

**EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PRESERVICE TEACHERS:
THE IMPACT OF A SIX-WEEK SPECIAL EDUCATION
STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM**

Laura E. Johnson

Rosemary Battalio

University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire

Special Education (SPED) in Scotland was a six-week study abroad program where pre-service special education teachers lived with host families and observed in Scottish schools in the area of special education. The program included coursework in the area of Emotional Behavioral Disabilities and traveling. This study sought to determine the impact of the SPED in Scotland program on students' intercultural awareness, perceptions of educational practices, and awareness of global interconnectedness. Participants took the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) before departure and after their return from Scotland. Seventy percent of participants remained at the same level of intercultural sensitivity after the program. Thirty percent moved to a more culturally sensitive view of cultures. In addition, participants wrote weekly reflective journal entries which were analyzed using Grounded Theory approach. Three stages through which students moved emerged from the journals: (a) observation, (b) reflective awareness, and (c) life change. These stages were present across four domains: culture, education, homestays, and travel. Program duration, prior experiences and personal characteristics appeared to influence a participant's progression through the stages. Emotional expressions at times of program transitions were also found throughout the weekly entries.

Introduction

In order to strengthen the cultural competence and global mindedness of special education teachers, teacher educators must take creative and challenging approaches to coursework and experiences that develop these dispositions. Study abroad programs that immerse students in special education settings internationally are a promising way to develop these dispositions.

Addressing the diverse and changing needs of learners from all cultural backgrounds has never been more urgent. In the United States, 40% of primary and secondary age children are from a background different than white, European-American. Twenty-two percent of these children are identified as having disabilities. At the same time, educators emerging from teacher preparation programs are of increasingly less diverse backgrounds; currently 14% of teachers in United States public schools come from non-white or non-English speaking cultures. Therefore, teachers may be increasingly less familiar with cultures of the students they are teaching, which may affect the quality of the services they provide (Matzusny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007). Additionally, our world continues to grow in interconnectedness, requiring teachers to examine their position as global citizens. A global perspective recognizes that worldwide economic, cultural, and political issues affect the practices in education by influencing how we instruct students in citizenship and academic areas. A global perspective extends beyond diversity in the classroom to engage and encourage students to recognize how their decisions increasingly relate to issues and events in their community and world (Kirkwood, 2001).

When instructing students with special educational needs and disabilities teachers must consider additional cultural factors. Teachers must not only provide culturally relevant instruction, but also maintain cultural awareness in assessing students, determining eligibility for special education services, setting goals, designing instruction, (Voltz, Dooley, & Jeffries, 1999) and working closely with families (Rogers-Adkinson, Ochoa, and Delgado, 2003).

There is a cultural divide among many special educators and the families they serve. If teachers lack the cultural competence to communicate and collaborate with families, it is less likely that the most productive and ethical relationship will be formed. Additionally, a lack of competency with diverse

populations harms the ability to objectively assess and serve children. (Rogers-Adkinson, et al., 2003). Oftentimes, diverse populations are compared to the norms of European-American children, not taking into account cultural realities. When education lacks objectivity and sensitivity, children of color are disproportionately identified as having disabilities (O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006).

It is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to prepare globally-minded and culturally responsive teachers. Several approaches characterize the preparation of pre-service special education teachers for cultural and global responsiveness that include coursework and field experiences (Voltz, et al., 1999). Although gaining experience with diverse populations within one's own community is valuable, international experiences can provide a more challenging and explicitly unfamiliar context in which to examine culture and educational practice (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Kuechle & Ferguson; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998). Study abroad has been found to give students cross-cultural immersion experiences that involve academics and travel while gaining a global perspective. In the 2005/2006 school year, 223,534 American students studied abroad, a number that increased 8.5% from the year before, and 150% since 1995/1996. The number of students studying abroad is expected to continue to increase (Institute for International Education, 2007).

