

Chapter 16

The Benefits and Challenges of Study Abroad in Teacher Education in a Neoliberal Context

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors review literature--primarily within the field of teacher education--and present their own data about the benefits and challenges of study abroad. Drawing from the literature and data collected over eleven years of Purdue University's Honduras Study Abroad, the authors pragmatically doubt the often unquestioned benefits or transformative nature of study abroad programs. The authors argue that while international cross-cultural experiences can result in increased multicultural awareness, it is important that study abroad participants are encouraged to critically examine the reasons they are going abroad, the neoliberal context in which they study abroad, and the manner in which they process their assumptions and experiences in the host country in relation to their own identity. The authors offer suggestions for improvement for those wanting to integrate more intentional reflection and critical curriculum.

Professional folklore would have us believe that the benefits of study abroad are evident to all, and they are not. (Kinger, 2010, p. 225)

Are we as educators guilty of simply selling illusions? Illusions that we ourselves have bought into because we want to believe that international education is inherently positive and transformative and a sure path to developing what is touted and marketed as international competence? (Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2014, p. 104)

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to pragmatically doubt (Doll, 1993) the benefits of study abroad within international teacher education. When contemplating the benefits and challenges of study abroad, it is worthwhile to attend to Doll's (1993) contention that "intellectual vision is predicated not on positivistic certainty but on pragmatic doubt, the doubt that comes from any decision based not on metanarrative themes but on human experience and local history" (p. 61). Additionally, we will explore the ideological challenges of study abroad through a postglobal lens, which is a postcolonial perspective with a focus on the influence of neoliberal ideology as experienced through globalization. As a challenge to the dominant ideology of neoliberalism, we propose a focus on human experience and local histories when examining preservice teachers' international cross-cultural experiences.

A brief analysis of recent study abroad literature in teacher education will be discussed through the strengths and problems highlighted in the literature. Based on this review of study abroad literature, we assert that a postglobal approach to study abroad in teacher education will foster critical understandings of what it means for a preservice teacher to travel geographically and ideologically, with implications for existence in relatively new forms of global interconnection. How preservice teachers make meaning from international cross-cultural experiences and the implications for international teacher education are important to understand amidst the unquestioned promotion of study abroad among U.S. universities and colleges. Such an approach requires an understanding of how historical oppressions shape contemporary social relations. This critical perspective emerged through an investigation of teacher education study abroad literature and through data collected about the experiences of preservice teacher participants of a study abroad program to Honduras, which one of the authors (JoAnn Phillion) founded in 2003 and continues to lead annually.

POSTGLOBAL FRAMEWORK

We employ a postglobal framework in order to recognize the colonial foundations of global social relations and the project of formal education (Willinsky, 1998). By postglobal, we mean a resistance to neoliberal ideological and economic globalization, and explorations of alternative forms of existence outside the purview of the hegemonic desires of neoliberal globalization. We suggest that a postglobal understanding for teacher education is necessary in order to recognize and imagine alternatives to globalization's epistemological colonization within education. The purpose of a postglobal approach to preservice teachers' international cross-cultural experiences is to provide opportunities for engagement with "border thinking" (Mignolo, 2000), by which we mean thinking that engages the difference between epistemological stances based in various locales and regions in the global South and the global North. Through a postglobal perspective, globalization is challenged by alternative knowledges that fall inside and outside the epistemological boundaries of the colonial/modern world system (Mignolo, 2000). A postglobal perspective provides opportunities for preservice teachers to develop critical thinking skills through the examination of the influence of neoliberal globalization on education (López, 2007).

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