INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCES: INSTRUCTOR LEARNING AND INSIGHTS FOR LEADING FACULTY-LED PROGRAMS ABROAD

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ABSTRACT: The need to develop international cross-cultural perspectives has led many educators to create study abroad programs for their learners. One way to support this learning in adult higher education is to offer education abroad programs – often short-term international field experiences led by faculty for adult students. In the current study, we investigated experiences of adult education/HRD faculty who have experience teaching in such programs; additionally, we explored what and how they have learned in order to do so. Through the amalgamated conceptual framework of learning readiness, communities of practice, and motivational learning theory, we offer preliminary analyses of interviews conducted with five tenured/tenure-track faculty members about their motivations and professional development in advance of leading these programs.

Keywords: study abroad, cross-cultural perspective, short-term international field experiences

Global intersections of societies, economies, politics, and workplaces have been developing for quite some time, and higher education has followed suit. Universities are globalizing through engaging in international research endeavors, welcoming international scholars and students to work and learn on their campuses, internationalizing the curriculum, and providing study abroad programs and international field experiences (Coryell, et al., 2012). Likewise, adult education and human resource development (HRD) faculty around the United States are infusing global perspectives in their curricula as well as through study abroad opportunities. Study abroad engagements in adult education related graduate programs are often led onsite by faculty and of short-term duration to accommodate nontraditional students/working adults who cannot afford the time and costs associated with longer study abroad programs (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009; Coryell, 2011).

Faculty who teach in international field-based programs participate within a variety of communities and contexts that may (or may not) help prepare them to teach their students while embedded in another culture and country (Coryell, 2013). We, the researchers, have been studying international cross-cultural adult and higher education and began to wonder about programs offered by university adult education and HRD faculty. Specifically, we sought to understand why and how instructors learn to develop and teach effectively in global educational environments. The purpose of the current research, therefore, was to investigate motivations, preparations, and learning experiences, activities, and outcomes in which faculty in our field engage when preparing for and

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teaching in international settings. We asked, *"What are the motivations adult education and HRD faculty have to teach students abroad?"* and *"How and with whom have they learned about and prepared to teach students abroad?"* We assert the benefit of learning about these professors' experiences in adult study abroad programs will assist our field in understanding linkages between international field experiences and faculty development. Further, our findings and subsequent discussions may assist the larger community of international education scholars and practitioners to link adult learning theory with international, cross-cultural educational approaches. In the following sections we offer a brief overview of research literature and our theoretical framework, our methodological choices, and our preliminary findings. We provide a brief discussion of the findings and implications of our study.

Conceptual Framework

Their readiness to learn may be critical to faculty members' engaging in leading study abroad programs. Pratt and Associates (1988) ratified adults generally become ready to learn when their life situations create a need to know; further, the authors recognized most learning experiences are highly situational, and a learner may exhibit different behaviors in different situations. In his work, Pratt and Associates identified two critical core dimensions of adult learning: *direction and support,* acknowledging learners may have fundamentally different needs in the learning process. Regardless of adults' competency or confidence, learning is *situational*, and a plan for direction and support is important (Knowles et al., 2020).

Our framework included tenets from corresponding theories: situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), communities of practice (CoPs) (Wenger, 1999), and motivation theory as explicated by Legault (2016). Situated learning helps us to understand people's values, beliefs, actions, resources, and contexts influence their interactions, co-constructed learning, and development within communities of practice. CoPs are a group of individuals who share interests and engage in collective learning endeavors in a common domain (shared identity of interest), with a community (people who interact through activities and dialogue to share information and learn from each other), involving communal practices (the actions, behaviors, values, resources, tools, narratives, and solutions shared within the community) (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). We acknowledge the social nature of learning, as well as the interdependency adults have in community to co-construct knowledge and to reflect and individualize learning for growth and development. Importantly, in this research 'learners' are the adult education/HRD faculty who develop and teach in adult study abroad programs.

Finally, common theories of learning motivation include extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Gopalan et al., 2017; Legault, 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Extrinsic motivation refers to factors external to the person, such as reward or pay (or tenure and promotion), social or professional recognition, and praise. Intrinsic motivation is a type of motivation that occurs within the individual. Personal gratification and a feeling of accomplishment are examples of intrinsic motivations.