There is a deep body of literature on the benefits of study abroad. These benefits include: expression of less dogmatic viewpoints (Marion, 1980), personal awareness and self-confidence (James, 1972), and growth in interest of other cultures (Barnhart & Groth, 1978). In extending the concept of study abroad, many teacher preparation programs employ field experiences in international settings. Studies show that these students end these programs with increased confidence, self-efficacy, independence, intercultural awareness, and global mindedness (Cushner, 2007). Quezada (2004) summarized three themes throughout the literature on teaching abroad: (a) expanding and enriching educational philosophies through exposure to different pedagogy and growth in understanding of one's home culture; (b) experiencing a challenging transition culturally and personally, leading to increased self efficacy and understanding of the immigrant experience; and (c) becoming aware of multiculturalism through immersion in the host country's language, customs, and families.

Although international student teaching was found to be effective and formative, the issue of program duration may complicate the issue of program effectiveness. The program examined by this study was short term: the entire experience lasted six weeks and the educational immersion occurred for two weeks. For various reasons, many education students do not have the luxury of going abroad for an entire semester (Quezada, 2004). Of all students who studied abroad in 2005/2006, only 4% were education majors (Institute for International Education, 2007). In the same year, 52.8% of study abroad participants went abroad for fewer than eight weeks (Institute for International Education, 2007), a percentage which may continue to increase; placements in international student teaching are often no more than eight weeks (Quezada, 2004). Because short-term studies are an increasingly viable way for education students to study abroad, it is necessary to understand what components maximize their effectiveness.

Finally, the program studied here occurred in Scotland. In 2005/2006, 14% of all American students abroad studied in the United Kingdom. (Institute for International Education, 2007). The allure that the UK holds for American students results largely from the shared language and history and opportunities to experience renowned British institutions. Although a popular option, its apparent similarity to the United States can sometimes make recognizing differences difficult if students have not been sensitized to the UK's cultural realities relating to communication, mores, and rituals (Edwards, 2000).

There is a lack of research on the involvement of special education preservice teachers in such programs, as the focus is generally primary, general education placements. Because of the involved and intensive nature of educating students with special needs and working with their families, preparing preservice teachers specifically in special education is a crucial issue to examine. Special Education (SPED) in Scotland is a study abroad and preservice practicum experience that seeks to equip special education preservice teachers for educating diverse populations and regarding special education and disability as global realities. It is unique in that it combines special education observation with what is for most students their first time studying abroad. While the program has anecdotally had a promising effect on participants, its impact warranted further investigation in order for the program to better serve its purpose and illuminate needs of the future. This study examined the impact of the program on participants' intercultural sensitivity (as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory [Bennett

& Hammer, 1998]), perceptions of their educational practices while working in culturally unfamiliar or diverse environments, and awareness that disabilities are globally prevalent while service delivery models may differ from culture to culture.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were ten pre-service special education students at a Midwestern comprehensive university who voluntarily partook in the Special Education in Scotland Program. All ten participants were females ranging in university experience from juniors to 5th year seniors. One participant was a graduate student who assisted in this study. All the students were from two midwestern states in the United States and their hometowns ranged from small rural communities to metropolitan cities. Their cultural experience ranged from having no experience to having lived in Central America for multiple years. Seven participants had traveled internationally on short-term vacations or school related opportunities. In addition, many of the participants had some exposure through a variety of opportunities (forums, volunteer work, courses) to cultural groups more prevalent in these midwestern states (e.g., African American, Hmong, and Hispanic). However, some of the participants' exposure was to cultural groups not typically found in these midwestern states (e.g., Malaysian, Taiwanese, Puerto Rican, and Haitian). None of the participants had a prior international higher educational experience (see Table I).

