probing beneath the surface to explore underlying assumptions and ideological frameworks.

Often the dual elements of transformational global citizenship and neoliberal competitiveness can be seen in single initiatives. The 2017 Report of the Study Group on Global Education called for increased priority to be given to SAPs, and is saturated with the language of neoliberalism, emphasizing the potential of these experiences to help students respond competitively to a shifting global economy, develop “vital job skills” (p. 9), and create economic opportunity (Biggs & Paris, 2017). At the same time, the report also extols more transformational priorities including the strengthening of “Canadian values of openness and inclusion at a time of growing intolerance” (p. 9), as well as the fostering of “intercultural

cooperation and respect” (p. 9). This kind of theoretical overlap is relatively common. In this article we use the frames of global citizenship and neoliberal competitiveness (Adamson, Åstrand, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Reid, Gill, & Sears, 2010; Toukan, 2018) to view the intentions participants articulated for their SAPs.

Teacher Education and Study Abroad

This increased interest in study abroad programs in higher education has been manifest in calls to internationalize teacher education (Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Mahon, 2007). Within teacher education, there have been calls for beginning teachers to be globally responsible (Cushner, 2009) and educate for 21st century global citizenship (Guo, 2014). Similar to other fields, competing theoretical frameworks are common in the research on teacher education and study abroad. Some argue that international practicums are too different from local contexts to develop preservice teachers who meet professional standards (Cruikshank & Westbrook, 2013). Others see the potential of teacher education programs in different global contexts to create opportunities for their teacher candidates to encounter cultural diversity both at home and abroad, a crucial competency for new teachers whether they are beginning their careers in their local contexts or internationally (Salmona, Partlo, Kaczynski & Leonard, 2015). In Canada, the Association of Deans of Education (ACDE) responded to these competing frames with an accord that recognizes the risks and benefits internationalization holds for teacher education and provides guidelines for principled and ethical international education practices (ACDE, 2014).

The Canadian Context

There has been an increase of Canadian student uptake in study abroad over the past

decade. In 2007, the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) reported that 2.2% undertook some sort of international activity for academic credit (AUCC, 2007). More recently, Universities Canada (UC, formerly AUCC) reported that 11% of Canadian undergraduates participated in an international mobility experience (UC, 2019). Despite this growth, the Global Education for Canadians report from the Study Group on Global Education at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy suggests this number should be higher and increase to 25% over the next decade (Biggs & Paris, 2017).

There is growing interest in international comparative work in teacher education and much of that work makes the case that understanding sociopolitical context matters in the analysis of policy and practice in the field (Darling-Hammond & Liebermann, 2012; Gilroy 2014). As Sears and Hirschhorn (2017) argue, “In jurisdictions around the world differences in cultural milieu shape teaching and teacher education in important ways” (p. 245). Except for Indigenous education, which is federally controlled, administrative and legal authority for education is otherwise constitutionally delegated to the provinces and territories. Canada has one of the most decentralized education systems among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Robertson, 2016; Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999). The history of ITE in Canada follows a parochial pattern, with provinces setting the requirements for ITE and administering the process of teacher certification and licensing. As a result, research on national trends or initiatives in Canadian education generally, and in teacher education in particular, is a difficult endeavor. A number of international, comparative books in these fields follow a common trend of using Ontario, Canada’s most populous province, as a reference point for the country as a whole, but this can

present a distorted picture of the national scene (Adamson et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012).

Our national study of international work in ITE across Canada addresses these parochial limitations and contributes to a growing body of work in the field. Our approach to this research is guided by our daily work in the preparation of preservice teachers, and as “important as philosophical issues are, qualitative researchers are often called to contribute practical solutions to human problems” (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011, p. 83). In this inquiry, the problem at the core of our work was the identification of ways in which a study abroad experience might support the development of preservice teachers.

