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## The Role of Cross-Cultural Experience in Art Teacher Preparation

Carole Henry
Tracie Costantino
University of Georgia, U.S.A.

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**Abstract**

Current research indicates that within the United States, many preservice teachers are not prepared to work with a rapidly changing student population that includes an increasing number of immigrant students with limited proficiency in English (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005/2006; Janzen, 2008; Latta & Chan, 2011). This article presents findings from a longitudinal qualitative study that examined the semester-long experiences of preservice art education students who participated in The University of Georgia Studies Abroad in Cortona, Italy program from 2003 to 2006, providing sequential art instruction to Italian children who were not English speakers. In 2010, we conducted follow-up interviews to better understand the potential long-term effects of this experience. Our findings indicated this experience gave the art education students increased cultural understanding and greater confidence in their teaching, and provided a foundational experience that they believed would help them be more successful in working with English Language Learners (ELLs) in the future.

## Introduction

Current research indicates that within the United States, many preservice teachers across the disciplines are not adequately prepared to work with a rapidly changing student population that includes an increasing number of immigrant students who do not yet speak English[1] (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005/2006; Janzen, 2008; Latta & Chan, 2011). Latta and Chan (2011) see the arts as "hold[ing] much potential" in this area because of the nature of the arts themselves; the arts function as forms of communication "enabling translation and fostering understandings of abstract and complex concepts" (p. xviii) and in that way are often able to transcend other more standard forms of communication. This article presents findings from a longitudinal qualitative study[2] that examined the experiences of preservice art education students who participated in The University of Georgia Studies Abroad in Cortona, Italy program between 2003 and 2006, providing sequential art instruction to Italian children who were not English speakers. The art education students were enrolled in a semester-long elementary theory and methods course offered as part of the studies abroad program and co-taught a unit of art lessons within the local Italian school as a component of the course. In 2010, we conducted follow-up interviews to better understand the potential long-term effects of this semester-long experience. While we acknowledge that there are substantial socio-cultural differences that exist between educational contexts in the U.S. and in Cortona, our findings indicated this experience gave the art education students increased cultural understanding and greater confidence in their teaching, and provided a foundational experience they believed would help them be more successful in working with English Language Learners (ELLs) in the future.

## Preparing Teachers for Diverse Classrooms

Today's educational climate is increasingly more diverse. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), more than one in seven school age children speak a language other than English at home. While a number of states, such as those that border Mexico, have experienced immigration for some time, the populations of other states have also become increasingly more diverse in the last decade with immigration from many parts of the world including Asia, the Middle East, Central America, the African continent and Eastern Europe. Some of these population changes have been quite dramatic. For example, within Georgia, population changes included more than a quarter of a million immigrants moving to the state between

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[1] Some portions of this article first appeared in Henry, C. (2007), "Teaching in Another Culture: Preparing Art Educators for Teaching English Language Learners (ELL)" in *Art Education, 60*(6), 33-39, which documents the pilot study conducted in 2001.

[2] This research project was supported by funding from a 2006 University of Georgia Research Foundation Grant.

2000 and 2009. During the same time period, the Hispanic population of Georgia nearly doubled with nine school systems reporting 10% or more of their student population as having limited English proficiency (State of Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, 2009). The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau figures show that Georgia's Hispanic population has continued to grow by 96% since 2000 (2010 Census Data, n.d.), with important implications for teacher preparation programs in the state.

In 2003-04, over 5 million children in the U.S. were identified as limited in English proficiency with ELLs comprising approximately 10% of the preK-12 population, a 44% increase from a decade earlier (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005/06). Many of these children receive only limited English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes (Fillmore, 2000). According to Latta and Chan (2011), an increasing number of school systems are "mainstreaming" ELL students, now providing English instruction through regular curricular classes rather than funding stand-alone ESOL classes. Stress and anxiety are common as the children, having recently left their friends and their homes, enter classrooms where they lack proficiency in the dominant language. Many of the children are also expected to speak English in school and their native language at home (Miller & Endo, 2004) and to serve as "translators" for their parents in conversations with doctors, attorneys, and school personnel. Adding to those issues are the increasing calls for immigration reform in the U.S., with stark, and often inflammatory, political messages that affect how immigrant children, legal or illegal, are perceived by others, as well as how they perceive themselves. Better understanding of the emotional, as well as the cognitive needs of ELL students is crucial to their educational success in a new country.