Table I
Demographics of Program Participants

	Level	Exposure to cultural groups	Countries visited/ duration noted	Additional experiences
A	Junior	None	None	Program Orientation
B	Junior	African American Russian	Italy- one week	Metropolitan city Cultural fests
C	Junior	African American, Filipino, Hmong	none	Forums on diversity (Hmong and Latino)
D	Junior	Exchange students: Germany, Spain, and France. Camp friends New Zealand and Australia, UK	Canada- twice/ 2 weeks Mexico twice/5 days Germany/France-10 days	International Club
E	5 th Year Senior	Hispanic, Hmong, Asian, African, Haitian	Mexico- 10 days	Forums
F	Senior	Malaysian, Taiwanese, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Danish	None	Tutored Taiwanese university student
G	Senior	African American, Swedish	China-8 days	Attended Native American and Hmong activities
H	Graduate	African American, Hispanic, Haitian	England-twice/2 weeks Norway/Denmark- 2 weeks Mexico-1 week The Netherlands-one semester	Assisted in teaching in a predominantly African American school. Trainings and forums on diversity
I	Senior	Hispanic, Asian, Australian, African, European	Guatemala-14 years Mexico-2 years Several weeks each: Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Cuba, Columbia	
J	5 th Year Senior		Mexico-2-3 weeks	Member of host family to students in high school.

Program

The six-week Special Education in Scotland Program was divided into three distinct components. First, the participants attended a 3-week course that introduced them to the topic of Emotional Behavioral Disabilities. Second, the participants spent two weeks living with Scottish teachers or other school

personnel. During these two weeks, each participant was able to observe and assist in classrooms or schools that offered services for students with special needs. The types of schools used were as follows: residential schools for students with behavioral or physical needs, day programs for students with special needs, units within regular schools for students with special needs, classrooms that served student with disabilities alongside peers in regular schools. Third, they had the opportunity to visit the Highlands for one week with a diverse group of people from a variety of countries (Australia, Germany, France, and Canada).

Measures

Research questions were investigated with two methods: reflective journaling with prompts and the administration of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Bennett & Hammer, 1998). Reflective journaling with prompts focused on gaining a broad view of the participants' perspectives. The six weekly journal opportunities prompted students to reflect on their experiences throughout the program. They were provided with prompts that assisted in their reflection; however, these were not meant to exclude other thoughts that may have arisen during their reflection. These prompts were: What challenges are you encountering? What differences are there in the culture or the educational system? How are these experiences affecting how you view your own culture and special education philosophy? How will your special education practice be affected when you return to the United States? Do you have any specific stories about any of the things that have happened? Do you have any questions about any of these cultural or educational differences? To maintain anonymity while the participants were enrolled in a course taught by one of the researchers, the students submitted their reflections to the graduate assistant. The journals were complemented by a post-program focus group which highlighted changes or thoughts that had emerged since their return from the program.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a tool that measures an individual's perceived and actual stage of intercultural sensitivity. The concept of intercultural sensitivity emerged from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993; Bennett & Hammer, 1998) which identifies one's location within the stages of perceived and actual intercultural sensitivity to cultural differences. The first stage is Denial and Defense (DD), which measures a worldview that simplifies or polarizes cultural differences. This orientation ranges from a tendency toward disinterest and avoidance of cultural differences to a tendency to view the world in terms of *us* and *them*, where *us* is superior or inferior. Next, Minimization (M) measures a worldview that highlights cultural commonality and universal values through an emphasis on similarity (a tendency to assume that people from other cultures are basically *like us*) and/or universalism (a tendency to apply one's own cultural values to other cultures). Finally, Acceptance and Adaptation (AA) measures a worldview that can comprehend and accommodate complex cultural difference. This can range from acceptance (a tendency to recognize patterns of cultural difference in one's own and other cultures) to adaptation (a tendency to alter perception and behavior according to cultural context) (Bennett, 1993; Bennett & Hammer, 1998; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004).

Procedures

The participants were given the prompts for their reflective journaling upon departure for Scotland. They submitted their reflective journals in an unmarked envelope to the graduate assistant at the end of the program. Data were coded using a Grounded Theory approach as it utilized a general methodology that provided the researchers *a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data* (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 275). Themes and categories emerged which allowed for the development of a conceptual framework that described the participants' experience. A follow-up focus group was held 4 months after the participants returned. This focus group provided additional data which assisted in clarifying some of the findings that were obtained through the reflections. The participants were questioned about how the experience continued to affect them and what general thoughts they had now that four months had lapsed since submitting the reflective journals.