Brief Literature Review

Research literature strongly supports the positive impact study abroad experiences have on students' lives. For example, the influence of study abroad participation on learners' ability to acquire 21st century professional skills is well supported (Dresen et al., 2019; DuVivier & Patitu, 2017; Liwiński, 2019; Moldenhauer et al., 2021; Sisavath, 2021). Among the advantages to students, educative student study abroad participation offers competitive professional advantages and—during economically challenging times—employers seek employees with competitive enhancing characteristics (Liwiński, 2019). To prepare students for the workforce, higher education institutions are engaging in internationalization strategies to help students develop global competencies that align with new professional requirements and heightened citizenship expectations (Agnew & Kahn, 2014; Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018). Additionally, one of the central strategies for internationalization in higher education is developing ways of broadening the academic experiences of students *and* academic staff (Knight, 2004; Stier, 2004). While there is a large body of literature championing the student experience, there is sparse literature supporting professional preparation of the faculty who develop and lead study abroad programs; there is even less research about the experiences of faculty leading adult students in study abroad programs.

While a general acknowledgment of the importance of faculty professional development is implied across the literature, very little exists detailing what it should encompass in preparation for leading international field experiences (Gözpinar, 2018; Tovar & Misischia, 2020). Many articles in existing literature describe the pitfalls of traveling with (undergraduate) students, highlight the importance of reflection throughout the program, and those creating checklists for pre-departure preparation; however, little details the type of professional development needed when working with adult students (graduate and doctoral) in educative study abroad programs. Alternatively, a uniquely dystopian perspective emerged in an article by Madden et al. (2019) who wrote from a Jungian shadow archetype perspective and contended the institution does not adequately prepare faculty to manage potential shadow risks (legal, relational, and professional) and shadow costs (temporal, financial, and physiological) when participating in study abroad programs. Madden et al. (2019) conclude by saying, "to mitigate reputational risk, the strongest advice from respondents was to get involved with study abroad only after tenure, and lastly, they recommend that faculty 'don't recreate the wheel'" (pp. 194-195).

Perhaps one explanation for the lack of research centering on professional development of faculty leading adult students in study abroad programs relates to the low number of graduate and doctoral students accessing and participating in study abroad programs. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2021), 162,633 students studied abroad in 2019/2020 (nearly a 50% decrease from the prior year due in part to the COVID-19 global pandemic). As well, while IIE reported graduate students participating in study abroad programs are an important and growing area of international education (Sanger & Mason, 2019), less than 10% of those who participated in study abroad programs in 2019/2020 were graduate students. This small subset of graduate students

may garner less attention in research and, therefore, may be a contributing factor to the lack of literature detailing professional development of adult educators working with adult students in study abroad programs. Notably, in a review of literature Voges (2015) asked about methodological shortcomings that could be identified "in assessing influences on study abroad participation for adult and higher education learners in the last 20 years of research, and what tentative solutions can be offered to encourage study abroad participation by adult and higher education learners in the US and globally?" (p. 2). Perhaps answers to Voges' questions lie partly in data collection of this study and in creating rich faculty development programs designed to engage adult student participation; such programs should recognize that faculty must be prepared to intervene in the meaningful construction of curriculum pre-departure (internationalization at home), during the experience (in-country learning), and after learners have returned home (reflection) (Coryell, 2013).

Methodology

We employed an interpretive phenomenological method (van Manen, 2014) in this study. This approach helps us explain, understand, and interpret participants' experiences. After securing IRB approval and sending out recruitment emails to the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, our initial participant pool consisted of five professors of adult education and human resource development. Inclusion criteria required participants to be associated with an adult education, adult and higher education, workforce education, human resource development, or closely related university graduate program and to have conducted/taught in an international field experience/study abroad program at least once. Interviewees were three women and two men. All were tenured or tenure-track; two of the participants were full professors, two were associate professors, and one was an assistant professor at the time of the interviews. The five were working in diverse universities comprising research-intensive academies inclusive of minority-serving institutions (one was a historically Black college/university) and land-grant universities.

A semi-structured protocol guided the interviews, which were conducted and recorded virtually using web-conferencing software. Interviews lasted on average about 80 minutes each and were transcribed for coding. Researchers watched and rewatched each interview, then read and reread the transcriptions to get an overall sense of the data and to begin identifying sensitizing concepts, "those background ideas that…offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259) and preliminary codes. Subsequently, constant-comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and thematic qualitative analyses (Saldaña, 2009) were used to analyze the data within each interview and across the entire data set.