The Study

The research reported here is part of a multi-phase investigation of Canadian teacher preparation for international contexts. The first phase was a pilot study of seven Canadian teachers with recent or ongoing experience as overseas teachers in England, and five Canadian teachers/administrators currently teaching at an international school in a large city in China (Lagace et al., 2016). This descriptive account of participant views of the effectiveness of their ITE programs in preparing them for international teaching revealed that their ITE programs had provided a limited focus on capacities for international employment and no opportunities for study abroad experiences.

Phase two examined ITE programs at a university in each of the four provinces in Atlantic Canada to assess how, if at all, they address preparation for international teaching in ITE (Gray et al., 2019). Three of the four ITE programs examined gave explicit attention to international topics and study abroad experiences and three themes emerged from the data about the nature of these programs:

attention to international teaching grew as a process of accretion rather than systematic planning; key types of individuals (architects, champions, and linchpins) were drivers and sustainers of international initiatives; and international initiatives used common mechanisms to achieve different purposes, including pedagogical skill development and the development of affective skills and dispositions related to cross cultural competence.

The third phase of the work, reported here, adds cases from five other universities in provinces ranging from Québec to Alberta resulting in 9 out of the 10 Canadian provinces included in the research. The nine universities included in this phase are all public and range from small, primarily undergraduate institutions to large, research intensive ones. Our focus in this paper is participants' conceptions of the intentions and priorities of international practicum experiences in ITE. We employed a multiple-perspective case study approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2005; Stake, 2006).

Site visits were conducted during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years. Each site visit included semi-structured individual interviews and/or focus groups with five categories of participants: (a) administrators (including deans, directors, associate deans), (b) faculty members, (c) key staff members and coordinators, (d) students, and (e) alumni who expressed an interest in or experience with international teaching. Participant numbers varied across sites according to interest in international teaching, scheduling availability, willingness to participate, and recruitment procedures permitted by research ethics boards. Deans, key staff members, and current students participated at each site, with cross-case variation in the number of interviewees across categories and 70 participants in total. Sites with international internship opportunities involving

a higher proportion of faculty and students generated higher numbers of interviewees across all categories of participants. The highest number of participants at one site involved the dean, other administrators, university support staff, current students, and several alumni currently teaching at multiple international sites but willing to participate synchronously via online conference technology. Conversely, at universities with lower program focus on international teaching, fewer total participants were interviewed. The range of participant numbers across sites varied from n=6 to n=17.

A multiple-perspective case study is designed to optimize understanding, and as the population of cases accumulates, comparisons become meaningful and patterns emerge (Stake, 2006). In addition to interviews and focus groups, relevant documents, field notes, informal conversations with consenting participants, and other products related to international teaching (policy documents, course outlines, internship manuals, etc.) also contributed data for the cases. The data from each case was analyzed separately as a discrete case before being combined in cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006).

A multi-stage process for qualitative data analysis was employed (Creswell, 2005). First, each university was treated as a discrete case. To enhance consistency, members of the research team reviewed common transcripts to establish the initial coding structure. Next, individual team members took the lead on examining and coding transcripts. ATLAS.ti software was used in coding transcripts and establishing patterns and themes. For the research reported here, two team members agreed on a select number of codes dealing with priorities and intentions across the universities and examined those for patterns which were grouped into initial themes. One researcher focused initially on data from administrators/faculty/staff, while the other

focused on student/alumni data. We met to compare themes and discuss similarities and differences across these two participant groupings. Next, supporting data from transcripts was shared with the research team and a meeting held to discuss the analysis. Our within-case and cross-case analyses (Stake, 2006) examined similarities and differences between how the two groups viewed the intentions and priorities of their SAPs.

Findings

The ITE programs ranged in their approach to SAPs, including those who offered a variety of placement opportunities to those who offered none. Most SAPs involved a teaching practicum or internship, and one program offered an international service-learning experience with the focus on a short, project-related task not specifically related to teaching. One ITE program offered no experiences outside of Canada but had a significant emphasis on teaching in Indigenous communities, which they considered similar to an SAP. One faculty member put it this way: “We think of them [teacher education students] as, you know, going to teach somewhere else in some other country but we have international contexts within our own country, like, when we talk about teaching with First Nation students” (F, U7).