The IDI was administered pre-and post-program by a trained IDI administrator. Participants were provided several opportunities to complete the inventory using university computers. The pre-experience administration was several weeks before departure and the post-experience administration was scheduled within a month upon return. Data were gathered and provided to the researchers by the IDI administrator.

Results

Determining the impact of the SPED in Scotland program became a task of understanding the participants' individual journeys through their reflective journals. In addition, the IDI results revealed the participants' intercultural sensitivity. It was interesting to note that while the first research question's results (intercultural sensitivity) stood alone, the other two questions' results, perception of educational practices and global awareness of special education services, complemented each other with similar comments answering both questions.

Reflective journaling

The reflective journals provided data that coalesced into a conceptual model that described growth through a linear set of stages (Observation, Reflective Awareness, and Change). In the first stage, Observation, students noted differences or similarities to the United States in their surroundings and experiences, or simply stated what they noticed. Once an observation had been made, many students demonstrated the second stage, Reflective Awareness, in which they contextualized their Observation to make qualitative judgments which were formed by reflecting on their own understandings and experiences. Finally, a few students progressed to Stage 3, Change, which indicated a conscious assertion towards making a change in their lives in approaches to personal or educational situations or their value systems. Within these stages, comments were coded into one of four domains or primary focuses of experience: culture, education, homestays, and travel. However, the domains students wrote about and the stages they moved through in each domain varied greatly for each participant.

Culture. Observations in the area of culture were somewhat dominated by issues of communication. Many students felt it was difficult at first to understand nuanced expressions used in Scottish dialect and converse with complete ease. Other participants also observed that the Scottish expressed kind treatment of others and focused more on relationships and family compared to the United States. Students also observed enthusiasm for culture and heritage. Participant A wrote, *The Scots seem to know more about their own country and the general UK than we know about the US* In continuing to recognize and cope with more frustrating aspects of cultural difference, Participant A also wrote the Reflective Awareness, *There are so many things that don't make sense to me. Maybe that's just the way the culture works and that is acceptable. Maybe as the trip continues, things will all come into place and start to make some more sense.* Many students expressed Reflective Awareness by noting the large degree of similarity they found with people from other countries. Participants generalized that several similarities meant that their cultures were more similar than different. Participant G wrote, *Finding similarities between myself and someone from another culture puts my mind at ease and makes me feel a little more comfortable where I'm at, regardless of how different a country it is. I have confidence that I could go to any country and find a way to fit myself in.* Few students expressed a desire to make changes in their lives related to culture. Participant I, noticing the less hurried lifestyle of the Scottish people, made this comment: *My goal for when I return will be to think about what I have learned and then to change my way of life so that I can enjoy it more. I would mostly like to try and slow down my daily life and not rush around. I think that I can enjoy my family and friends more if I take that away from this trip.*

Education. After the educational immersion experience in the schools, all participants made comments related to the structure of the schools and students they observed, and many participants made Observations related to pedagogical or philosophical issues in special education. However, few students related their experiences in the schools with their own perceptions of their practices back home (Reflective Awareness), or expressed a desire to change anything about their practices. Students were in a variety of placements; therefore observations about differences and similarities to the American system differed greatly. Participant C, who was placed in a regular education inclusionary school stated, *The differences [in the schools] were fewer than I would have expected.* Several participants indicated that funding for education seemed to be more stable and plentiful in Scotland, and students who were placed in special schools for children with disabilities observed more close and caring relationships between teachers and students, as compared to the United States. Some participants in special schools also observed a larger focus on functional life skills in these settings than in the States.