## ELLs and Art Education

Because art is considered by many to be a visual (Arnheim, 1954; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002; Feldman, 1982) or "alternative" language (Mezirow, 2000), children who speak languages other than English are frequently placed in art classes soon after they enroll in a school. Eubanks (2002) explained that "the art classroom may be the first place that immigrant students feel comfortable and capable in school"(p. 44), adding that art teachers often must quickly adapt curricula and pedagogy on an individual basis. Understanding the needs of ELLs and developing teaching strategies that are successful should be crucial components of art teacher preparation programs today. Studies of preservice dispositions toward cultural diversity have indicated that teacher candidates, while "open to the idea of cultural diversity. . . lacked confidence in their ability to do well in diverse settings" (Hollins & Gutzman, 2005, p. 483). Experiences with students who speak other languages during teacher preparation can better prepare future art teachers for the diversity within the contemporary classroom (Henry, 2007; Latta & Chan, 2011).

Professional organizations recognize the challenge of this "demographic imperative" (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage, et al., 2005, p. 242), as in the *National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Standards* (NCATE), which require that all "candidates. . .acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn" in preparation for "working with diverse populations . . . in P-12 schools" (NCATE, 2007, n. p.). Specifically mentioning the needs of ELLs, the target goal for Standard 4: Diversity is that candidates are able to "challenge students toward cognitive complexity and engage all students, including English language learners" (NCATE, 2007, n. p.). The National Art Education Association's *Standards for Art Teacher Preparation* (2009) also specify that study "in the artistic, cognitive, emotional, moral, physical, and social development . . . of English language learners" among other "special populations" (including "special needs" and "gifted") and "of teaching strategies appropriate to these populations"(p. 4) be included in art education teacher preparation programs.

The question becomes an issue of how these goals can become educational reality within the confines of often competing institutional expectations and curricular demands. Art teacher preparation programs vary widely within the US in terms of both content and course offerings (Beudert, 2006). While scholars in the field (Blocker, 2004; Chalmers, 2002; Desai & Chalmers, 2007) have articulated the need to address issues of culture and diversity in contemporary art education, research focusing on how this is actually being accomplished is needed. Beudert (2006) attributes the lack of scholarly research focusing on art teacher preparation programs in general to the interest of faculty and doctoral students in more theoretical issues and urges such research to make our work as teacher educators more visible. There has been progress in the last decade in recognizing the practitioner research of teacher educators as a viable and important endeavor (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2000). This work can inform the development of self-study, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and other forms of practitioner research in art education as appropriate methodologies for studying art teacher preparation programs.

## Conceptual Framework

Scholars have long been aware of the problems inherent within teacher education in connecting theory to practice. The practice of critical reflection, in which preservice teachers relate their classroom experiences to theoretical and philosophical concepts they encounter in their studies, is a crucial means to bridge that potential disconnect and help students find a more solid foundation on which to build their practice as teachers. John Dewey, writing in "The Relationship of Theory to Practice in Education" (1904), suggested that how we prepare students of teaching to think about their work "may be of more importance than the specific techniques of teaching and classroom management that we get them to master"(cited in Bolin, 1988, p. 49). Eisner (1972) wrote of how the "conceptions and attitudes toward the teacher's

task" (p. 13) acquired through years of experience as a student in the schools have to be "altered" when the ideas of the teacher preparation program are not aligned with the student's conception of "how teachers function" (p. 13). Bolin (1988) described these preconceived beliefs about the nature of teaching as "a latent philosophy of education" (p. 50), an unexpressed philosophy shaped by personal experience in the educational system, not as teachers but as K-12 students themselves and one that can be a point of disjuncture for students within teacher preparation programs.

Cochran-Smith (2004) uses the phrase "working the dialectic"(p. 3) to describe the need for a simultaneous process of "theorizing" practice and "practicizing" theory, a process that she explains is inherent to preparing teachers who "raise questions, generate knowledge, make connections, and construct curriculum" (p. 15). Such an approach requires continuous inquiry, reflection, and the courage to try new approaches that may not always be successful. In essence, the teacher preparation program must make possible a transformation in how students conceptualize teaching and their role as teachers.

The idea of transformation is especially relevant to this study. As Banks et al. (2005) attest, it is no longer enough to prepare future teachers to be competent in a variety of teaching skills while ensuring they have a strong content knowledge base. While these goals remain essential, students must also learn "how to examine their own cultural assumptions to understand how they shape their starting points for practice" (p. 243) and to develop the cultural skills needed to connect their instruction to a diverse student population, thereby building a more "culturally responsive practice" (p. 243).

In the early 90s, the theory of learning as transformation, known as Transformation Theory (Mezirow, 1991; 2000), was developed within the field of adult education to address the ways adult learners are able to "transform . . . taken-for-granted frames of reference. . . to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, pp. 7-8). Such an approach to learning, Mezirow explains, can result through "elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, or transforming habits of mind" (p. 19). The process of critical reflection is necessary as is imagination in that we critically examine our beliefs and points of view and then imagine "alternative interpretations of our experiences" (p. 20). This study embraces the central ideas of Transformation Theory in that teaching art within another culture necessitated a reexamination of cultural assumptions and resulted in a greater sense of cross-cultural understanding and openness toward others on the part of the participants. The process of this transformation has particular relevance regarding the recurring finding in teacher education literature "that our programs and courses may have some short term effect on changing our students' beliefs and attitudes about diversity, but our long-term influence is minimal" (Irvine, 2004, p. xiii). Transformation Theory implies a more lasting possibility.

