

# Beyond Educational Tourism: Lessons Learned While Student Teaching Abroad

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*Many universities provide overseas student teaching yet little is known as to what knowledge, skills, and dispositions university students have prior to arriving in their host country as well as after their return to their home country. This article considers several key issues and suggests factors that schools of education should consider when planning, developing and providing prospective teachers with an exposure to international student teaching abroad beyond educational tourism.*

International education, overseas student teaching, student teaching abroad

## INTRODUCTION

It is important for United States teacher candidates to experience student teaching or study abroad so they may better understand the world community and the United States' place in it so they can be more reflective and effective teachers while working with immigrant children in our schools (Blair, 2002). We know from research that most teachers prefer to teach near or within their own neighbourhood schools. Yet the majority of the teaching positions are in urban areas where there is a high concentration of children from distinct ethnic and linguistic minorities who look different from those who are seeking teaching positions. Many universities and schools of education require teacher candidates to take a course in multicultural education or promote issues of diversity, peace education and social justice within their curriculum. However, a course alone, reading a textbook about multicultural education, conducting course discussions and even having a variety of ethnicities represented in university classrooms and working with children from different ethnic and linguistic minorities are not sufficient. Future teachers need to experience the cultural roots that immigrants experience in their new country that may develop international knowledge in a way that assists the understanding of their perspective students.

A research report from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) stated that study abroad was found to be the activity that provided university students' with international experience. In many campuses studying abroad was available in principle, but few students majoring in elementary or secondary education tended to participate. Therefore, some cutting-edge schools of education have led the way in developing and creating international training programs for prospective teacher candidates so they may become more worldly teachers (Germain, 1998).

Different models exist that provide internationalisation experiences for future teachers. One way is to provide study abroad opportunities (tourist approach), a second model is to internationalise the curriculum, and a third is to allow future teachers to student teach in another country and immerse themselves not only with the country but also within the schools and the community.

While many institutions of higher education have study abroad programs and have instituted end-of course evaluations and program evaluations, little is known as to what knowledge, skills, and dispositions university students have prior to arriving in their host country as well as after their return to their home country. It is, therefore, proposed to discuss some questions as to ways that

schools of education can create, develop and provide prospective teachers with exposure to international education through student teaching abroad. The following questions may assist in providing a framework for this experience: (a) what does it mean to be a global teacher or a global citizen; (b) what types of international student teaching programs are available to prospective teacher candidates; (c) what does the research indicate regarding the preparation and experiences of student teachers while teaching abroad; (d) what knowledge, skills and dispositions can they be said to 'transport and unpack' while in their host countries; and (e) what do students teaching abroad bring back that may enhance their life, educational experiences and skills in their future classrooms?

### **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAMS AND CONSORTIUMS**

A review of the literature revealed two program models. Some schools of education have created or developed their own global education programs in which international education opportunities exist, both in teaching courses specifically on educational issues abroad or stand-alone student teaching abroad programs in one or more countries. A second model includes schools of education that are part of a consortium that includes various universities in the United States that are partnered with host country universities. Students do their practice teaching in three types of schools: Department of Defence K-12 Schools, United States Department of State American Sponsored Overseas Schools, and host country schools. The Department of Defence K-12 Schools serve children of military families stationed abroad. The language of instruction is English. Countries include those located in Europe and Asia, as well as Guam, Puerto Rico, Panama, and Cuba. United States Department of State American Sponsored Overseas Schools are private schools open to all children on a tuition-paid basis. The schools are supported by the Department of State and serve as models for American education overseas. Some are housed in United States embassies while others have external campuses in the local community. Many children from diplomatic families attend. The languages of instruction are usually English and the host country language. Host country schools are the public schools attended by local children. The language of instruction is the country's primary language.

The following is a brief description of the various types of student teaching program models. Some universities participate in international consortiums with United States universities and universities abroad. Other universities base their international student teaching programs in schools of education in which they have developed international partnerships with specific elementary or secondary schools or universities abroad.

