

Understanding the Impact of International Travel on Pre-Service Teachers

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Introduction

When studying abroad, students can experience a shift in both their professional and individual mindsets. For pre-service teachers, this shift is especially important as they can be more equipped to address diversity within their own classrooms (Alfaro & Quezda, 2010; Constantiou, 2015; Cushner, 2007; Cwick & Benton, 2009; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Egeland, 2016; Jiang et al., 2010; Keengwe, 2010; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007). The goal of this study is to discern how both international travel and education experiences can change the pre-service teacher's cultural knowledge and their personal and professional identity.

Two questions will be guiding our study:

What change, if any, occurred to teacher education students' personal and professional identity after participating in an international travel and international education experience?

What change, if any, occurred to teacher education students' cultural understanding after participating in an international travel and international education experience?

Methods

Participants:

The participants of this study are students that are currently enrolled in the College of Education and SRU and they are participating in an international teaching experience such as a spring break trip, international student teaching, or any other international program facilitated by a faculty member from the College of Education.

Procedures:

Before their trips, a series of meetings with the students will take place to discuss important information regarding the trip such as what to pack, trip events, and general information about the country. Students will then be asked to answer the Pre-Trip Survey:

1. Describe your preconceptions of []'s culture.
2. What are your expectations about their schools?
3. What do you hope to gain from being in the country?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share about the trip/country?

While on the trip, students must journal their experiences at least three times a week, and supplemental questions will be provided should the students need any ideas. In these journals, students are encouraged to discuss their weekly encounters with teaching, any notable developments, anything they found surprising, for example. After the completion of the trip, a meeting will take place where students will answer the Post-Trip Survey:

1. How did your experiences support or contradict your preconceptions of []'s culture?
2. How did your experiences support or contradict your expectations of their schools?
3. What did you gain from this experience?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

Analysis:

Once the data has been analyzed, brief summaries of the results and data will be sent to each participant by the principal investigator. Participants will be given the choice to meet with one of the faculty researchers to discuss their results as viewed within the City as Text © and Constantiou (2015) frameworks. We will use the procedures for qualitative content analysis described by Schreier (2012) to apply the theoretical framework developed by Constantiou (2015) and the City as Text © model (Braid & Long, 2000) to the data. We will use the NVivo 12 data analysis software to analyze the data in the following order: (1) decontextualize, (2) recontextualize, (3) categorize, and (4) compile.

India Experience

This year, student teachers have been working with a pre-school in India over Zoom. Over a three-week program in each semester, a group of student teachers observed the teachers in the meeting and then took turns teaching the students each week. They are able to experience different aspects of the culture in India and adapt lessons to be taught over Zoom; the students chronicled their experiences in their journals.

"The children truly have such a personality that is shown even through zoom. I feel connected with these children even through zoom, which I thought would be hard to form bonds virtually." – Student teacher

"I learned so much about what it is like teaching to students who have grown up in a different country. I learned about how to teach virtually and to make meaningful connections with students." – Student teacher

Results

Due to the unprecedented events of the past year, international abroad trips have been cancelled from the pandemic. For this reason, we have been unable to gather results for this study. Following the completion of the India program, we will begin to analyze their journals entries and gather what they have gained from the experience.

Furthermore, student teaching trips are being planned for Ireland for the Fall 2021 and for Spain in the Spring of 2022. More data will be collected during these programs to come.

Discussion

Data from this study has the potential to confirm and/or elaborate on the existing body research regarding the importance of connecting diversity experiences and teacher preparation. Results could support the need to increase programming and funding for international education experiences, thus providing the opportunity for more students, especially those from other socio-economic backgrounds, to gain these experiences.

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