

Beyond graduation: The sustainability of new pedagogy and other lessons learned during a short-term student teaching abroad

Marsha H. Lupi: University of North Florida

Kelly C. Turner: University of North Florida

The purpose of this study was to determine the continued impact of a short-term international student teaching experience on participants during the first five years following graduation from their teacher preparation program. We investigated the sustainability of pedagogical skills and personal growth through a comparison of alumni initial reflections two weeks after returning from student teaching abroad with reflections while in actual practice as teachers. The study revealed the experience did make a difference and continued to be important to alumni pedagogy, cultural understanding, global awareness, and personal growth post-graduation.

Introduction

In recent years, literature has surfaced on the challenges associated with university-based international student teaching programs. These challenges include program development and implementation, as well as how to ensure and measure the growth of a pre-service teacher as a professional and global citizen. Information is often presented as specific outcomes which identify and support gains, such as the acquisition of new insight and pedagogical skills to use in pre-service teachers' future classrooms (Phillion, Malewski, Sharma, & Wang, 2009). Quezada (2004) reminds us that providing a study abroad experience for student teachers is a "key ingredient" in preparing teachers for the future who are able to meet the challenges of an ever-changing and increasingly diverse school population and classroom.

This article focuses on reports of long-term effects of a short-term international student teaching experience in Plymouth, England. It

presents the findings of a survey administered to alumni participants from the University of North Florida who were in the first five years of their teaching career. Surveying program alumni after graduation was an idea which evolved from the interest of faculty trip leaders who spent time with the participants while abroad and also had the opportunity to follow up with them after graduation. We wanted to know, for example, if Alum A implemented the new strategies learned during her time in a British classroom, as was mentioned in her initial reflection paper. In this article we have attempted to answer this specific question, along with others, as to the sustainability of lessons learned, and personal and professional growth, as a result of the short-term international student teaching internship.

Short-term study abroad programs

Literature on short-term international study abroad opportunities is gaining popularity. Many universities in the United States have started to offer short-term study abroad opportunities, those

typically lasting less than eight weeks (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Pence & MacGillivray, 2008). In 2011, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported over 56% of U.S. students studying abroad in 2009-2010 participated in short term programs, an increase from previous years. A possible reason for this increase is the many practical benefits of short-term study abroad experiences, such as less time away disrupting life at home, school and work compared to what would occur during long-term programs, less cost to run and participate, and when joined by home faculty, less anxiety from being away from what is familiar (Lupi, Batey, & Turner, 2012). Outcomes of these short-term study abroad experiences have begun to emerge in the professional literature, which support the concept that study abroad programs are beneficial to the personal and professional growth of students. For example, Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) compared students who took part in a short-term study abroad program with students who did not participate. They report that the short-term study abroad students showed higher levels of intercultural awareness than the students who did not study abroad.

Short-term study abroad programs for student teachers

Norris and Gillespie (2009) state that students in most academic backgrounds can find study-abroad programs that reflect their focus of study. While this has been true for many academic majors, for those in teacher education programs it may be more difficult as often there are restrictive state mandates requiring a sequence of coursework leaving little room for flexibility if the student wants to graduate in four years. However, in recent years, support for such experiences has grown. These internships have the capacity to increase cultural competence and global perspective, preparing pre-service teachers to apply their increased understanding of multicultural education to the diverse learning needs within the U.S. classrooms (Cushner &

Mahon, 2002; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). Students who participate in short-term student teaching internships have returned to their home college or university citing that they have had experiences causing them to reflect on pedagogy and practice (Lupi et al., 2012; Stachowski & Visconti, 1997). Our involvement with short-term internships leads us to agree with reports from other faculty leaders that benefits of short-term international student teaching, such as strengthening pedagogical knowledge, fostering personal growth, and increased cultural competence and global awareness, are important for classroom teachers to possess.

Longitudinal Studies of Study Abroad Programs

A more comprehensive look is needed to be able to identify the longitudinal impact of study abroad experiences, whether short or long-term, on participants' lives and careers after they graduate (IIE, 2011). Many studies focus on the immediate impact when returning from a trip abroad, while few examine the long-term outcomes (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Franklin, 2010). The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) conducted a longitudinal survey which queried 50 years of study abroad alumni about the long-term personal, professional and academic impact of their study abroad experience. The results of the study showed strong agreement among participants that study abroad experiences positively influence cultural and self-awareness, along with career and academic performance. Another follow-up study by Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus (2011) examined the impact of a short-term study abroad experience one year after students returned from their trip. They concluded new knowledge and understanding learned while abroad must be integrated into subsequent learning opportunities and daily life in order for the impact to continue years after the experience.