In our examination of intentions, we found that the two groups (faculty/staff/programs) and students (current/alumni) both overlapped and differed with one another and with the larger ideological frameworks that underpin study abroad. We have grouped these intentions into four themes, discussed below: global citizenship, personal growth, professional development, and employability.

Global Citizenship

The language of global citizenship permeated the responses across participants and

sites, with some references directly using the term global citizenship and others alluding to it more indirectly. One dean directly invoked the language of global citizenship to frame the institutional commitment to international opportunities: “I think we definitely want our students to be exposed to different countries, cultures, languages, and also the reality as mature and global citizens. It’s a global village” (D, U9). Within this theme, participants identified the ways that SAPs foster a range of characteristics of global citizenship, including (a) global citizens know things about the world, (b) global citizens are interculturally competent, and (c) global citizens are committed to socially just partnerships.

Global citizens know things about the world. Across the body of responses, both direct and indirect references to this characteristic were expressed. Faculty members noted the importance of knowing “the history of that country...and developing a precursory understanding of the community that they’re going to” (F, U8). Additional specific intentions included faculty who want their students to develop more sophisticated global understandings of subject-specific material and disciplinary concepts: “I think we understand more about sustainability if we go anywhere outside North America” (F, U9). Knowledge of other locations, histories, and approaches to global issues were identified as associated outcomes of an SAP.

Global citizens are interculturally competent. The concept of intercultural competence emerged across the responses as a necessary component for global citizenship and a potential outcome of SAP experiences. Having preparation prior to SAPs was identified as a key requirement for students, since “wherever you go you need to understand that culture is different, that cultural norms are different. . . intercultural competency needs to be

understood by our students going abroad” (D, U1). Coursework involving mandatory preparatory education on intercultural understanding was suggested as a support for this intention, because of “some common things that they each need. One is just cultural sensitivities, right? Knowing some of the idiosyncrasies of different cultures or just being aware that they exist so that you're not insulting when you're going to another country” (DFP, U9).

Another aspect of an interculturally competent global citizen that participants identified as key involved self-awareness and cultural humility. Participants shared a common desire for students to recognize their biases and be open to perspectives and practices that differ from their own. One administrator argued that SAPs that “put the students in a situation where they become more conscious of their own cultural norms have a really important impact on their view of themselves in a classroom setting” (C, U8). This kind of self-awareness underpins what some participants called “cultural humility,” described by one as “opening ourselves to learning, some of what we really have to learn from cultures that are very different from ourselves” (F, U6).

Global citizens are committed to socially just partnerships. A concern for socially just partnerships emerged as an explicit intention of some education programs. This was expressed by some participants as a desire for students to have theoretical understanding of colonialism, post-colonialism, and hegemonic practices prior to study abroad. It was noted that international partnerships, particularly those between the Global North and Global South can be fraught with unequal and unjust power relationships. All faculty participants who spoke about this were committed to building programs that did not perpetuate power imbalances or exploitation. For them, global citizens

collaborate, listen, learn from, understand the difference between charity and help, and do not replicate colonial patterns of development. Participants noted distinctions between service learning, tourist travel components, research-based learning placements, and teaching-based placements. Through these distinctions, intentions for socially just partnerships were expressed. The contrast between service learning contexts and teaching-based programs is highlighted through the words of this participant, who notes that a short service learning context was more of a tourism opportunity with students “taking pictures and selfies with the indigenous kids. We were in and out of there. I felt a little dirty about the whole thing, you know, these white people show up, do their show and leave” as opposed to a “practicum where we could be there for a long period of time and actually have this authentic thing where we offer something we’re really good at” (C, U3). Efforts at fostering socially just relationships were noted in the context of misperceptions about intentions as well. For example, the quote below captures the tensions within competing frames of global citizenship and the intentions that shape study abroad:

It's hard to escape views and perceptions, like you're basically acting like a missionary. It's very difficult. It doesn't matter how many times you explain it, the attitude very much is, “Oh, you're going there and you're just civilizing the uncivilized” (F, U8).