#### **Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST)**

COST is a consortium of 15 United States colleges and universities and 28 colleges and universities from other countries that have banded together to plan and create opportunities for prospective teacher candidates to complete their student teaching abroad. Over 600 college students have participated in student teaching in overseas schools. The consortium was established in 1973 and meets annually to update its bylaws, discuss new overseas placements and to assess itself as an organisation. Placement is in national schools including countries such as Australia, the Bahamas, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, and South Africa. Student teachers may also select to be placed in United States or international schools in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Greece, Japan, Mexico, and Switzerland. Each year 60 to 75 students participate and complete their student teaching outside the United States (Mahon and Cushner, 2002; Clement and Outlaw, 2002). The United States colleges and universities include Auburn University, Berry College, Eastern Illinois University, Grand Valley State University, Kent State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Northern Kentucky University, Ohio University,

Thomas Moore College, the University of Alabama, the University of Georgia, the University of Kentucky, and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

### **Foundation for International Education**

The Cultural Immersion Project of the Overseas Student Teaching Project at Indiana University-Bloomington was created in the 1970s to prepare and place student teachers in national schools in England, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, India, Taiwan, Kenya, and Costa Rica. Students complete 10 to 16 weeks of student teaching in Indiana and eight weeks in another country. The program provides certification for both elementary and secondary education, and includes certification in subject areas such as music, special education, and physical education. Placements are made in cooperation with the Foundation for International Education. Prospective students must participate in an extensive preparation program for the educational teaching abroad experience (Stachowski, Richardson and Henderson, 2003).

### **International Teacher Education Consortium**

The California State University System, San Diego State University, CSU-Long Beach and CSU-Bakersfield are involved with the Bilingual Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development Certificate Program (BCLAD). The CSU system participates in a consortium of all of the California State University Campuses and the Office of International Programs to help support the preparation of teachers working with English language learners in California. The program combines coursework in the United States and in Queretaro, Mexico as well as student teaching. Teacher candidates can receive teaching credentials or master's degree credits. Candidates have access to both indigenous (meaning unclear) and public schools. Candidates who complete the program receive a certificate from the Bilingual Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CSUS, 2004).

### **Pacific Region Student Teaching Program (PRST)**

This teaching program is a collaborative program between New Zealand, Australia, and the United States colleges based on cross-cultural exchange. It allows students to teach in a cross-cultural setting from any of the three countries. Its purpose is to allow the student teachers to engage in experiences that promote an understanding of the diversity of the country and allows students to share their beliefs in order to justify learned behaviours, actions and the implications on teaching (Kuechle, O'Brien, and Ferguson, 1995).

### **University of San Diego-School of Education Global (SOE-Global) Project**

The mandate of the SOE Global Education Resource Center is to provide SOE students and faculty with information about global education opportunities and the resources necessary for planning a global education experience. SOE Global supports the school of education's mission and promises to provide students with the professional knowledge, skills, and ethical perspectives they are likely to need for effective leadership and practice in a diverse society. SOE Global seeks to accomplish this by providing educational opportunities to students and also offering opportunities for non-United States students and scholars to study at the University of San Diego. SOE Global currently has student teaching abroad opportunities in Trinidad, Haiti, and Costa Rica. Teacher candidates student teach for 16 weeks under the supervision of cooperating teachers in both elementary and secondary American international schools. The school of education is currently planning to develop and create new partnerships with other countries in order to provide student teaching opportunities.

### **Christopher Newport University-Newport News, Virginia**

This university provides cross-cultural internships to pre-service teachers in Mexico, Germany, Peru, Brazil, Ireland, and Saudi Arabia. Most of the participating schools are American overseas schools, where English is the predominant language of instruction. Most pre-service teachers participate over an eight to 15 week period.

