



Impact of short-term study abroad program: Inservice teachers' development of intercultural competence and pedagogical beliefs

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Intercultural experiences do not guarantee growth in intercultural competence.
- Reflection should start during the pre-departure program.
- Foreign language learning contributes to teachers' growth.
- Intentional and meaningful collaboration within the group is critical.
- Assessment of teacher study abroad should include the impact on teaching beliefs.

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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive study abroad program is one of the most effective ways to prepare multicultural and global teachers. However, in teacher education, most of the study abroad programs are designed for preservice teachers. In this study, we detailed the design of a short-term study abroad program for inservice teachers and reported on the impact of the program not only on teachers' intercultural competence development, but also their teaching beliefs and practices. Discussions and implications were provided for educators designing study abroad programs for teachers.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student population in U.S. K-12 settings. More than ever, teachers are challenged to create culturally responsive learning environments to meet the needs of CLD learners, and leverage their funds of knowledge in classroom instruction (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Nieto, 2010). In addition, teachers are challenged to prepare all students with intercultural competence so that they can effectively communicate and collaborate with those from various cultural backgrounds (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; Longview Foundation, 2008).

International cultural immersion experiences are considered one of the most effective means to prepare multicultural and global

teachers (Cushner, 2007; Hadis, 2005; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). While more and more teacher education programs integrate overseas field experience opportunities, most are designed for preservice teachers (e.g., Cushner & Chang, 2015; Cushner, 2007; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Mahon, 2007; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009). Studies regarding programs designed specifically for practicing teachers are very limited (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Gleeson & Tait, 2012). Thus, understanding meaningful and effective design of study abroad programs for inservice teachers and ways to assess the impact of such programs can provide insights as teacher educators expand intercultural exchange opportunities to include practicing teachers.

In this study, we reviewed relevant literature regarding the design and assessment of study abroad programs and detailed the design of a short-term study abroad program sponsored by the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (GPA) Program involving K-12 teachers from various disciplinary areas. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, findings regarding the impact of the program on teachers' growth were discussed. Discussions and

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implications were offered for educators interested in exploring the design and assessment of study abroad programs for teachers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Design of study abroad programs for teachers

The international experience for teachers may take on many different formats. Depending on the length of the program, it may be short-term (2–8 weeks) or long-term (semester or year long). Due to the licensure requirements of preservice teacher education and the lack of flexibility in inservice teachers' working schedules, short-term programs are far more common for teachers (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Based on the review of recent empirical studies examining the quality and impact of short-term study abroad programs for teachers, it was noted that researchers highlighted five core elements to consider. These elements include: 1) cultural immersion experiences; 2) teaching opportunities; 3) language learning; 4) reflection; and 5) collaboration.

The first two elements are identified as the core elements of study abroad programs for teachers. Cultural immersion experiences may include cultural site visits, homestay, interaction with people in host countries, and some selected visits in educational settings. Researchers reported that these experiences enhanced teachers' appreciation for diversity (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008), supported development of global mindset (Cushner, 2007), and prepared teachers to become more resourceful and innovative in their instruction (Fitzsimmons & Mackenzie, 2006; Hill, Thomas, & Cote, 1997; Zhao et al., 2009). Teaching opportunities are more challenging to arrange due to differences in curriculum and language. The teaching practicum is typically arranged in settings where the teacher and students can use a common language (in most cases, in English). For example, American preservice teachers may participate in short-term study abroad programs with teaching opportunities in England (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009). It is very rare for content area teachers to have the opportunity to teach content in a K-12 classroom setting where the instructional language is a foreign language for the local students.

Language learning is not an essential element for all teacher study abroad programs. It is emphasized more in programs involving foreign language teachers (e.g., Wernicke, 2010) or English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers (e.g., Trent, 2011). In these programs, teacher candidates have foreign language training in their home country and are expected to enhance their language proficiency through overseas immersion. In programs not specifically designed for foreign language development, teachers experience language differences through cultural immersion. Zhao et al. (2009), for example, described a four-week study abroad program involving American teachers teaching English to Chinese students. Even though English was used as the instructional language and there were no specific Chinese language learning requirements for teacher participants, participants developed empathy toward second-language learners through being immersed in a foreign language environment.

Reflection is a key component in the design of study abroad programs. As Merryfield (2000) pointed out "[international] experiences alone do not make a person a multicultural or global educator" (p.440). Most of the study abroad programs for teachers include reflective journals as a requirement. In these reflections, teachers record their cross-cultural encounters and reflect on their understanding of both their home culture and the culture in the host country (Tang & Choi, 2004; Willard-Holt, 2001). Many teachers document the "disorientation, confusion, and discomfort" they experience (Merryfield, 2000, p. 439). Trilokekar and Kukar

(2011) focused on teacher participants' reflections on disorientation experiences and highlighted teachers' experiences with racial dynamics, perceptions of "outsider" status, engagement in risk-taking, and recognition of privilege and global power relations. The authors called for educators "to recognize the pedagogical value of each individual's experience as the basis for learning" when designing study abroad programs for teachers (p.1149).

Finally, collaboration is an implicit element in all study abroad programs. Collaborations between the teacher education program in the home institution and the overseas school are essential when designing teacher study abroad program. Teacher participants benefit from direct interactions and collaborations with teachers in the host countries through school visits or teaching opportunities. In addition, teacher participants were also found to have more opportunities to collaborate within the group through study abroad programs (Tomaš, Farrelly, & Haslam, 2008).

In our study, we integrated all 5 elements in the design of the study abroad program for inservice teachers teaching different grade levels and content areas. While the design of cultural immersion activities is similar to other programs, we integrated unique features into the other four elements. Specifically, we engaged teacher participants in co-planning and co-teaching in the content area; learning the Chinese language through a pre-departure course and in-country seminars; reflecting on both their intercultural competency development and their teaching beliefs in a pre and post manner; and collaborating with their peers from the U.S. and in China.

2.2. Assessment of study abroad programs for teachers

Regardless of the design of the study abroad programs for teachers, the assessment of almost all programs focuses on participants' growth in two areas: intercultural competence and academic competence (Anderson & Lawton, 2011; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). While intercultural competence applies across disciplinary areas, academic competence is specific to the discipline of study. For teachers, this competence involves their dispositions, knowledge, and skills regarding teaching. For both preservice and inservice teachers, academic competence is typically assessed in an ongoing manner through activities and measures such as coursework or professional development, lesson planning and teaching performance, teacher reflections, and student outcomes.

2.2.1. Assessment of intercultural competence

In a recent article regarding the involvement of the intercultural competence research field, Mitchell Hammer (2015) contrasted the traditional Cognitive/Affective/Behavioral (CAB) paradigm with the developmental paradigm. According to Hammer (2015), while research studies within the CAB paradigm focus on exploring various personal characteristic factors that comprise cultural competence, studies within the developmental paradigm emphasize how individuals experience cultural differences. Intercultural competence is viewed "as a function of the extent and quality of the individual's engagement with cultural difference" under the developmental paradigm (p.13). To explore teachers' negotiations of cultural differences through their intercultural experiences in China, we adopted the developmental paradigm in selecting and designing assessment for the program measuring participants' development beyond the CAB growth.

Specifically, Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was employed to measure the intercultural competence development of participating teachers. DMIS articulates a continuum with a monocultural mindset on one end and an intercultural mindset on the other. The developmental stages include: *Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance,*

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