Institutional and program intentions were found to shape SAP programming. Several sites noted a pervasive commitment to developing teachers committed to honoring diversity and fostering social justice. This was manifest through a particular focus on students and families from underrepresented groups in provincial schools, including African Canadian, Indigenous, or immigrant groups. The SAP was largely seen not as a preparation for future

international work but, rather, to support the institutional program intent of fostering social justice pedagogy locally.

For example, at one university with an institution-wide mandate to serve the inner-city community where it is located, SAPs were widely understood as a vehicle for enhancing that mandate. One faculty member noted the following:

I wanted to design one as well for an international experience that was more socially justice oriented so and I guess my focus wasn't necessarily to prepare our students to go teach internationally but for them to understand where some of the students that they're teaching in....are coming from (F, U9).

Participants both explicitly and indirectly connected their approach to SAPs to overarching goals emanating from their own context and noted differences in individual implementation. For instance, one faculty member expressed alignment with the institutional direction, or “our extended goal of having them [the students] be socially responsible, but the views of what does it mean to be socially responsible are very different” (F, U8). While the sense of shared ethos and intentions was common in the ITE programs examined, there were also various interpretations in practice

Personal Growth

The themes of personal growth and professional development each contain distinct aspects that deserve separate attention but are also closely interlinked. Belief in the capacity of the SAP to foster qualities important to both personal growth and professional development is common across the transcripts of faculty, staff, and students. We summarize these qualities and the personal and professional dimensions in

Table 1.

Table 1. Qualities Developed Through SAPs

Quality	Personal Components	Professional Components
Self-Awareness	More aware of position-ality – who they are, their identity and worldviews are not general	More aware that the Canadian school system is contingent on particular contexts and that there are other ways of doing education
Empathy	Understand others better	Understand students better – where they came from, the conditions of migration, the feelings of otherness
Flexibility/risk-taking	Less bound to familiar structures and routines, more willing to try new things	Experience with other approaches to education and teaching creates willingness to try alternative approaches
Self-confidence	Confident in their ability to face new and unfamiliar circumstances	Confident in the face of change or unexpected circum-

	and not be thrown by them	stances in schools and classrooms
Tolerance for ambiguity	Willingness to live with a degree of uncertainty	More tolerant of open-ended teaching and a range of student responses to issues and problems
Perseverance	Not thrown by difficulty or resistance. Willingness to stick with a problem and work it through	Not thrown or put off by difficult problems in lesson preparation, teaching, or assessment. Willingness to work through difficulties

Across the institutions included in our study, there was a pervasive belief in the inherent benefits of travel and its potential for personal growth. The chair of one ITE program expressed this common understanding clearly, stating, “I’ve always thought there was value in travel, irrespective of the benefits that are also tied to the international teacher. I think it’s good for people to go abroad” (C, U3). There is an abiding belief that international work can shape people in powerful ways that cannot be realized by simply studying different places. One dean put it this way, “Anthony Bourdain is good to watch. Nothing beats true experience, authentic experience” (D, U9). Another dean echoed the personal impact of an international teaching experience: “It’s the core idea of transformational learning. A new experience

would bring about a different kind of teacher . . . it changes their lives” (D, U1). A faculty member who regularly led international practicum opportunities highlighted growth as a key outcome: “My focus when my students go international practicum is their growth” (F, U9). The director of field placements at the same institution referenced the potential for growth and transformation: “I do it because I see the potential to be even better in some of the students that I teach. I see that they have the capacity to change the world, to change opportunities for kids” (DFP, U9). The theme of personal growth and transformation runs across the transcripts.

Direct experience is one of two powerful forces shaping this personal transformation; the other is difference. Students need to be in places jarringly different to experience this change:

I think when they come back they’re different, because they’ve actually lived in a different place. They’ve had to deal with a different environment, climate, language. . . I think that experience is life changing and I think it kind of does something to your brain. It’s just this different you just have kind of this different outlook on life maybe you’re more tolerant.... that kind of life experience of you’re not in your normal kind of comfortable environment (F, U6).