Findings

Faculty in this study taught in courses that were short-term (generally 1 to 3 weeks) in locations including Thailand, Russia, Vietnam, Netherlands, France, and Mexico. Two of the participants had taught their program once, two participants had taught in two or three programs, and one participant had taught in nine programs in multiple countries. Here we address preliminary findings for each research question.

What Are the Motivations Adult Education and HRD Faculty Have to Teach Students Abroad?

Unique International, Cross-Cultural Student Learning Opportunities

Motivations to teach students abroad varied but related to a desire to offer learners opportunities for participation with cultural communities and experiences in comparative and authentic ways that engaged real-world issues, problems, and projects in adult education and HRD. Program goals included opportunities to investigate immigration and gender issues in Mexico, to develop authentic language learning activities for immigrants in the Netherlands, and to compare nuanced understandings of leadership across organizations and educative experiences in Thailand. Three professors developed international experiences so students could learn about and interact with cultures and communities that were different, yet similar, to their own. These included students of color studying Black existentialism and sense of Blackness in Paris; heritage, culture, societal issues, and Spanish language in Mexico for learners from United States–Mexico border state communities; and water quality testing and language learning exchange between indigenous Russians and Native Americans.

All participants acknowledged many of their adult students had never travelled abroad prior to the course, so offering these learning experiences may be the first—perhaps only—opportunity for students to gain "experience of being in an international context," "a quite expansive approach to internationalizing experiences," and to "share global mindsets" about their academic discipline. Importantly, participants realized the chance to broaden perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and reflect about oneself and one's own culture through the lens of living and learning abroad. One participant noted "there's such a narrative in this country (U.S.) about what it (immigration in Mexico) is and what it isn't that [the study abroad program] was basically myth busting. And so, we wanted to see how it was from [the Mexican] perspective." Another offered, "one of the neatest experiences the students had was with local people; they were coming up to them and saying, 'You look like another member of my family'…just you know by laying eyes on each other was a really cool thing."

Personal and Professional Motivations

Additionally, study participants had personal and professional motivations to develop and teach in these programs. With differing life and work trajectories, three of the five participants had previously lived, worked, or travelled to their programs' foreign locations. The experiences they offered students were an extension of their personal motivations to be in those places, too, in part because of relationships they had built with people and organizations abroad. One participant shared, "I love Thailand, and I've missed Thailand. I have so many friends and contacts there…I want to go back all the time!" Another offered, "I had been going [to Vietnam] several times to do faculty development workshops around teaching and learning…we had all kinds of connections all across the country…we created out of that an opportunity." A third explained Mexico and an organization with which she had worked previously, "fit with us

perfectly…there's a heritage with that institute with adult education." Other participants explained offering study abroad for students came from a history of travel experiences, including previous international work histories, that had sparked "curiosity" and a need to continue "looking at ourselves and our assumptions [at] a deeper level."

Finally, all participants highlighted professional motivations for engaging in this work. Motivations included opportunities to conduct research and explore adult learning in new ways. One interviewee suggested programs "gave us a chance to talk about research and about *not knowing*…how research isn't putting down what you already know but going somewhere that you don't know," while another offered, "I was being driven by this deep desire to understand this very interesting way of learning, and what could possibly result from that sort of experience." The opportunity to help increase awareness of international education and globalize the campus were also identified as motivations. Respondents offered, "there was a chance to help globalize my campus…[and] our faculty;" and create a "formal attempt" to understand and lead international graduate learning experiences and outcomes. One participant indicated this work was meaningful because it can give "exposure on campus…from a tenure and promotion standpoint." Finally, one participant acknowledged, "that year had been a rough year for me personally. I needed to reconnect with this thing called *adult education* this thing called just *being a faculty member*. I felt like I needed that more than I realized." Participants recalled the excitement of fresh perspective-taking on culture, on curriculum, and on adult education and HRD through these programs.

How and with Whom Have They Learned About and Prepared to Teach Students Abroad?

Formal Training and Previous Workplace Learning

Invariably, participants explained they learned how to teach abroad through "a confluence of things." Participants called upon various formal training and previous work experiences, earlier travel in the foreign locale, and—importantly—mentorships, relationships, and collaborations. One participant attended training for faculty-led study abroad through the university and from a third-party provider of education abroad services. Others mentioned university programs and workplace learning that included attending undergraduate and Master's programs in international training, teaching English as a foreign language, and working in university international offices abroad. Four of the five participants, however, acknowledged they did not "pursue any special formal training" specifically for teaching abroad.

