

Chapter 15

Post Study Abroad: To Which Reality Should the Teacher Candidates Return?

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ABSTRACT

Putative in the fields of psychology, sociology, education, and neuroscience is that some degree of learning takes place in significantly new situations. Ideally, study abroad will provide a multitude of new experiences for teacher candidates to relish, revel in, relate to, and recount. Thus during the study abroad experience, emotional, psychological, and cognitive intelligences of teacher candidates will transform. Prior to departure, a teacher candidate will have intentionally or unintentionally created a version of reality in their lives. Trudging uphill through the mucky streets of a small Ugandan village between tiny homes made of thatch and mire, past this morning's decapitated steer head, and amongst friendly, dirty, children playing with machetes can quickly change a person's version of reality. Practical examples of response and succor for balancing "versions of reality" will be bestowed. Finally, lessons learned to best attempt to prime teacher candidates for potentially perplexing circumstances will be imparted.

INTRODUCTION

Simply put, university students who study abroad, return home changed. Very quickly students learn that there are versions of reality in this world. What college students once knew as "common" and "everyday" can suddenly become "rare" and "extravagant". For example, hot, clean, running water is a luxury for millions of people across the globe. An American student who suddenly finds himself or herself washing up with cold, dirty water or a package of baby wipes for eleven days in the heat of Africa can find a new version of reality that he or she had never once experienced. Suddenly, the idea of bathing has changed to that student.

To what reality do they return? After a long airplane ride, abruptly the student is home in America sprinting to turn off water faucets that someone has left running for a few seconds, pouring unused

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dinner table water into plants and pet dishes instead of down the sink and, limiting his or her own showers to a few minutes. Yet before the African study abroad, she or he took 45-minute hot showers. The aforementioned example is merely one of hundreds of effects for students who study abroad. While that result may or may not be long term, it then has an influence on those that reside and communicate with the student who studied abroad. The impact of study abroad can range from simplistic to life changing.

Study abroad has a powerful, transformative effect in either a positive or negative manner. The consequences of study abroad can also be intended or unintended. The specific sub-group of university students in the focus of this chapter: “teacher candidates”, also known as “pre-service teachers”, have experienced phenomenal rewards for themselves personally, their future students, and their teaching practice in general. These benefits come from careful planning and orchestration to minimize the negative unintended consequences and improve the probability of intended positive consequences.

To provide a comprehensive picture of study abroad for teacher candidates and the impact it may provide for them, this chapter will begin broadly with a brief history and statistical data and then progress to the specifics of positive and negative, intended and unintended consequences of these experiences.

Brief History of Study Abroad in America

The concept of university study abroad is nearing its centennial. The University of Delaware is credited with giving rise to the first American study abroad program at an institution of higher education in 1923 (Institute for Global Studies, 2013). Since that time colleges and universities across the nation realized the value of the study abroad experience and many offer such opportunities in most all majors. All faculty members who have delivered successful study abroad courses are surely indebted to the pioneering spirit of Raymond W. Kirkbride, the professor who instituted the first study abroad to France.

United States Teacher Preparation Program Statistics

According to the United States Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs (2014), in the 2012-2013 academic year there were 2,163 American institutions of higher education delivering a total of 25,000 teacher preparation programs with 630,808 pre-service teachers enrolled. In 2013, 204,172 completed their programs of study. According to the Institute of International Education (2014), approximately 4% of those enrolled as education majors studied abroad for credit. In the 2012-2013 academic year, a total of 289,408 American college students studied abroad for credit. Seventy percent of the students completed short-term study abroad experiences and 90% of the students were undergraduates (U.S. Department of Education, Network of Education Information, 2014). The grand total of US college students who studied abroad has risen incrementally over the decades and the sum in 2012-2013 was an increase of 2% from the previous year. (Institute of International Education, 2014). The percentage of education majors who studied abroad (4%) was meager compared to the more than 20% of students majoring in each of the fields of business and management, science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and the social sciences that studied abroad (Institute of International Education, 2014).

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