Students also explicitly articulated the value of direct experience in their personal growth and their understanding of difference. Study abroad was framed as an opportunity for Canadians to better understand the experiences of international students who come to Canada by being put into the situation of understanding what it is like to be away from everything familiar. This is evident from how one student explains her decision to study abroad:

I had friends from all over the world in high school. I had a friend from Germany, from Korea, from all over the place and I was just so interested in how can you go away for so long...It sounded so interesting and I really wanted to

experience what they experienced when they came here (S, U9).

From this student's perspective, her high school friendships with international students from different countries and cultures provoked her interest in an international practicum. Her intentions for the SAP were made clear—she expected to learn what it is like to be a foreigner in Canada by being a foreigner herself, and to translate that experience into her teaching. This interlinking between personal growth and professional development is addressed in the next theme.

Professional Development

Originally, we set out to investigate what ITE programs were doing to prepare students for the international teaching jobs we saw our own students taking up more frequently. Our assumptions were that ITE programs with internationally-oriented courses and practicum placement opportunities would be explicit about the intentions underpinning those courses and make direct links between the program offerings and the international teaching opportunities being taken up by many newly graduated teachers. However, as we conducted the site visits, our research question evolved to incorporate the responses that disrupted this assumption. Many faculty members explicitly rejected that idea that these courses and experiences were direct preparation for international teaching. Rather, in their education programs there was an emphasis on the international experience as a catalyst for better teaching in local contexts, and that local contexts are increasingly characterized by greater diversity. One faculty member's comments reflect this common assertion: "We do really focus on preparing students to teach in (our province). So, I think that's our priority" (F, U8). They went on to say, however, that international experience was very effective in

developing teacher characteristics necessary for local inner-city jobs. The associate dean at another institution recounted how preservice teachers who have spent time in another country can better relate to newcomer students in their own classrooms, and that when they come back from an international experience "they can empathize, they can be more compassionate, they can relate to kids. It's a whole different experience (AD, U9).

The ability to relate empathetically to diverse students, newcomers to Canada in particular, permeated the data. The coordinator of overseas placements at another institution summed it up this way: "This will make you a better teacher, you will look across the classroom at a sea of different faces, and you will have a better idea what it feels like to be there, to be the one who's not understanding what's going on" (DFP, U6). There is a strong sense among participants that teachers who have been in the position of being in other cultural contexts where their own sense of familiarity is disrupted will be able to translate that understanding to an empathetic response in classrooms back home. Another faculty member described the power of learning to solve problems in international contexts translating very positively to transitioning to teaching in Canada.

They've already been challenged in one place. So, the culture shock they're now dealing with, they're not dealing with the culture shock, but they are able to kind of go, 'Okay. I remember this feeling. I remember what it is like. I know what the next step is. I know what I have to do. And I know I'll have to challenge myself to look differently.' We've received nothing but positive responses from students and from principals as well in terms of how our students were able to handle things (F, U8).

While there was recognition that some students will be attracted to teaching internationally and take up teaching positions internationally after their SAPs, personal and

professional qualities for all contexts, particularly locally, were given more emphasis.

Employability

Initial teacher education is professional preparation, theoretically and empirically supported, with a clearly defined professional possibility—employment in teaching. Typically, ITE programming is focused on the policies and procedures for employment in local contexts, although some are explicit in their desire to prepare students for international teaching, especially in contexts of a teacher surplus, or if the program has an emphasis on international teaching. One faculty member noted, “I think we have certainly more students now that will teach internationally because of the practicum programs we have out there. Some of them end up staying where they have students, many of them get offers to stay” (DFP, U9). This faculty member observed a link between the six-week practicum and readiness for international teaching, noting, “I think the program has transitioned some from what it teaches our young teachers coming back here to being an opportunity for them to teach internationally” (DFP, U9). This link between the increase in international opportunities and the SAP was made by an administrator at another institution, who noted that “it seems like half to more than half of our students leave [our province] and increasingly more of them are going overseas, so why would we not give them something overseas” (C, U3)?