Some participants concluded in Reflective Awareness that the funding and investment in special schools signified that Scotland placed a higher value on education than the United States. A few participants expressed Reflective Awareness regarding differing approaches to inclusive practices in Scotland. Participants placed in special schools were impressed with the level of support and funding

available for Scottish special schools, while conflicted about their educational background that had appeared to value more inclusive practices. Participant G, who observed in a special school day program wrote, *In some ways I think the system here is great (with the amount of money and staff they put into special schools) but other things don't quite make sense to me...And I think that is really interesting to think about because the special schools here are so great that I would think other services for students with special needs would also be as great. Thinking about this makes me appreciate some of the settings we have back home, and that though the special schools here are just phenomenal, the public schools back home can still offer students with special needs a lot of services compared to the public schools here.* Participant E, placed in a residential special school, wrote, *I really learned a lot about the school system but it really made me look at our system with a more critical eye. I wanted to know more about ways we did things to see if we had anything like the program at [school name]. I found that school to be a great place for students to go when there is no other option.*

As a result of this experience, two participants expressed a desire to make changes in their approaches to education. Participant F, placed in a special school day program, wrote, *I have also realized that maybe some methods of teacher, behavioral, and school placements are not only like what we have in the States, and maybe we don't have the 'best' system. And that I can take that knowledge home and share it with other professionals.* Participant I, placed in a residential special school, observed more independence in students than she had in special education classrooms in the United States, thus making this statement of Change: *I would like to continue to hold high expectations for my students. I would like to better the manner in which I help students, so that I do not cause them to continue to rely on me in order to complete a task. Though it is my job to teach the students, I also want to teach them to complete things individually.*

Homestays. Students made several comments about the aspect of staying with a host family for the two weeks they were placed in schools. Participants expressed concerns about appropriate interactions and how to helpfully integrate themselves into routines. For some, the experiences with the host family were more salient than the educational component of the two weeks. Participant D wrote, *Just in that two weeks at the host stay I have a much bigger appreciation for Scottish culture.* Through the host families, many participants noticed similarities in functions and behaviors of families between Scotland and the United States, which led to Reflective Awareness. No expressions of Change were present in the homestay domain of the entries.

Travel. In the final aspect of the program, Travel, it was noted that all three stages were represented in the participants' comments and views of travel. For some students this experience was their first journey outside the United States, and for most it was their first experience with independent and longer term travel. That is, many students were engaging in trip planning and navigation for the first time. Observations described transportation, map-reading, and hostel experiences. Some participants expressed discomfort with being recognized as a *tourist* and having to complete complicated tasks in unfamiliar environments. However, as a Reflective Awareness, many students expressed comfort and confidence with these tasks and independent travel by the end of the program. As a Change, almost every participant expressed a desire to find a way to save money and time in order to travel more. Many participants indicated specific places to which they would like to travel.

Emotional and personal growth. The researchers recognized that emotional and personal growth statements were present throughout the entries; these statements did not directly correlate to any stage, but seemed to facilitate and encourage the progression through them. Participants transitioned several times throughout the program which required them to form and break ties quickly and often; they also dealt with homesickness and interpersonal relationships among each other. These emotional and personal growth statements reflected dealing with experiences that required maturity and resilience to overcome. Participant B stated, *I can't help but wish that my family and friends were nearby. I feel out of touch with the rest of the world. I'm kicking myself for feeling this way and am really hoping it goes away.* Before the week-long tour at the end of the trip began, Participant E stated, *I am sad to leave, excited to explore new places, nervous for the upcoming events and sad to say goodbye to all the great people I have met. This has been such an emotional rollercoaster since I have gotten here.*

Follow-up Group

Four months after the participants returned from Scotland, they were reunited to discuss their thoughts and reflections on their experience. Five general findings emerged from this follow-up group. First, they indicated that it was difficult to merge the desired changes into their typical daily routine. Their new pattern of thinking was not reinforced by their current activities or routine, thus new thoughts and

ideas disappeared. Second, they all stated emphatically that the desire to travel still remained. Third, most of the students could highlight both positives and negatives of both educational systems. Questions about changing or improving the US system and defining the Scottish system pervaded throughout the discussion. Fourth, the students agreed that having more background about the Scottish schools as compared to the US schools would have been helpful. They needed more than a peripheral understanding of the Scottish system to fully grasp the differences. Finally, the students indicated that the one-week Highlands trip that included other people from other countries was one of the most memorable experiences. Every student stated that they grew from this experience and felt that it was a *life changing* opportunity for many individual reasons.

