

From Student Teaching Abroad to Teaching in the U.S. Classroom: Effects of Global Experiences on Local Instructional Practice

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Purpose of Study

The diversity that characterizes our world continues to be reflected in U.S. schools, even as our nation's teachers continue to come overwhelmingly from the racial group category of White. Our nation's schools and personnel remain unprepared to manage, much less master, the challenges, both stark and nuanced, that accompany this relentless historical pattern of diversity. The rise in poverty and general economic disparity between the upper income and lower income groups adds to the complexity of our educational challenge. One method to enhance teacher effectiveness that continues to develop and expand within teacher preparation programs relates to providing prospective teachers student teaching experiences

in international settings to prepare them for the multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual professional contexts in which they will engage as teachers within U.S. schools and classrooms. The general premise of the student teaching abroad experience being that it will provide future teachers with experiences that will enable them to interact effectively and productively with the increasingly diverse student population that comprises U.S. schools (Martines, 2005). It is under-

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stood that teacher preparation programs must provide effective platforms and settings for pre-service teachers to develop, express, and refine the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will, collectively, establish their foundational competence as culturally responsive teachers. Toward this end, the student teaching abroad experience is projected to provide a substantive platform and setting for student teachers to engage in a multifaceted, culturally distinct experience outside the United States to develop, and even transform, their professional and personal perspectives, and related knowledge and skill bases.

We have previously addressed the effects of student teaching abroad experiences (DeVillar, Jiang, & Bryan, 2008; Jiang, Coffey, DeVillar, & Bryan, 2010; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011). The purpose of the current stage of our ongoing research was to determine the influence of former student teachers' student teaching abroad experiences along three dimensions of their teaching practice within U.S. classroom settings: (a) instructional practice, (b) cultural responsiveness toward diverse student populations, and (c) curricular approach. The research was an extension of the researchers' three previous years of on-site and electronically-based investigations regarding the instructional, cultural, and professional development of student teachers in Belize, China, and Mexico (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Demographic Polarity in Schools and Teacher Preparation

The level of knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions that pre-service and practicing teachers have regarding students from cultures different from their own is generally weak and even cause for feelings of professional inadequacy. Thus, knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the area of student cultural diversity are of major importance, particularly as these factors can relate to teachers' effectiveness, or lack thereof, in communicating with and understanding the students they teach (Catalogna, Greene, & Zirkel, 1981; Dee, 2005; Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002; Neal, Mccray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003; Rueda, Au, & Choi, 2004; Sheets, 1996). This research-based principle is particularly relevant as teacher ethnicity will remain predominately White over the coming decades even as student ethnicity will continue its dramatic path of reflecting diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds other than White (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000). Students designated as *minority*, for example, comprised 41%, or 22,500,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b) of the estimated 55 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Additionally, in 2006, 23% (12,650,000) of all students had at least one parent who was foreign-born, and 5%, or 2,275,000, of all students were themselves foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a). Nearly 11 million (20%) of the students spoke a language other than English at home, 7.8 million (71%) of whom spoke Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a).

This demographic polarity, in and of itself, would not be cause for alarm were

it not for our schools' transgenerational inability to successfully meet the academic, social, and cultural needs of students, particularly those from low-income families and urban contexts (DeVillar & Jiang, 2011). Although improvements in particular academic indicators have been made over the past three decades by Hispanic, African American, and other designated minority students, overall a significant academic gap persists (Whitehurst, 2005), and drop-out rates among these groups remain disproportionately high (Fry, 2003).