Still, the primary goal of the SAPs is not perceived to be preparation for international teaching, as several faculty members noted. Comments ranged from “I never really thought that our taking the students to Norway and then to Iceland was about preparing them to teach internationally. I didn’t really think in those terms” to “I never considered what we did to prepare them to teach internationally. That was

never my interest. I’m just concerned about preparing them to teach” (F, U3). Good preparation was linked to a broad range of experiences in a range of educational settings, not just placements in local schools:

The more experiences we can provide them, whether it be in Cape Breton or in the North, or in an alternative setting, a prison, a hospital, or Norway, I think it’s the context that drives the difference, that helps them grow in that final field experience, because it’s our last chance to expand that view, before they go out into the system (F, U3).

Consistently, the teacher educators we interviewed emphasized the SAP as one way of providing students with a variety of broad educational experiences that can improve their preparation for teaching, primarily in local employment contexts.

Some ITE faculty members in our study believe the international practicum works both to prepare graduates for an international teaching career, and to provide a check on those who want to teach overseas but might change their mind after an international practicum experience. In the case of the latter, international practica are seen as a safety valve or a test run. The director of international placements at one institution said, “It allows them [students] to take a huge risk without huge commitment” (DFP, U1). At another institution, the value of being able to consider in the short term what would otherwise be “a two year, three-year commitment” was expressed by a student who shared how the SAP allowed her an international teaching opportunity that “I could maybe test run in six-weeks” (S, U1).

The short-term nature of the SAP program is construed as an advantage for students intending to use it as a professional gateway to employment. In terms of program design, the short duration of the SAP was perceived as an opportune time frame for evaluating suitability for international teaching and making future

career decisions: “It was the perfect opportunity to see if I could go and do it for six-weeks, and maybe see if I was able to actually take on a contract somewhere internationally.” In terms of seeing if “I would be able to deal with it...six-weeks was kind of the perfect time period” (S, U1). Exploring international teaching as a profession through an SAP is a low-risk commitment prior to making a definitive professional choice, and provides the additional opportunity for travel, which was a recurring personal reason for wanting to do an SAP.

Students expected their SAP to assist them in making an informed professional choice about their career pathways post-graduation. Whether their intentions were to teach locally or in international contexts after their ITE program, students expressed faith that the international experience would hold value for their future employment in terms of skill building and pedagogical development. They saw the SAP as a way of testing the waters for international teaching and for enhancing their resumes for local teaching jobs. This was especially relevant in contexts with overburdened hiring markets. When local employment options are constrained due to an oversupply of teachers, beginning teachers look to international teaching opportunities as a way of entering the profession, and the global demand for teachers means international schools are increasingly willing to hire newly certified teachers (Gauthier & Merchant, 2016).

Students in this research indicated that local hiring markets were a factor in their decision for selecting a program that has a study abroad component, and that they expected the program to assist them in their professional decision-making. Describing her decision to do an SAP, one student expressed her reasoning: “Because there are no jobs. I took this international teaching experience as a six-week placement that might be trickier to have (something short

term like it) after I graduate” (U1, S). Another student noted that while jobs were scarce in her area, the benefits of being a teacher include being able to work and travel:

I was aware that in Atlantic Canada that there weren't a whole lot of jobs available for teachers, and personally as well I like travelling, and seeing the world has always been a big aspiration of mine. I know that being able to, as a teacher, you'd be able to do a lot of that (S, U1).

Another participant who hopes to do an SAP described his hope that it would link him to future employment opportunities:

Well I've always kind of wanted to do like a teach internationally. As soon as I graduate, I'd like to travel and initially I really want to go to Europe or even Asia just anywhere in the world and teach (S, U8).

The perception that SAPs may be a link to employment is lived out in the experiences described to us. Students who flourish may get offered jobs while they are on international placements, as described by a faculty member from an institution that has a partnership with a school in Thailand where many students do placements and stay on, sometimes for multiple years. She reported, “A lot of them end up staying and teaching in Thailand. Each year, there's a good number that stay a year, there's some that have stayed probably six to eight years” (DFP, U9).