Intercultural Development Inventory

The results from the IDI indicated a low level of actual change in perceived or actual intercultural sensitivity. All students perceived themselves to be more intercultural sensitive than they actually were. It was interesting to note that the expected pattern of change did not emerge. It was thought that participants with a more abundant experience in travel and culture would actually change most towards being more sensitive. This was not bore out by the data. The following Table 2 shows the data.

Table 2
Intercultural Development Inventory Scores

Student	Pre test Perceived Sensitivity		Post test Perceived Sensitivity		Pre test Actual Sensitivity		Post test Actual Sensitivity	
	Score	Scale	Score	Scale	Score	Scale	Score	Scale
A	122.13	AA	122.87	AA	94.7	M	93.24	M
B	115.35	M/AA	120.69	AA	80.33	DD	91.38	M
C	123.41	AA	128.81	AA	109.42	M	115.95	AA
D	118.45	AA	118.65	AA	86.99	M	83.3	DD
E	123.01	AA	119.24	AA	98.76	M	87.44	M
F	116.1	AA	118.52	AA	79.32	DD	77.05	DD
G	117.09	AA	120.01	AA	87.05	M	89.9	M
H	124.72	AA	117.72	AA	102.2	M	87.8	M
I	122.21	AA	120.89	AA	89.83	M	89.21	M
J	115.11	M/AA	119.83	AA	74.3	DD	84.52	DD/M

Note: DD means Denial/Defense; M means Minimization; AA means Acceptance/Adaptation

Perceived and actual stage scores. In general the students before and after the SPED in Scotland experience perceived their intercultural sensitivity as being at the level of acceptance and adaptation for both the pre- and post-tests. This viewpoint indicated a consistent positive view of their perceived sensitivity to cultural differences. However from the participants' scores for actual stage of intercultural sensitivity, one can ascertain a very different pattern that revealed lower levels of actual sensitivity. The majority of students scored within the range of Minimization as compared to their perceived score of Acceptance and Adaptation. This held true for both the pre-test and post-test results. One student increased her actual sensitivity to the level of Acceptance and Adaptation while the rest of the participants fluctuated between Denial and Defense and Minimization. It is interesting to note that if a student's score fell, rose, or stayed the same within the perceived scores; it was mirrored in the actual stage scores.

Discussion

Awareness of diversity, cultural sensitivity, and best teaching practices are hallmarks of good teacher education programs. With the ongoing desire for new teachers to be able to work within culturally diverse environments, experiences like the SPED in Scotland program can fulfill multiple goals if the

program is implemented well. One such goal that is expressed in this program's University vision statement is to facilitate the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the area of diversity by valuing and attuning to cultural beliefs and practices, in order to promote social justice and effective practice. The SPED in Scotland Program is one avenue by which this vision is carried out, in partnership with the college's international education initiatives. SPED in Scotland attempted to immerse students in an international pre-service practicum and study abroad experience specifically in settings serving children with disabilities. The researchers sought to determine how adequately SPED in Scotland achieved its desired impact in regard to students' intercultural sensitivity, perceptions of educational practice in culturally unfamiliar environments, and awareness of global realities in special education.

The results of the Intercultural Development Inventory and the analysis of the students' reflective journals supported one another in determining the impact of the program on participants. In the same way that only three students were found to move to higher levels of intercultural sensitivity, there were few students who committed to make life changes within the four domains, including the culture domain. Students also made several statements which, in light of the IDI, reflected the stage of minimization in that they celebrated and found comfort in similarities. For example, Participant B made the statement, *I am finding that people in the UK and the US are surprisingly alike. The relationships between my host family members with each other are quite similar to my family's...so I do not feel like I am in a significantly different place in terms of culture.* There were several such statements throughout the journal entries, and although these are necessary observations to make in a culturally unfamiliar environment, they mirrored the movement within the IDI results. Reflective journals showed that very few students moved past the Reflective Awareness stage and embraced the Change stage which paralleled the lack of movement between the Minimization stage and the Acceptance/Adaptation stage.