The Necessity for Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers

Educational researchers have been critical of teacher education programs for insufficiently preparing teachers to work with diverse student populations (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2002, 2010; Merryfield, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999) and have questioned the adequacy of these programs relative to effectively addressing global issues (Jennings, 2006). Professional associations also have realized the importance of preparing teacher candidates to teach students of diverse backgrounds within classroom settings. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), for example, has stipulated Standard 4 (NCATE, 2006) as *Diversity*, which requires, in part, that teacher education programs demonstrate evidence that their teacher candidates have been engaged in experiences with diverse student populations and that they can “apply proficiencies related to diversity” (NCATE, 2008). In response to the need for more competent teachers to effectively work with an increasingly diverse student population, culturally responsive teaching has been developed by a group of scholars, researchers, and practitioners (Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 2010) to provide “hope and guidance to educators who are trying to improve the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social-class groups” (Banks, 2010, p.x). According to Gay (2010),

Culturally responsive pedagogy validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success. It is anchored on four foundational pillars of practice—teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies. (46)

Thus, teachers—as front-line professional educators—must learn to understand and respond effectively to the learning needs of all the students they teach, which includes understanding the relationship of language use, cultural background, and culturally influenced behaviors to learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010) in order to become culturally responsive teachers who provide culturally responsive instruction. First-hand contact in a school setting within a representative culture is a direct way of providing a solid foundation for NCATE's diversity requirement, and

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complements multicultural and related course work within the teacher preparation program completed by students prior to the international student-teacher experience. McAllister and Irvine (2000) assert two fundamental points that guide the current authors' investigation. First, that research remains "inconsistent" and "scant" regarding the "process by which teachers develop a cross-cultural competence that enables them effectively to teach diverse students in their classrooms;" and second, that "teaching training and professional development models do not adequately develop the type of cross-cultural competence...deemed essential for teachers of diverse students" (McAllister & Irvine, 2000, pp. 3-4).

In order for pre-service teachers to learn to teach culturally diverse students, teacher educators and researchers generally agree that they need opportunities to discover their own cultural identities, to experience and learn about other cultural groups, to consider their beliefs about racial and cultural difference, and to examine critically the socio-cultural aspect of learning and teaching (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). Educators have proposed international study abroad teacher education programs as an innovative way to influence pre-service teachers' intercultural development in ways not possible in domestic student teaching experiences (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Merryfield, 1994; Paccione, 2000; Quezada, 2004; Roberts, 2003; Schneider, 2003). Romano and Cushner (2007) suggest that such experiences influence the way prospective teachers teach due, in part, to their understandings about the connection between culture and its effect on teaching and learning.

Research on International Student Teaching Programs

More than 100 universities and colleges in the United States offer student teaching abroad opportunities through participation in a larger consortium or through developing their own programs (Quezada, 2004). The academic literature relating to the value and impact of the student teaching abroad experience is generally informed by three data sources. These are (a) students' personal reflections, interviews, and surveys; (b) on-site observations and perceptions by host educators within the particular international contexts; and (c) program evaluations (Baker, 2000; Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Mahon & Cushner, 2007; Stachowski, Richardson, & Henderson, 2003). Personal outcomes associated with the student teacher abroad growth and development process generally relate to three areas: instructional pedagogy, learning about oneself, and an appreciation and understanding of multiculturalism (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Stachowski & Visconti, 1997; Stachowski & Chleb, 1998; Stachowski, Richardson, & Henderson, 2003). Additionally, students purportedly raise their consciousness regarding global dynamics (Young, 1993) and intellectual development (McKeown, 2009), although this latter finding is applicable to students who study abroad for various reasons, not necessarily who student teach or who plan to become teachers.

Guided student abroad experiences—in this case, those that relate to contexts within which student teachers will engage—affect prospective teachers along

dimensions beyond the self. Roose (2001), for example, reports that they strongly influence the development of prospective teachers in six areas of understanding:

- (1) understanding that schools are essentially microcosms of the larger culture within which they are situated;
- (2) understanding schools as cultures, and the need to observe, listen and pose questions as a means to effective adaptation;
- (3) understanding students and learning; that is, prospective teachers learn to be sensitive and gracious within the context of a new culture and to transfer those skills within the contexts of their U.S. classrooms, which include learning about their students and how they learn, and to view differences, both cultural and learning, “as potentially friendly and positive” (p.45);
- (4) understanding that curriculum can be enhanced by integrating “ideas and materials” from their internship abroad experiences and feeling “more flexible in their need for and use of materials” (p. 45);
- (5) understanding themselves as risk-takers and confident of their ability to “continue trying out new ideas and new ways of teaching” (p. 46); and
- (6) understanding the richness and complexity of their newfound attraction to differences. Prospective teachers, who now functioned as practicing teachers, “were curious about cultures, had respect for differences ... enjoyed and wanted to learn from others ... to know parents, learn about different learning styles, and ... felt learning ... from people who were not like themselves was a positive and exciting part of their teaching” (p. 46).

Our past research findings support, refine and contribute to the above literature by (a) identifying similar positive effects that international experiences have had on student teachers; (b) extending the specific developing country contexts and the different school settings (public and private) within which students teachers were placed—in Latin America and Asia; and (c) comparing and contrasting the effects of context and setting on student teachers relative to professional development, cultural responsiveness and character development. Our current research findings offer a further dimension to the above literature by addressing the degree to which former student teachers who student taught abroad and are now practicing within U.S. classrooms, transfer, adapt and integrate aspects of their professional, cultural and personal development, informed by their student teaching abroad experience, to the U.S. classroom.

Methods

The research employed qualitative and descriptive statistical methods. Ten former student teachers who had student taught in China, Costa Rica, Mexico, or Belize and returned to teach in K-12 U.S. classrooms (public and private) participated in this study. Eight were female and two male; all were White, non-Hispanic,

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whose teaching experiences varied from six months to five years. Eight of the ten participants were in K-6 classrooms; two were in secondary settings. Their classrooms generally were comprised of a culturally and linguistically diverse student body. Interviews were conducted with the 10 participants and complemented by classroom observations of five participants.

Types of Evidence, Data and Practices Reported

We collected data during the academic year 2008-2009, sending out emails to 25 former student teachers who student taught in Belize, China, Mexico, or Costa Rica to invite them to participate in the study. The 10 former student teachers who participated in the study were the ones who accepted the invitation, were currently teaching in a U.S. classroom, and were available for interviews and observations. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to a modified form of the content analysis instrument we designed and used in our previous student teaching abroad research. Interview questions probed the degree to which the participants' international student teaching experiences influenced their (a) stateside instructional practice, (b) cultural responsiveness toward diverse student populations, and (c) curricular approach. In addition, the researchers' on-site observations were also analyzed using content analysis to examine the same three areas of classroom practice.

Preliminary Findings

Six findings emerged from the preliminary data analysis. They include: development of instructional skills and style; transfer and adaptation of skills, techniques, and knowledge; development of creativity, flexibility, and appreciation for instructional material; difficulty in transferring, adapting, and integrating some favorite practices; value-added experience relative to culturally responsive pedagogy; and more challenges in classroom management in U.S. classrooms. In this section, each finding is shared in detail from the perspectives of the participating teachers in the study.

Finding #1: Development of Instructional Skills and Style

Former student teachers judged, in retrospect, that, within the international setting in which they student taught, they had: (a) learned how to teach independently and, at the same time, collaborate; and (b) developed their respective teaching styles, particularly through the guidance of their collaborating teachers. One teacher, for example, established rubrics to grade English language oral proficiency during his student teaching abroad experience in China, which the Chinese professors used. Once in the U.S., he had the opportunity to engage in establishing rubrics as a first-year teacher within his school:

Rubrics are not easy to develop. And it was one of those things that I learned how to do, by doing. I remember my first year coming in and teaching, they said, 'Well, we're going to put together a writing rubric. Who wants to help do this?' And I

threw my hand up right away and said, 'I'd be more than happy to jump on that.' And it really helped the teachers that had been at that school a couple of years put together a writing rubric that we still use parts of today. [Teacher 1]