For international schools looking to recruit teachers, evidence of a successful SAP suggests potential capacities for a successful international teaching career (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Even when students decide to remain in Canada to find work, there is a perception that international experience is seen as a valuable component of a teacher's resume and potential success. As one dean said, “It's a valuable commodity when it comes to employers,” adding that “it really says to an employer, even if it's a local employer or somewhere in Canada, that this person is prepared to go out of their comfort

zone” (D, U1). Commenting on the success of some students one faculty member said, “When they’ve gone out into the world and taught in other locations besides the little place that we’ve come from, they’ve done very, very well” (F, U8). This fourth theme highlights a conceptual collision, where the neoliberal commodification of study abroad, preservice teachers’ practical intentions of finding work in their profession, and teacher educators’ intentions to support students’ personal and professional development collide.

Discussion

Four recurring themes emerged from our cross-case analysis: global citizenship, personal growth, professional development, and employability. Faculty members at some institutions indicated, through reference to their own scholarship, that they had done research on their program’s international placements. However, the overwhelming support for a study abroad experience was not typically grounded in systematic empirical evidence from literature or collected as part of program evaluations. Any accounts of students who struggled ended with predominantly positive resolutions to the issues, and only one instance of a student who did not successfully complete a SAP program due to overwhelming difference was noted. As experienced teacher educators we know this does happen, although the extent and frequency are not always documented, and participants may have been reluctant to share such information.

While four common themes emerged from the analysis, the evidence for the themes is idiosyncratic and mirrors an unsystematic approach to SAP implementation across Canadian teacher education programs. One significant post-analysis gap that we identified was the infrequency of opportunities for specifically-targeted, post-international

experience reflection across programs; rather, there was wide-ranging trust that unmediated experience abroad is just good. Across the policies, programs, participants, and public discourses, there is great faith in the grand tour (Brennan, 2004) to change people—being in a different place with different people—but the change is amorphous and the approaches unstructured.

Each of the themes is infused with a conceptual overlay that we theorize as a possibility for framing future SAPs, and we term this structured encounters with difference. This concept is grounded in several features, which we discuss here and offer as conceptual framing for SAP intentions. Whether personal, educational, or relational factors were important to participants’ interest in providing or pursuing an experience abroad or in a local context, the value of the experience was attributed to an encounter with difference. The contrasting nature of the experience was the expressed essence of what makes it valuable, and is discussed here.

First, psychologically, encounters with difference are disruptive. Greater cognitive effort is required as the brain adjusts to the unfamiliar and attempts to integrate new knowledge and experiences into existing schema (Osland, 2000; van Kesteren, Ruiters, Fernández & Henson, 2012). For those of us who teach, we know that pushing students to go out of their comfort zone is integral to the learning experience but can be fraught with resistance. Situating the learning experience within a context where the disruption is deliberate, such as a study abroad experience, not only provides an authentic context for new learning, it also integrates another important motivational factor—agency. Students who elect to go on SAPs have actively selected to engage in an experience that will be challenging and require them to use skills that are not as frequently utilized in their encounters with the

everyday. Although the safety nets of home are not in place during study abroad experiences, SAPs are university-sanctioned activities, and students typically undergo orientation and complete risk-assessment documentation to prepare them for the challenges of travelling abroad (Mizzi & O'Brien-Klewchuk, 2016). These structural components coupled with the agentic motivations for engaging with difference may account for the high rates of success described by both faculty members and students involved in these SAPs.

Secondly, encounters with difference are presented here as deliberate, intentional, and desired structural features of SAPs. Students and faculty members consistently referenced encounters with difference as part of the design of SAP programs and portrayed the challenges of encountering difference as an opportunity for personal and professional growth and transformation. This is consistent with Cushner and Brennan (2007), who see carefully structured immersive international or intercultural teaching experiences as one way of preparing teachers for the challenges of teaching children in a global age. In the words of our participants and in the broader research and public discourse, it is worth noting that the transformative value of SAPs is widely supported but also highly nuanced. In Larsen and Searle's (2017) study of an international experience in an ITE program, they make a distinction between transformation leading to culturally aware global citizenship and transformation that leads to critical global citizenship. They describe cultural awareness as one level of personal transformation, and frame critical global citizenship as a deeper engagement with difficult knowledge, systemic privilege, and social justice. Study abroad alone is not sufficient for building global citizenship (Pedersen, 2010); while teachers in SAP may describe their international practicum experiences as life changing, there is

insufficient research on the longevity of that impact (Maynes, Allison, & Julien-Schultz, 2013). Many participants in our study described significant personal and professional changes as part of the SAP experience, but the depth, impact, and criticality of that change is a direction for future research.

