

Chapter 23

Beyond Accommodations: Study Abroad in Brazil, Teacher Preparation, and Global Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities have increasingly worked to provide an international curriculum acknowledging that students must be prepared to deal with international issues in a globalized world. Study abroad programs provide students with opportunities to learn about cultural and linguistic systems outside the United States (US). While scholarship on learning outcomes associated with study abroad programs is emerging, inquiry into offerings that employ critical disability studies perspectives acknowledge power and intersectionality is absent. The inclusion of these frameworks provide opportunities to disrupt traditional, hegemonic, and ethnocentric understandings of knowledge and work to reflect the increasingly diverse demographics of college students. By examining the experiences of students on a short-term program to Brazil, the authors illustrate how disability studies, inclusive education, culturally relevant pedagogy and intersectionality address access, participation and learning outcomes to and about historically underrepresented groups.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter promotes intersectional teaching and learning strategies in the creation of postsecondary short-term study abroad programs for preservice teachers. Drawing from examples of a program visit to Brazil, the instructors disrupted hegemonic claims of knowledge and fostered cross-cultural ways of teaching and learning. Employing the principles of critical disability studies, ‘Universal Design for Learning’ (UDL) and democratic education, *three* main themes guided the program structure: (1) culturally relevant visits; (2) inclusive education; and (3) intersectionality. This work attempted to dis-

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mantle traditional, ethnocentric formats for study abroad programs and foster inclusive and reciprocal opportunities for the shared creation of knowledge. The authors draw from scholarship in the field of disability studies, culturally responsive teaching methods, and comparative education to inform their research and program design.

This work intended to challenge traditional admission practices for study abroad, account for diverse learners, engage in the diversification of participation in postsecondary curricular and co-curricular offerings and expose the preferences for able-bodied norms that are inherent in study abroad program formats. The inclusion of diverse participants, hosts, and site visits—while also accounting for ability diversity in the form of physical, social-emotional, sensory and language differences—enriched the learning and cross-cultural dialogues for participants. This work is especially important for emerging and future educators who are often not provided with opportunities to study abroad given their course sequences, field placements and student teaching schedules as examples.

Background

Postsecondary institutions have been working to provide an international curriculum and experience for students (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). Higher Education (HE) scholars, faculty and administrators contend that students must be prepared to deal with international issues as escalating globalization brings cultures and societies closer and gain exposure to different cultural contexts in an effort to adapt to changing economic systems, politics and educational systems (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001; Kets de Vries, 1994). Study abroad has been one such tool available to broaden the postsecondary curriculum and expose students to transnational topics, cultural practices, knowledge systems and opportunities for language acquisition.

Students who earn credit for studying abroad often participate in programs that are approximately eight weeks or less duration, which leaves educators with little evidence about what the benefits of short-term programs may be. A 2003 study of 2,300 students conducted by the University of Delaware's Center for International Studies—one of the Top 20 research HE Institutions (HEIs) in the US to send students abroad—found that students who studied abroad 'were generally more cognizant than their peers at home of varying national and cultural perspectives... and demonstrated enhanced learning about tasks associated with international travel' (p. 170).

These findings indicated that approximately one third of the students who studied abroad learned to view the US differently and acknowledged their position of privilege in the world. This shift in perspective can be referred to as 'subjective culture learning' meaning that assumptions, values and patterns of thinking and behaving are learned, reflected upon and destabilized by interacting with diverse groups of people. In this practice, Kim (1988) contended that students 'grow beyond the psychological parameters of the original culture in spite of, or rather because of, the adversarial nature of the cross-cultural adaptation process' (p. 144).

While colleges and universities work to increase their institutional profiles with study abroad programs, this work is more frequently aligned with broader neoliberal reforms within universities that focus on the student as consumer rather than the academic (Bolen, 2001). Postsecondary institutions have designed programs that can be completed in the shortest amount of time for the least amount of money. The commercial discourse about abroad experiences and different countries used the language of discovery, and it glorified or subverted countries' backgrounds in frequently destructive histories

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