Most participants became more globally aware of differences in special education service delivery, and their reflections on educational practices revealed movement throughout the stages of Observation and Reflective Awareness in the education domain. However, only a few students made statements that reached Stage 3, Change, in the education domain, which indicated only a modest effect on students' perceptions of educational practices.

The researchers identified three factors that influenced both participants' IDI scores, and their movement through stages coded in their journals to determine the effect of the program on global awareness and educational practices: program duration, cultural implications of travel in the UK, and personal characteristics that influenced students' experience.

Program duration

Program duration is a potential key element in the success of programs. The SPED in Scotland program was specifically designed to provide a study abroad program to pre-service teachers that would not interfere with their ability to complete their degree programs in the desired four and a half years. Six weeks during the summer months provided a short, yet intense experience which was developed to serve as a true educational and cultural immersion.

A study of programs in Mexico examined the issue of program duration using the same quantitative tool used for this study. Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) found that when comparing a 7-week to a 16-week program, both occurring in Mexico, students in the longer program made more gains on the IDI than the students in the shorter program. In the shorter program, one-third advanced to the next stage between pre- and post-testing; in the longer program, two thirds advanced to the next stage. In addition, 30% of the post-test scores for the shorter group indicated movement into the Acceptance or Adaptation stage. Seventy-eight percent of the students in the longer group reached the Acceptance or Adaptation stage at post-test. Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) found significant outcomes for the variable of program duration; these outcomes were confirmed by the results of this study. It was reasonable to conclude that the lack of movement as measured by the IDI for the participants in the Scotland program was to be expected given the program's short duration of six weeks.

Even though the SPED in Scotland program was short, there is evidence that positive outcomes do occur for shorter programs. Dwyer (2004) conducted a survey study of study abroad alumni whose programs occurred within the past 50 years. The programs in which students were enrolled varied in length and type of enrollment and housing arrangements. Although students who studied abroad for an entire academic year reported a higher facility with a foreign language and more sustained relationships with people from other countries, all students, regardless of program duration, perceived their

experience as equally formative and emotionally important, even as many as 50 years later. Dwyer (2004) asserted, *Well-planned, intensive summer programs of at least six weeks duration can have a significant impact on student growth across a variety of important outcomes* (p. 161). Although students did not make marked gains in intercultural sensitivity based on the IDI, through the journals and focus group discussion students expressed growth in their cultural awareness of global realities of special education. In some cases, participants extended this awareness to examining their educational practices. In that sense, this study supported Dwyer's finding that shorter-term studies can have positive impacts beyond intercultural sensitivity measures.

Personal characteristics

Another important factor highlighted by this study was the varying degrees of experience in international travel and immersion in different cultures. Previous experience ranged from full immersion in foreign cultures for long periods of time to little or no exposure to groups different from the student. Experience in travel ranged from complete comfort with tasks and procedures associated with travel to almost no experience traveling independently. In addition, the factor of self-selection played a role. The self-selection process potentially narrowed the type of student who was interested in study abroad. One had to be willing to venture into a foreign country, be put into an uncomfortable situation (homestay), be able to find ways to afford the program, and be ready to experience new things with less familiar support. For these reasons, it was important when analyzing the reflective journals to consider the salience of experiences relative to the student's life and perception. The dominant events recounted by the students revolved mainly around travel and cultural observation. Furthermore, the level of their educational program (sophomore, junior, or senior) corresponded with the participants' facility in making educational observations and committing to life changes. That is, students who had completed four to five years in the special education program wrote more about educational difference and awareness, whereas students newer to the program did not necessarily have the acute experience in American schools yet to comment on education.