Conclusions

In political discourse and the research literature, the ideological frameworks underpinning study abroad are supported by notions of economic competitiveness, personal development, and positional advantage. The value attributed across each of these ideological frames is consistent with the views expressed by faculty and students in our research, with study abroad conceptualized as a fundamentally valuable opportunity that has the potential to enhance the personal and professional capacities of beginning teachers. Findings from our work reinforce calls for creating teacher program structures that replicate the value of the study abroad experience and illuminate our assertion that programs can and should enable structured encounters with difference for teachers whether they choose to begin their careers locally or globally. Providing opportunities for experiences shaped by structured encounters with difference to support the personal growth and professional learning of teachers in balanced ways that are attentive to the employment aspirations of beginning educators, the needs of local and global communities, and the larger global forces that influence this dynamic context is an important consideration for advocates of study abroad and teacher education programs alike.

In Canada, international student recruitment is a recurring discourse in higher education, but there is no companion strategy for providing Canadian students with greater international exposure, even as national spaces are increasingly internationally diverse (Paris &

Biggs, 2018). Our research indicates that there are shared intentions among faculty, students, and the larger society, including employers and schools, for beginning teachers to have personal experience and professional preparation for teaching across contexts increasingly marked by cultural border crossing (Kawtharani Chami, Hirschhorn, & Ingersoll, 2019). Given this uniformity of support for SAP components that provide personal and professional preparation through structured encounters with difference, we concur that there is a need for greater opportunity and financial support to create equitable access and support in terms of costs to students and workload for the key architects, champions, and lynchpins (Gray et al., 2019) who initiate and sustain these SAPs. We also recommend that there should be a common platform for Canadian faculties of education to share information and resources on international placements and study abroad. A national strategy and platform for teacher education programs to exchange information on common standards, practices, procedures, preparation, support, follow-up, and critical engagement would benefit a currently idiosyncratic approach to study abroad in teacher education in Canada.

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About the Authors

Marcea Ingersoll is associate professor and director, School of Education, St. Thomas University. She is a collaborative scholar and works with other researchers as a member of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Narrative (CIRN) and the Research on International Teaching and

Teacher Education (RITTE) team. Building on her experiences as an international teacher and teacher-educator, her scholarly work is situated at the crossroads of curriculum, narrative, teacher education, and international schools and their communities.

Alan Sears is an honorary research professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. His research and writing focus on civic education, history education, educational policy, and teacher education. He is a member of the Research on International Teaching and Teacher Education (RITTE) research team.

Mark Hirschkorn, Faculty of Education, University of New Brunswick, is a science/teacher/international education professor who, as a member of the Research on International Teaching and Teacher Education (RITTE) research team, has been investigating how education programs prepare teachers to teach across cultural boundaries. His research interests include international education program design, and how science educators integrate the philosophies of digital integration and authentic teaching into the ways they teach science.

Lamia Kawtharani-Chami, Faculty of Education, University of New Brunswick, is a PhD candidate, science education /teacher education, and member of the Research on International Teaching and Teacher Education (RITTE) research team. Her global academic and career experience from Sierra Leone, to Lebanon, and then France, has shaped who she is as an educator and researcher. Her research interests include international education and studying the

authentic practices of science teacher educators in different national and cultural contexts.

Jeff Landine is an associate professor in the counselling program, Faculty of Education, at the University of New Brunswick. His research interests include career development, vocational identity and employability, in particular with youth, young adults, and vulnerable populations.