#### **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

In the investigation of overseas student teaching programs various similarities and differences have emerged. Programs that have been in existence for many years have created and developed excellent partnerships with host universities as well as with local elementary and secondary schools, the community, and with host families. In order to prepare student teachers for the experience many universities have an application procedure with more rigid requirements than for those applying to the regular teaching credential program. In many cases students undergo extensive preparation for the cultural and educational experience. Students have to attend orientation meetings and take a course where they learn about the host country, its history, its customs, its people, and study their educational system. The purpose is to eliminate candidates who only want to take an educational tourist approach while student teaching. The majority of the programs include a two-phase approach. The first phase is a five to eight week student teaching experience in the United States. prior to doing their second phase of five to eight weeks student teaching abroad. In some cases they continue into a third phase where they continue their student teaching after they have returned from overseas. For the most part student teachers live with host families, but some live in apartments or in host university housing. While student teaching abroad they are paired with host university supervisors, principals or teachers who become their immediate supervisors and then are placed accordingly with cooperating teachers. Student teachers also communicate with their United States university supervisors through e-mail. Students complete the same requirements as their United States counterparts by reflecting on their experiences, completing mid-term and final evaluations with the selected university personnel from the host country. In some instances, United States university supervisors travel with groups of student teachers or visit at least once during their placements and also provide weekly feedback through e-mail. However, for the most part student teachers are on their own compared with other study abroad programs where they are in groups from their own institutions. Some student teaching abroad programs also provide course opportunities where students take half of their core teacher credential courses while teaching abroad and complete the remaining courses when they return to the United States, as is the case with the California State University International BCLAD Student Teaching program.

#### **REPORTS ON THE INFLUENCES OF STUDENT TEACHING ABROAD**

It is well documented that both study abroad and international student teaching experiences have positive effects on university students' cultural understanding of the host country. According to Quinn, Barr, Jarchow, Powell and Mckay (1995) such experiences result in increased personal and professional competence. The literature seems to be consistent in reporting both professional and personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions that student teachers acquire while teaching abroad. The literature review of research that has been conducted supports three general themes based on students' personal reflections, program evaluation, and perceptions from host educators. The three themes are instructional pedagogy, self-learning and genuine multiculturalism. Studies conducted by Bryan and Sprague, (1997), Clement and Oflaw, (2002), Mahon and Cushner, (2002b), Stachowski and Visconti, (1997), Stachowski, and Chleb, 1998, and Stachowski, Richardson, and Henderson, (2003) further support the three themes.

## THE THEMES

### **Theme 1-Instructional Pedagogy**

Student teachers found that some aspects of teaching were universal such as classroom management and administrative procedures. Student teachers were also able to compare their teaching experiences and practices in their home country and the host country and take the best from both. Since there were fewer resource materials provided student teachers had to become more creative in their curricular planning and delivery of instruction. Student teachers also had to learn how to adapt planning from local and state curricula in the United States to planning lessons from a national curriculum while student teaching abroad.

### **Theme 2-Learning about Self**

Most study abroad program models allow for large groups of students from one institution to attend school and live in university housing. Therefore, students have support systems that make the transition experience and cultural shock much easier. In comparison, many student teachers live and travel alone; therefore, they grow personally as a result of feeling isolated, homesick, and out of place during their first weeks in the host country. The experience is later seen as a positive one since student teachers self-efficacy is much higher. Gibson and Dembo (1984) have reported that teachers with higher self-efficacy guide, motivate, and praise students much more. Therefore the results of their student teaching experience may have a direct impact on culturally diverse students in their home country who are likely to need more guiding, motivation and praise. The experience that immigrant children undergo in the United States is thus placed into context. Students become more independent and mature as a result of their experiences. Student teachers appear to learn about the importance of family time and parent and extended family time with children. This may lead to student teachers taking a more relaxed approach. Therefore, student teachers' reflections and evaluations of their roles with their host families influenced how they planned to change their approach to life.

### **Theme 3-Genuine Multiculturalism**

As a result of learning about a new culture on a daily basis and in a new context, and the manner in which the programs are designed, student teachers may alter both personal and professional dispositions. An increase in cultural awareness and global thinking is evident. Student teachers may begin to question aspects of their own culture that may have previously gone unexamined (Mahon and Cushner, 2002). Student teachers who work with language minority children can then relate their experiences while working with English language learners in the United States. The teachers also see that children in their host countries address their teachers with much more respect. The experience gained plays a large part in cultural learning (Cushner and Brislin, 1996).

Student teachers may develop an increase in cultural sensitivity by viewing the United States from a different point of view.

Researchers also report that United States student teachers often returned with new skills, fresh ideas and enthusiasm that provided host children with a broader outlook on the world, in general, and the United States, in particular. Cultural enrichment in many instances was evident for the entire school community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations in the planning and implementation of new programs should be considered in order to improve effectively the experiences for student teachers preparing to teach abroad. The following suggestions, based on the literature review from various programs, include

integrating a planning phase, providing in-service training as part of the experience, providing scholarships, and conducting follow-up interviews with program participants.