Another teacher appreciated the amount of independence as a student teacher she had to teach and to progress in her development as a teacher:

Mostly, just practice. I got a lot of practice just being in front of kids [in Costa Rica] and understanding what it takes to engage them—to keep their attention. And to manage them, when a few kids are having discipline problems or whatever. Yes, it's basically the best thing I got was the practice. [Teacher 3]

Yet another teacher mentioned the degree to which he felt prepared for collaborative teaching based on his student teaching experience in Costa Rica:

It would be hard to compare [the school in Costa Rica with the present U.S. one]. I just can say that [here] ... we do get together and talk as a team, you know, the four of us teachers in one classroom. But that was similar to Cost Rica; it was a wonderful experience to have all the Kindergarten teachers sit down at least once a week to talk about what [was] going on in the unit, are-we-all-on-the-same-page kind of thing, and, you know, toss around ideas basically. [Teacher 4]

This experience and sentiment were echoed by a colleague also participating in his student teaching abroad experience in Costa Rica, at the sister school located in a coastal setting:

Very similar in both contexts. The only difference is, in Costa Rica, it was me and [my collaborating teacher], and that was it. And [we], both being young teachers, brainstormed a lot more than we actually planned. Here, I'm with a lot of veteran teachers, so they know what works; they've been doing stuff for a while, so they'll share ideas and stuff, and are open to change. [Teacher 3]

A teacher who had engaged in student teaching in China shared comments regarding how the experience influenced her professional development:

I do know that I learned a lot as far as teaching style and how to present material ... And with my student teaching experience there, doing a lot of hands-on, getting them motivated by getting them to do different activities. So, as far as that goes, my experience in China helped me develop my teaching style and how I wanted the kids to learn and what I was going to teach. [Teacher 2]

***Finding #2: Development of Creativity, Flexibility,
and Appreciation for Instructional Material***

Teachers report that, due to the general lack of resources, technology, and instructional materials available at their student teaching abroad sites, they developed: (a) a practical sense of creativity and flexibility that enabled them to identify, gather and use materials in low-cost and innovative ways; and, at the same time, (b) an appreciation of the quality and quantity of instructional materials available

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within U.S. classrooms and the value of using them. One teacher expressed the dual advantage in the following manner:

They're [that is, the U.S. and Belize school settings] very different definitely. The school that I was at was a Catholic School and in a low income area. So, as far as resources and everything, I really got to develop everything on my own. And here, working at a private center, each week I can turn in a supply list and she'll go out and get whatever I need for that week. So I'm very fortunate to be able to have that. [Teacher 5]

Another teacher offered a similar statement of cross-cultural appraisal and appreciation with respect to instructional resources, describing how teaching in Costa Rica enabled him to regularly tap into his creativity and seek alternatives.

Costa Rica kind of taught me to teach on my toes because ... I didn't have something at certain times. So when I [would think], 'Oh man, this is a great idea.' Well, that [resource] was nowhere to be found. So, I got like the next best closest [resource] to it and [would] teach a whole group unit on that. And it's fine, you know? It just makes you appreciate what you have here ... the availability of everything.

Finding #3: Transfer and Adaptation of Skills, Techniques and Knowledge

Teachers report that they transferred and adapted certain skills, techniques, and knowledge to their U.S. school settings and classroom practices in accordance with classroom needs. A teacher, for example, spoke of the accommodations she felt compelled and competent to make with respect to the perceived differences between the level of academic preparedness of her U.S. students and the international students whom she taught at an international school in China:

I think the kids over there are just ready to learn. They're there to learn, they want to learn. So, as far as planning, you have to take a step back because I think coming into it my first year I was—after that experience [in China] and seeing those kids—I'm like, 'Oh, I'm going to be ready to go!' [Laughing] And I had to take a step back and say, 'Okay, I see where my [U.S.] kids are. Now I need to plan according to that.' I can hold them to high expectations, as I did with the other students [in China], but I have to do it in smaller steps and set them up to be successful. [Teacher 2]