The effect of personal characteristics on the IDI scores was less predictable and regular. Students who had more experience in special education, travel, or cultural immersion did not necessarily progress more dramatically to a higher level on the IDI.

Cultural implications of travel in the UK

Although the United Kingdom presents exciting and rich study abroad opportunities, there are drawbacks and concerns to highlight when a somewhat familiar and superficially similar country is visited. As stated, in 2005/2006, 14% of American students who studied abroad did so in the United Kingdom. Because of many shared cultural norms, the UK is a popular destination for American students. For this reason, the cultural differences and nuances should not go unrecognized when one ventures there. Of concern for the researchers was the possibility that a lack of sensitivity to cultural difference in the UK may have been the result of a lack of preparation for recognizing such differences. Edwards (2000) claimed that with the American fascination with British study abroad comes certain assumptions and taken-for-granted similarities that lull American students into a belief that they are expanding their worldview towards personal ethnocentrism. Students traveling to the UK may miss the very differences that develop this awareness, especially while on short-term journeys. Edwards illuminated the concern that:

We are sending students abroad hoping that they will have the kind of perspective changing *other*, but we do this at a moment when all such encounters are suspect, and we do it, in many cases, without formally or even informally preparing student for such an experience. When we send students to the UK, if they take with them no discriminating expectations that they will in fact be in a foreign society, it seems over-optimistic to expect that this can possibly be such a meaningful encounter. (p. 91)

Although it is uncertain how much preparation in recognizing differences will effect how students view culture and educational systems in Scotland, it was clear from the journals that at times students did not recognize cultural or educational differences. When traveling to the UK, it would be important to sensitize students to these differences, as the shared language and history leads students to neglect the celebration of difference.

A final element that warrants discussion is the dramatic difference between students actual and perceived intercultural sensitivity. Perceived intercultural sensitivity scores were higher than actual developmental scores, which indicated that all participants both began and ended the program with inflated views of their own intercultural sensitivity. The implications of this are that students may not

necessarily take the initiative to expand their worldview and strive toward a more ethnocentric viewpoint if they don't perceive their ethnocentrism in the first place. Thus, this growth may need to be fostered and instructed through structured experiences and self-awareness exercises.

Implications

Although the SPED in Scotland program has gained a positive reputation with the participants supported by their positive comments and memories, does it really serve the true purpose of providing opportunities for students to improve their intercultural sensitivity, enhance their educational practices, and increase their global interconnectedness? Based on the data, this program definitely provided the foundation for providing a beneficial study abroad experience in the area of special education. However there are several implications for the improvement of programs of this nature.

First, the pre-service teachers' preparation must include more thorough instruction in educational practices both in the United States as well as Scotland. A clear understanding of each participant's knowledge, experience, and awareness needs to be determined and supported as they move through the experience. Leaders cannot make assumptions that students will perceive differences and then reflect on them in light of the United States system, without making the differences transparent for some of the students.

Second, a richer understanding of the cultural differences between the UK and the US needs to be clearly delineated. As Edwards noted, many students miss the subtle differences they are exposed to because they are at a level that make things look the same. The issue of minimization needs to be addressed. Students need to be taught to recognize how they may minimize differences or even deny differences occur. The development of cultural sensitivity needs to take priority if all students will be equipped to actually notice, celebrate, or be changed by their experiences.

Finally, developing a relationship with instructors of pre-service teachers in Scotland would provide a more in-depth understanding of the Scottish system that may provide opportunities for participants to analyze what they are seeing in Scotland more objectively with what they have already experienced in the US. Students need the tools to be able to explore what they are experiencing within their own knowledge base.

Wanting to increase the ability of pre-service teachers to interact in a more sensitive manner with people from diverse backgrounds is one of the focuses of the SPED in Scotland program. Having culturally sensitive teachers in the field can only serve all students better. The SPED in Scotland program seeks to enhance its participants' cultural knowledge base, educational experiences, and their perceptions of the world. It has provided some of these experiences so far; it can only get better for the future.

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