### **Recommendation 1-Planning Phase**

In planning new programs the need to include a preparation phase is very important. Cultural shock can be minimised by requiring cross-cultural coursework and an orientation program to address the culture, beliefs, customs and the curriculum of the educational system of the host country for prospective student teachers.

### **Recommendation 2-Service Learning**

The student teaching experience should require in-service training so student teachers may become involved and immerse themselves more deeply in the local community. Building partnerships with international service clubs, such as Lions, Rotary, and Kiwanis, would be a start by helping the students to feel less isolated during the beginning of their student teaching. At the same time, the students receive invaluable cultural experience that increases their feeling of self-worth and accomplishment.

### **Recommendation 3-Scholarships**

There could be increased provision of scholarships for economically disadvantaged students. A study conducted by Mahon and Cushner (2000b) showed that less than 10 per cent of university students who participated in student teaching or study abroad programs came from ethnic minority students or were students who lacked economic resources. Most students cited cost as a factor in their lack of participation. Although student loans were available the need to provide mechanisms for financial support appeared to be required as positions for student fellowships or graduate assistants might be made available to those students who have fewer resources and who, therefore, were least likely to participate in study abroad programs.

### **Recommendation 4-Follow-up**

There appears to be minimal research on the effects of student teaching abroad and its impact on teaching practices in the home country classroom. A need to provide follow-up studies on the transfer of knowledge, skills, and dispositions once candidates are employed is lacking both from participants who have studied and those who have student taught abroad.

## **CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED WHILE STUDENT TEACHING ABROAD**

There are several challenges that student teachers have encountered while teaching abroad. By addressing many of the recommendations cited, the possibilities of minimising the challenges can be addressed. The most common challenges are adapting to the national curriculum, having minimal contact with peers their own age, and in some instances having difficulty communicating in the community outside of the schools.

### **Challenge 1-Adapting to the curriculum**

Adaptation and planning lessons to meet the national (overseas) curriculum is very challenging. Learning about a country's educational standards in such a short period can be daunting. Learning about the national curriculum during the preparation phase or in coursework may alleviate this anxiety.

### **Challenge 2-Lack of contact with peers**

Lack of contact with other young people may increase isolation. When student teachers are not placed in groups they may feel isolated and homesick, particularly when many of the teachers at their schools are much older. If their host families do not have children, the age gap may minimise conversation. Having at least two student teachers in one location can help support their personal needs. They can plan together and may become more involved with the school in extracurricular activities and with the community in-service learning projects.

### **Challenge 3-Language barrier**

In some instances students also felt frustrated when placed in countries whose language they could not speak or when their initial fluency was limited. Although they were able to communicate in the school there was limited involvement with the community. Some challenges exist anytime one travels abroad; therefore, it is much easier when one is in the position of a tourist. Students teaching abroad are young professionals who may become teachers once they return to the United States. They are the emissaries and ambassadors of United States schools of education and representatives of higher education institutions. Therefore, minimising the challenges can help support future student teachers abroad from the recruitment phase to the teaching placement phase.

### **CONCLUSION**

It was evident from the research that over 100 universities in the United States participated or provided some form of student teaching abroad. As a result of participation in international student teaching, university students grew personally and professionally from their experiences. They learned effective pedagogical practices and adapted their instructional planning. They became more sensitive to issues of multiculturalism and were, therefore, able to relate to experiences immigrant children and families went through in the United States. They showed an increase in self-efficacy as they learned more about themselves, the international communities in which they lived and the children they worked with. They had moved beyond educational tourism.

### **FUTURE IMPLICATIONS**

An increase in efforts to globalise United States' institutions of higher education increases the need to infuse, integrate and implement international student teaching programs if this country is to develop global citizens who support cultural and global diversity. Will the graduates be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of citizens in the twenty-first century? Will they have the required skills and sensitivity as well as the respect for human dignity that is likely to improve current and future conditions? These are the fundamental questions that are faced by educators who prepare future teachers (Kirkwood, 2001). Providing overseas student teaching experience is the key ingredient if the United States wants its future teachers to be culturally and globally literate to meet the challenges of this new age.

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