Another teacher spoke of implementing particular instructional delivery techniques in China that he adapted and transferred to his U.S. classroom setting:

I was kind of forced to teach whole-group a lot while I was in China because of the size of my classroom. I wasn't able to take a tremendous amount of time working individually with some students; so, therefore, in order to give them the more one-on-one feel, [I did] a lot more turn-to-your-partner-and-share-what-you-have type of situations. And I use that a lot in my [U.S.] classroom now. When I'm working whole-group [in the U.S. classroom], I try to make it as intimate as possible. So one of the things that I do is, instead of having them spread out, I bring my desks as tight-knit and close-in as possible. When you're in my classroom you notice my

horseshoe shape that I have set up there. That's as close as I could get my children to each other. I found that when you bring them closer in, not only are they more interested in what's being done, but when they talk to each other they're not as loud—because they don't have to scream across the room. And it actually encourages conversation. And I did that with my students in China, too. [Teacher 1]

A third teacher spoke of the different types of curricular approaches that did not allow for transference as Belize was more workbook- and exam-driven, while the U.S. classroom of the teacher was based on Authentic and Performance Assessment:

[With] *Bright from the Start*, you're not allowed to use any worksheets or anything like that. So everything, all of the assessment that I do, has to either be using a checklist or a matrix or taking a photo or something like that. I mean, I can use a work sample, but it has to be obviously something that's more hands on. In Belize, they had a workbook that they worked in. And so we would do it on the board; they would do their work and each one individually would have to come up and we'd have to check it off, to see if they got it right. If they didn't, they would go back to their seat and do it again. [Teacher 5]

***Finding #4: Difficulty in Transferring, Adapting,
and Integrating Some Favorite Practices***

Former student teachers find it difficult in transferring, adapting and integrating some of their favorite practices (such as giving individual attention to each student) into U.S. classroom contexts as classrooms tend to be more standards- and test-driven, or otherwise distinct.

I felt like there was this freedom to be more creative in Costa Rica and to not be so bound to teaching towards a test. I tried to still bring that into my teaching here. I mean, it's not entirely possible as much as it was there, but I do, I do, try to bring that because I saw how much the kids in Costa Rica enjoyed that. The problem is that there's so much to hit here in the States. There's so much to do and you feel like you're on such a limited time table that when the kids get any down-time to work on stuff and you give them this creative freedom, you like, lose them. [Teacher 4]

Another teacher described the traditional approach she encountered in the U.S. classroom and contrasted it with the more student-centered approach she experienced in China as a student teacher:

For example, the multiplication [tables], we're learning that in math right now. A lot of flash cards, having them write it out, having them practice. Just repetition of what they're doing. So as far as that content goes, just constant repetition—getting them to say it and do it. And I think they did that in China, but they did a lot of hands-on, a lot of group work, a lot of group activities; they put a lot more on the students. The teacher that I worked with [there] did a lot of literature circles, where the kids would get in their literature circles and had different jobs that they would do. And, I really, really like that idea. It's hard to implement that here because you

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really have to have a group of kids reading at least on a third grade level or a little bit above, so that they can do the jobs and be successful. [Teacher 2]

In response to our question regarding to what degree her students could gather an appreciation for cultures, this same teacher remarked how the school's persistent drive to cover content affected her ability to introduce cultural content other than during holiday periods:

I try to incorporate as much as I can, but it's really hard to plan around the kids' cultures because we have so many difference ones. Sometimes the parents feel like you're imposing it on their children and you have to deal with the parents' desires for how they want their culture [integrated]. I really follow the curriculum. There are some things that I will bring in, you know, during holiday season, during different times of the year, when we talk about different holidays—and we'll bring it up and say, 'This is [such and such a] holiday' and we'll talk about it. And we ask if the kids celebrate it and we talk about it; but other than that, doing anymore than that—for one, I don't have time with the content that I have to teach throughout the year. I really just stick to the content and the curriculum that they give us because I just don't have time—I wish I did. [Teacher 2]