The Plymouth Short-term Student Teaching Study

At the University of North Florida there is a strong commitment to “transformational learning” and the provision of scholarship money to assist students who would like to study abroad. In the College of Education and Human Services, this commitment is accomplished in many ways, one of which is the short-term international student teaching internship. For the past seven years our students have had the opportunity to apply for a short-term internship in Plymouth, England. The project has doubled in popularity since its initial group of six participants in 2007 to a group of 12 in spring 2013. Since its inception, Plymouth TLO goals have been to:

1. Develop increased knowledge and skills in new methodologies used to teach literacy, math, and other significant areas of curriculum.
2. Develop mentor relationships with master British teachers and related school personnel who will increase the pedagogical skills of the UNF students as well as expand their knowledge base on teaching and learning.
3. Gain increased knowledge of British culture and daily life through friendships with Marjon students and the faculty and staff at their school placements.
4. Incorporate new skills and methods of teaching curriculum into their own pedagogy as they embark on careers as teachers.
5. Acquire a greater context in which to understand themselves and the world around them.
6. Expand their interest in world travel and global issues.
7. Be able to articulate the impact the international internship has had on their self-esteem, independence, and efficacy both in the classroom setting and in social situations.

Earlier investigations on the initial impact of the TLO short-term international internship focused on student teachers’ reflections

immediately upon return from Plymouth. Research on the students’ reflection papers, submitted two weeks after returning to the U.S., supported an overall positive effect on curriculum and classroom management knowledge, gains in self-awareness and self-confidence, an increase in cultural sensitivity and global awareness, and more interest in travel abroad. These effects were collectively examined and produced emerging trends that were discussed in two articles. The first article focused on an examination of their cultural awareness developed through the internship, and the second focused on observations of pedagogy, learning and practice in UK schools (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Lupi et al., 2012).

In this article, alumni were surveyed post-graduation to investigate whether initial reflections and reports on the impact of the student teaching experience abroad had been sustained and integrated into their personal and professional lives for a period up to their first five years of teaching. The two research questions framing this study were as follows:

1. Does the knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and teaching methods/skills student teachers bring back from their international teaching experiences continue to influence practice in the early years of teaching?
2. Does participation in a short-term international teaching internship have a continued influence on personal accomplishments, global awareness and a desire for world travel?

Plymouth Student Teaching Experience

As noted by Lupi and Batey (2009) there is a rigorous application and selection process for the teacher education students who apply for this international student teaching experience. The students, who are entering their last semester to be fully admitted into an internship in a local school, must demonstrate proficiency on multiple

variables (i.e. GPA of 3.0 or higher, writing samples and interviews, and a demonstration of success in previous field experiences). Those accepted attend pre-trip preparation meetings conducted by trip leaders to discuss important factors of the international experience, such as the British education system and National Curriculum, history of Plymouth and England, and travel information on such topics as passports, safety, and immigration.

Once in the U.K., the students reside on campus of our partner school, The University of St. Mark and St. John (Marjon) in Plymouth. They are placed in Plymouth primary, secondary, and special schools. These placements are generally linked to the age group and grade of the home student teaching experience. The students student teach for approximately three weeks and are encouraged to participate fully in daily classroom activities. In addition to seminars while abroad with UNF and Marjon faculty members, upon completion of the experience students attend a post-trip seminar which serves as a debriefing session. Students are required to submit a reflection paper capturing their initial thoughts about what they perceived from the experience.

Methodology

Participants

From 2007-2011, 60 student teachers, the study's population, completed the student teaching internship in Plymouth, U.K. However due to the mobility of many of our graduates we were unable to reach all alumni, some of whom had moved or changed email addresses making them unavailable. Subsequently, we collected data from 28 (47%) of the alumni. Table 1 presents the groups based on the year traveled abroad, the number of participants in each group, and the percentage of response from each group. All eight groups that participated in the TLO are represented. The students' majors were in Pre-K Primary (18%), Elementary Education

(64%), Secondary Education (11%) and Special Education (7%). At the time of travel abroad, the age range of respondents was 21-39 years old with a mean age of 24. There were 26 females and 2 males with an ethnic make-up of 2 Hispanic and 2 Black females, and the remaining respondents were White. Over 95% were employed as teachers with 57% of the respondents enrolled in or having obtained a master's degree since graduation. Over half of the participants (54%) identified themselves as never having traveled to another country prior to the internship.