Previous In-Country Experience

Three of the five participants believed their in-country experiences prior to leaving for the study abroad program were helpful in their preparations for teaching abroad. These foreign trips included cross-cultural learning from personal or professional travel years before the study abroad program or pre-program trips to set up program logistics and work with colleagues/partners. Participants stressed the importance of having a "good

relationship" with in-country collaborators and "to know the place…to have already been everywhere…so that you're grounded when you go…[and] how to coordinate with organizations and site visits."

Mentors, Co-Instructors, Partners

Importantly, across the data set the most prevalent way the participants discussed having learned about and prepared to teach abroad was by working with mentors, co-instructors, or in-country partners. Mentors were faculty members at their institutions experienced with faculty-led study abroad and who shared knowledge of the importance of "[how] to design the program," "student recruitment," "planning organization," "building the syllabus," "finding course materials…embedded in the cultural context," and ultimately "walking me through everything, and like here's the pitfalls." Interviewees were clear that co-instructors were also essential. Statements illustrating this point include, "You really do need a partner…to sort of bounce things off from," and "You always want to have a partner, just in case something goes wrong…you want to have another person there…you know you're dealing with 10 to 15 people on their trip, so you don't want it all to be relying on one person."

Additional Insights on Course and Learning Design

We found participants did not generally design in-country learning experiences with a strict structure. While each had course objectives and assigned learning resources, specifics of learning activities, interactions, projects, and other functions while abroad were often "natural and just sort of spontaneous," not always "intentional," and "a little bit like ad hoc sometimes." Having flexibility regarding learning while in the foreign setting was stressed as essential for "authentic," cross-cultural educative experiences.

Discussion and Implications

In linking with our conceptual framework, the findings of this study point to participants' readiness to engage in new learning opportunities for both themselves and their adult learners through short-term study abroad experiences. Their motivations to do so were primarily intrinsic, connected to relationship, experiences, and prior learning about a foreign context, and were deeply embedded in the desire to offer adult students international learning experiences for their professional and personal growth.

Findings also help us characterize the domain, community, and practice in teaching and learning experiences. The *domain* is seen as a shared interest (faculty and adult learners) in student and personal learning and experience with international cultures. We also ascertained participants' personal interests differed yet weighed-in significantly with motivations to engage in this learning (Pratt & Associates, 1998) and teaching and the choices of location and content/curricular aspects of programs they developed. The *communities* with which our participants interacted and learned comprised mentors from participants' doctoral programs, other more senior and experienced university co-workers (Knight, 2004; Stier, 2004), and local, faculty, and organizational partners in the foreign

setting. Essential to these communities were *practices* and *valuing* of relationship building, developing global perspectives, and collaboration and co-construction of learning and teaching as a faculty member.

The CoPs in which our interviewees participated were essential to their own professional development for teaching in these programs. What we found missing, though, was a link to the larger community of United States-based adult education/HRD professors who were also doing this work. What might we learn together as a field, and perhaps within the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, with a more intentional CoP of adult education study abroad faculty practitioners?

The findings also provide insights into how the discipline—and our universities—might assist in professional development of future adult education/HRD faculty who are motivated to develop a study abroad program for learners. Participants chose to engage their energy and expertise to lead these international experiences with varying levels of administrative and faculty support and professional development. Future support for others interested in designing and teaching adult study abroad programs should include informal and nonformal learning opportunities, networking to learn from other CoP members about developing these programs, planning curricula and learning activities within the foreign city as a classroom (Coryell, 2011), establishing and building relationships with foreign colleagues and organizations, and avoiding personal, professional, and legal risks along the way (Madden et al., 2019). Opportunities to co-teach in cross-institutional collaborations may additionally evolve from this CoP.

The study's limitations certainly include the small number of participants. Thus, we continue to conduct interviews with additional participants and hope to expand our findings with their perspectives on motivations and preparations and report insights about the personal and instructional learning and changes adult education/HRD faculty have undergone through the experience of teaching in study abroad programs. Ultimately, we hope the investigation will help the field build strong faculty development approaches and support so more international education opportunities will be offered for both faculty and student participants.

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