Finding #5: Value-Added Experience Relative to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Former student teachers consider their student teaching abroad as a value-added experience that has informed their teaching and professional character in four relevant and interrelated culturally responsive pedagogical areas: (a) development of awareness of diverse students' needs, (b) appreciation of their students' native languages and their use in class, (c) sharing their own experiences with their students as a way of building communicative and experiential bridges, and (d) integration of students' cultures into curriculum units. One teacher describes her experience in making connections with her students in the following way:

It [that is, the student teaching experience] affects so many different things in so many ways. It could be content ... and there's something so beautiful about being able to say, 'I was there. Let me, let me, take you on a journey,' instead of just, 'I hear that this place is having trouble with this and that.' You can tell them a story. I also volunteer after school at the same school because I'm only there until 12:30, so I volunteer with a Kindergarten classroom and a 1st grade classroom. Well, I was reading *Slowly, Slowly, Slowly, Slowly, Said the Sloth*, by Eric Carl; and I was just reading to the kids in front of the class and I was like, 'I know what this animal is! Because it lives in Costa Rica!' And I just noticed that every single page had a Costa Rican animal, and I was like, 'Sweet, this is my book.' [Teacher 3]

Another teacher, who teaches first grade, shared the excitement generated in his classroom by addressing his students' questions relative to, from a Western cultural perspective, an exotic cultural culinary Chinese practice:

In the classroom, the children really are interested in what I ate while I was in China.

They say, 'Well, did you eat dog?' And I said, 'Well, of course, I did. It was considered a delicacy in one of the provinces where I was.' And I try to explain to them that in the Shanghai Zoo there was an actual exhibit that were dogs, and that one of the sections of the zoo was called Dogs. There was a Cocker Spaniel, and [the sign] said in English *Cocker Spaniel* and then it had the Chinese characters. And [the dog] was just sitting in a cage, and people were going around and looking at the different [breeds] of dogs. [Teacher 1]

A third teacher described various culturally-responsive feelings and actions that resulted from his student teaching abroad experience, particularly regarding the vast amount of students from other countries he taught in his classroom in Costa Rica:

Costa Rica made me more aware, you know? [Here,] I know all of my kids [who] are Hispanic [are] from Mexico. But we have a kid from Egypt, who actually came from Egypt mid-year. They lived in California, his family moved to Egypt, and now they're here. Well, you know, I would like for him to share that because I realized in my class in Costa Rica, we only had three Costa Rican kids. My girls were from Germany, France, and Brazil; and my boys were from Italy. And even in [my U.S. school], I had a girl who was from India and it made me more aware to help them adjust. Like the kid from Egypt really struggles with money [when used in instruction]. I would have never in my life made that connection that he struggles with money ... the only reason I know that is because when I was in Costa Rica I kept saying *dollars* ... and everyone would be like, 'What?' And I would [then say] *colones*. But it was just those little connections that I kept making with kids. I really try and do the 'What about me?' posters and stuff. It's cool to see their heritage and for them to be proud of where they come from, and so I try to incorporate that a lot more. And I don't think I [had] ever stepped back to notice it until I got back from Costa Rica, because of how diverse my class was in Costa Rica. I think we had, like, 8 kids with 7 nationalities [in my class in Costa Rica]. They all spoke [their native language] and they also spoke English and Spanish, flawlessly. To hear my kids speak Spanish in [the U.S.] class, you know, used to like freak me out because before I went to Costa Rica I was like, 'Oh no, what are they saying!?' You know, 'Is this bad? Good?' Now, I'm just like, 'It's part of their heritage; it's part of their culture.' [Teacher 4]

At the same time, Teacher 4 recognized that students from different ethnic and racial groups should regularly sit and work together in class—a practice he appreciated seeing and experiencing in Costa Rica as a student teacher:

I particularly don't like all my Hispanic kids to sit together, even boy-girl. It's because I think they should interact with [other groups]....Everybody was just kind of out there in Costa Rica, and enjoyed each other's company. Here, it's homogenized ... like mixing doesn't really happen that often....I think that [mixing] does them good. Even if they don't want to, they're around the other people in the classroom. [Teacher 4]

Another teacher shared her personal assessment of her degree of openness to other cultures and to how the student teaching abroad experience had enabled her

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to move to a stage of professional implementation of cultural activities within her classroom, which incorporated longer-range planning, as well:

I do think it helps. You know, I think I've been pretty wide [open] as far as diversity and everything like that throughout my teaching career, my schooling, I guess I would say. You know, during TOSS [a 15-week pre-student teaching field experience], I was working in [locale_x in Georgia]. It's not very diverse. And here, in [locale_y in Georgia], it's very, very diverse. So, at the beginning of the year we do an *All about Me* unit, where they bring in their favorite snack and they bring in a poster of themselves and their family, and they share it and talk about it. So, we incorporate families that way. As far as other cultural things, there's just so, so many different ones. I think next year I would like to, to incorporate it a little bit more into the classroom. You know, as far as the families and things like that. [Teacher 5]

Finding #6: More Challenges in Classroom Management in U.S. Classrooms

Student teachers uniformly reported that they had less challenges in classroom management and behavior issues in their international student teacher settings than what they encountered in their respective U.S. classrooms. One teacher's description is reflective of this general appraisal:

Also, the class sizes are much smaller [here in the U.S.]; but in Belize, the children have like a higher level of respect, I guess, for their elders. So the behavior issues that I do experience here weren't as bad there. They're sitting in their seats the whole time; they're not up and around and everything and they don't have things at every angle to tempt them. [Teacher 5]

A student teaching peer, whose experience was in Costa Rica, shared a similar assessment:

And you know, to me, my kids in Costa Rica were a lot more attentive, so I didn't have to do as much classroom management. But there, I felt like I could teach more; where here, I have to manage more. You know, managing as first [priority] and teaching as second. There it was like I taught and every once in a while I had to manage. But that's just what you get here—especially at the school that I'm at. We're probably 70% free and reduced lunches and stuff like that, so... [Teacher 4]

It is evident that the teacher made an association between behavioral management issues and income status of students, and not solely based on cross-cultural contexts. A teacher who had student-taught in China also makes an association between socio-economic status and classroom behavior:

The students that I had in my class in China were mostly American citizens or some sort other than Chinese. I didn't have to discipline. The discipline was very minimal. I could teach and not have to worry about re-directing and stopping to give them a few minutes to think about what they was doing. So, you know, here, with the socio-economic status that the kids are, or where they are, we do a lot of

disciplining, and re-directing and waiting, and getting them back on task. So, it takes a lot more time. [Teacher 2]

Discussion and Conclusion

Former student teachers who student taught in China, Belize, Costa Rica, and Mexico in this study concurred that they not only learned how to teach independently and work congenially with their collaborating teachers and colleagues but also developed their respective teaching styles, particularly through the guidance of their collaborating teachers and respective school contexts. Their developed competency in instructional pedagogy is consistent with the research literature regarding the benefits of student teaching abroad programs related to skill development in instructional pedagogy (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Mahon & Cushner, 2007; Stachowski & Chleb, 1998; Stachowski et al., 2003; Stachowski & Visconti, 1997).

Our second finding relative to teachers' development of creativity and flexibility in their former student teaching contexts in this study has been touched upon in the literature. For instance, the development of flexibility is consistent with previous research by Mahon and Cushner (2007) in which they reported "increased ability to be flexible and adapt their teaching to student differences" (p. 76). The development of creativity, furthermore, relates to reports of intellectual development (McKeown, 2009) in general study abroad programs. Likewise, Jiang and DeVillar (2011) found that "the international teaching experience had had a positive impact on [student teachers'] teaching and increased their instructional flexibility" (p. 11).