Data Sources, Collections, and Analysis

A mixed method research design with multiple data sources was used in our study in an effort to triangulate data and minimize the potential for bias from self-reporting. The first data source was student reflection papers completed two weeks after each of the international student teaching internships (Source 1). The purpose of the paper was to provide insight into the personal and professional growth of the student as a result of the international teaching experience. These papers were analyzed previously for quantifiable data on cultural awareness shifts, pedagogy and growth in global and international awareness (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Lupi et al., 2012). In the papers, the students were asked to comment on perceived gains or new perspectives on schools and teaching that included differences and similarities between their home placement and the classroom in Plymouth, and their observations of the cultures around them. The analysis of the reflection papers produced emerging trends and patterns that provided insight into the collective nature of the experience for the student teachers. These analyses provided the authors with a baseline reference point to investigate the impact and sustainability of the internship's benefits. The second source of data was obtained from the survey administered post-graduation. The survey included 22 items which focused on how the short-term international internship continued to influence the students'

personal and professional lives. The items reflected the seven component TLO goals. The survey consisted of 8 demographic items, 10 items with rating scales measuring personal and professional impact adapted from the work of Wallace (1999), and 4 summative open-ended items providing the students the opportunity to expand on the overall teaching experience abroad. The return rate for this study was 47% (n=28).

The seven original TLO goals presented earlier provided the framework in which the student reflection papers and survey responses were organized and analyzed. Data analysis included the quantifiable responses along with significant direct quotes and comments from student papers and survey responses. Quotes were identified using a coding system making it possible to match the initial reflection with survey responses. The coding system consisted of a number (1-5), representing the number of years since the participant graduated, followed by a letter (A-H), identifying the participants within a group.

Findings

The findings indicate there was strong agreement regarding the positive benefits and influence of the short-term teaching internship post-graduation into the initial years of teaching. This was particularly evident in the areas of knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogical skills. The findings support the overall positive responses reported in the initial student reflection papers.

TLO Goals 1 and 4: Methodological Skills and Pedagogical Knowledge

TLO Goals 1 and 4, describing an increase in the development and incorporation of methodological skills and pedagogical knowledge used to teach, were reflected in a survey item asking the alumni to indicate the influence the international internship had on their current

teaching. Results indicate that the experience was very important to their practice as classroom teachers (Table 2). Only one student answered that the experience was not very important to her current teaching experience. The benefit of the international experience was further reinforced by survey comments. One student shared that “I have not lost touch with any lesson learned overseas. In fact, I have planned my entire course selections around lessons learned in England” (2E). Alum A, who had commented in her initial reflection paper that she wanted to implement new strategies learned during the Plymouth internship when she has her own classroom, stated that two years after graduation she is still using subtraction strategies learned in her UK classroom (5E). These comments are representative of alumni and support a positive longitudinal pedagogical impact of the teaching experience abroad.

TLO Goal 2: Mentor Relationships

Directly related to TLO Goal 2, describing the development of mentor relationships with master British teachers and related school personnel, Table 3 reports over one-third of the alumni continue to communicate with their supervising British teacher. An alumna five years out from the trip stated, “I was able to stay in touch with the teacher I worked with. My current class became pen pals with her class. Experiences like these have made an impact on my teaching experience” (5B). Within every category in the Table, the responses of the participants who were four or five years out from the Plymouth experience were the strongest, which suggest that the participants valued and wanted to maintain the relationships with those they met abroad.

TLO Goals 3, 4, and 6: Cultural Awareness and Global Understanding

Three TLO goals (3, 4, and 6) focus on aspects of increased cultural awareness and global understanding as a result of the study abroad experience. Survey items aligned to

these topics were crucial when determining longitudinal impact considering 33% (n=9) of the alumni had indicated they did not consider themselves culturally or globally literate prior to the Plymouth trip. One intern mentioned in her initial reflection paper that “this experience has changed my viewpoints and has made me more alert, opened to change, and appreciative of the world around me” (1A). One year later, the intern expressed that her eyes continue to be open to the world around her and that the awareness has brought a sense of accomplishment, both personally and in her career. The alumni expressed how the multitude of cultures in Plymouth increased their own cultural awareness which has helped to accommodate and better understand ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students. Corresponding survey quotes, such as “I became more aware of how culture and expectations affect student learning” (3B), build upon initial reflections, such as, “This has really helped me as a teacher to see what it is like for my ESOL students when they are experiencing our culture for the first time” (1B).

In terms of awareness of global issues, the responses indicate 83% of the alumni believe that their awareness and interest in global issues has been enhanced by the study abroad experience. One alumnus three years after the trip mentioned, “The experience gave me new insight into teaching and a more global view, which opened up many doors in my career” (3B).