The following findings in our study relate to whether these former student teachers transfer their instructional pedagogy, personal development and cultural competence to their instructional practice in their U.S. classroom contexts. This is an area that has received scant empirical research attention in the student teaching abroad literature. Participating teachers confirmed that they transferred instructional techniques and strategies developed from their international student teaching experiences when they deemed them appropriate for their current U.S. classroom settings. A teacher in his Chinese schooling context, for example, used whole class instruction with students sitting in rows. In his U.S. school context, as group work and peer learning are encouraged, he adapted his instruction by combining whole class instruction with pair or small work in a horse-shoe shaped classroom configuration to foster peer collaboration in his current American classroom. However, there were also skills and techniques the teachers learned and practiced in their international student teaching contexts that they do not transfer or adapt to their current U.S. classrooms based on the requirement of school or district policy. Thus, the transference, adaptation and integration of former student teachers' instructional skills and practices developed in their student teaching abroad experiences are affected by their current instructional settings' needs, requirements and policies. Further investigation is warranted to determine additional factors that may contribute to

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or restrain the transference, adaptation and integration of prior instructional skills and techniques acquired abroad to domestic instructional settings.

The third finding that participating teachers consider that their international student teaching experience positively impacted their teaching and professional character confirms well-organized, long-term student teaching abroad programs to be an innovative strategy that positively influences pre-service teachers' intercultural development in ways not possible in domestic student teaching experiences (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Merryfield, 1994; Paccione, 2000; Quezada, 2004; Roberts, 2003; Schneider, 2003).

More specifically, through their intercultural experiences while student teaching abroad, teachers developed heightened awareness of the diverse needs of their students and their backgrounds and provided necessary caring and support that informed their daily learning based on their student teaching experiences abroad. In addition, some have changed their attitude toward the use of students' native language from fear or doubt to appreciation. Their deeper understanding of the value of diversity and diverse learners was also informed by their cross-cultural experiences in which they felt themselves to be an outsider or of minority status, particularly due to not speaking the native language of the host country; this emotional state was temporary, but it did promote their development of "consciousness of inequities of power and privilege" (Merryfield, 2000, p. 441) in U.S. schools. For example, one of the teachers who student taught in Costa Rica now implements various culturally-responsive strategies, such as having students prepare posters to share their cultures, and recognizes the importance of seating arrangements for students from different ethnic and racial groups to regularly sit and work together in class—a practice he appreciated seeing and experiencing in Costa Rica as a student teacher. The above findings relate to the participating teachers' transfer of intercultural development to culturally responsive practices in their U.S. classrooms (Gay, 2002, 2010); they also provide evidence that teachers with former international student teaching experiences understand and respond effectively to the learning needs of all the students they teach, which includes understanding the relationship of language use, cultural background, and culturally-influenced behaviors to learning (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Merryfield, 1994; Paccione, 2000; Quezada, 2004; Roberts, 2003; Schneider, 2003).

Implications of the Study

A salient finding in our research was that teachers who engaged in student teaching abroad settings viewed themselves as competent classroom teachers in the U.S. schools where they were practicing. Thus, the student teaching abroad experience *added value* in terms of cultural and language experiences and resultant sensibilities and behaviors, and, at the same time, prepared the student teachers to self-assess that they performed competently in U.S. classrooms. Further investigation

is recommended to determine administrators' evaluations of the teachers' professional competence. Additionally, the findings contribute to the research literature regarding the relationship between student teaching abroad experiences and their transference, adaptation, and integration into the classroom practice of beginning teachers in U.S. schools—an area in which research remains sparse. The findings provide university faculty and administrators with research-based information to better understand the effects of experiences. In conclusion, these findings, in principle, support offering international student teaching experiences to prospective student teachers at the national level.

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