The short-term international teaching experience in Plymouth seemed to encourage participants for future travel abroad. One alumnus stated in her initial reflection paper that “this experience has increased my wanting to teach abroad” (3E). In her response to the survey, she indicated “I taught in Istanbul, Turkey for a year because the Plymouth internship gave me the courage to teach abroad.” This is not the only example of participants fulfilling TLO goal 6; 12 other alum (43%) indicated they traveled abroad since the experience, four of which returned to

England. Alumni stated, “It was a wonderful way to connect my love for traveling with my love for teaching” (4E) and it was “an opportunity to grow as a teacher and traveler” (5C).

TLO Goal 7: Personal Growth and Accomplishments

The final TLO goal, being able to articulate the impact the international internship has had on self-esteem, independence, and efficacy in both classroom settings and social situations, was supported with a strong, positive response. In this category 86% (n=24) reported that their personal accomplishments have been constructively influenced by the international experience. “I learned a lot about myself as a teacher and as a person from this experience. I think before you can become an effective teacher, you have to be comfortable with yourself and know yourself” (3D) one intern shared. Written feedback to the survey items included quotes such as, “...you learn more about yourself, your goals, and teaching that you could have ever imagined due to the impact of this international internship” (1A). Words, such as “confidence” and “comfort”, occurred frequently throughout these survey responses, such as in this reflection from an alumnus five years out from the trip, “I used every experience in Plymouth as a learning experience which allowed me to gain confidence in my teaching skills and my ability to deal with different circumstances.” (5D). These personal reflections centered upon the idea that the trip abroad was “an amazing transformational learning experience that can only be achieved by being immersed in a foreign environment and gaining experience through working in a diverse environment out of one’s comfort zone” (5B).

Conclusion

Overall, the long-term effects of the Plymouth TLO mattered, made a difference, and continued to be important to alumni’s pedagogy, cultural understanding, global awareness and personal

lives post-graduation. The response to the first question, “Does the knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and teaching methods/skills student teachers bring back from their international teaching experiences continue to influence practice in the early years of teaching?” is yes, as alumni responses indicate that the experience was important in influencing their curriculum knowledge, pedagogy, and teaching methods and skills post-graduation and into the first five years of teaching. The second question, “Does participation in a short-term international teaching internship have a continued influence on personal accomplishments, global awareness, and a desire for world travel?”, also appears to be “yes”. In fact, alumni responses seem to support the efficacy that short-term study abroad experiences have in broadening self-awareness, global awareness, and increased desire for world travel. Although there is more work to be done, our findings, although by no means definitive, can be useful in adding to the limited body of research on the positive effects of a short term student teaching internship.

To conclude, despite both time and distance from the Plymouth TLO, alumni continue to express the benefits of the short-term student teaching experience abroad. As one alumnus articulates, “This trip is by far the most important influence in my teaching career. It has changed the way that I see education and the way I educate my students. I feel that my students are better off by having me as a teacher with this experience” (3H).

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Tables

Table 1

Cohorts, # of members, and percent of cohort response

Cohort	# of Teacher Education majors in Cohort	Survey Response Rate
Spring 2007	6	3 (50%)
Fall 2007	6	2 (33%)
Spring 2008	7	3 (43%)
Fall 2008	7	3 (43%)
Spring 2009	7	6 (86%)
Fall 2009	8	2 (25%)
Spring 2010	9	5 (56%)
Spring 2011	10	4 (40%)
Total	60	28 (47%)

Table 2

Perceived influence of the international teaching experience on current teaching experiences in the U.S.

Years Since Trip	Unimportant	Not Very Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important
1 year (4)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)
2 years (5)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)
3 years (8)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (25%)	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)
4 years (6)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)
5 years (5)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
Total (28)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	5 (18%)	16 (57%)	6 (21%)

Table 3*Alumni Remained in Contact With:*

Years Since Trip	Contact with English Teachers	Contact with Fellow Alumni	Contact with English Students
1 year (4)	2 (50%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)
2 years (5)	2 (40%)	5 (100%)	1 (20%)
3 years (8)	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	1 (13%)
4 years (6)	2 (33%)	4 (66%)	2 (33%)
5 years (5)	3 (60%)	5 (100%)	1 (20%)
Total (28)	11 (39%)	24 (86%)	5 (18%)

About the Authors

Marsha H. Lupi is associate dean of the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. Her research focuses on international internships, leadership, and special education.

Kelly C. Turner is a graduate research assistant at the University of North Florida. She is pursuing a Master's degree in Elementary Education, with a concentration in Literacy and TESOL.