## Research Context

Cortona is an Etruscan hillside town in Tuscany overlooking the beautiful Valdichiana. Original stone walls from the Etruscan period still exist, and many remaining buildings can be traced to medieval times. Others were built during the Renaissance. A significant collection of Etruscan artifacts is housed within one of two local museums; Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* is in the other. Several well-known artists were born in Cortona including Luca Signorelli whose frescoes in Orvieto inspired Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel; the 17$^{th}$ century painter, Pietro Berrettino (also known as Pietro da Cortona) known for his frescoes in the Pitti Palace in Florence; and the Italian futurist, Gino Severini, whose more modern *Stations of the Cross* line the students' climb along Via Margherita from the piazza below up to the University campus. The town is small and, until the success of the book *Under the Tuscan Sun* written by Frances Mayes (1998) and the subsequent Hollywood film (2003), was not on the typical tourist route. It is for these reasons, and the interest of the Cortonese people, that Cortona was selected for the University of Georgia Studies Abroad Program in Art in 1973. The program has become year-round from its initial inception as a summer program and regularly offers studio art, art history, creative writing and landscape architecture among other offerings.

In the spring of 2001, a pilot project to investigate the feasibility of offering art education was conducted (Henry, 2007). The small local elementary school, the Scuola Primaria G. Mancini di Cortona with grades 1-5, presented unique opportunities for art education students to work directly with Italian children and teachers. Although children begin learning basic English vocabulary in the early grades, English is not spoken in the elementary school. In conceiving this pilot program, several questions were raised: How problematic would language be? Could students communicate effectively through other means? How would the Italian students react to American students? What lessons could be learned that could be applied to teaching art to children who do not speak English in their future classrooms in the U.S.?

That initial project was successful, and the first art education course was offered in the fall of 2003. The course has been taught annually since that initial offering and, for the last eight years, has been taught each spring semester**.** Based on the research findings and final recommendations of the pilot project, students work in pairs to teach a month-long series of sequential art lessons at one grade level, meeting with that class for one hour per week. Informal conversations with UGA Cortona program students indicated that their immersion in a foreign culture through their work in the elementary school has had a profound impact on their personal and professional development. However, it was not known how this experience affects the art education students over time.

Through this research, we hoped to learn more about the long-term effects of the cross-cultural educational experience on the art education students and their development as teachers. How did this experience impact their learning? What issues are important when working with other cultures? What can be learned to facilitate their teaching non-English speaking students in the United States? The answers to these questions have the potential to inform other art teacher preparation programs seeking ways to address cross-cultural understanding and to prepare their students to teach in more culturally diverse environments.

## Description of the Setting

The school is a small, yellow cinderblock two-story building with a tile roof on the side of Cortona that faces the Valdichiana. A gated courtyard in front of the school provides a recess area for the children. It is a partial day school; students leave at 1:15 to go home for the day. Family is important in Italian culture, and the school's hours reflect that value. Classes meet Monday through Saturday. Each day at 1:15, parents gather at the front of the school to take their children home. With fewer than 100 children in the school population, the school typically has one class for each grade level with anywhere from 12-22 students per class. Although there are many similarities with U.S. schools, one major difference is that children progress through the grade levels with the same teacher for the entire five years, adding to the sense that the school functions as an extension of family.

Walking through the double glass doors into the lobby, the scene is reminiscent of any small school. Children's artwork and announcements line the walls. While several of the teachers know some English, Italian is the only language spoken in the school. There are also several children in the school with English or American parents; these children speak both Italian and English and often help informally with translation. There is no art teacher, but classroom teachers incorporate art experiences within their instruction, much as the case with many elementary schools in the U.S.. The program we have developed provides a more extensive art experience for the school population.

## The Teaching Experience

Once students are accepted into the Cortona Program and registered for the art education classes, they are asked to begin trying to learn basic Italian through foreign language training software programs, or conversational Italian classes before traveling to Italy. This is an

informal process, and such preparation has consistently been uneven.[3] After classes begin, students prepare for the sessions in the school through readings, discussions, and class teaching assignments. A local parent, who once studied in the Cortona program and now lives permanently in Cortona, visits the class each year to talk about the Italian school system and cultural differences to be expected in the educational experience. We also talk about ways of communicating non-verbally and the importance of developing meaningful art education content that encourages higher levels of thinking, despite the language barriers that exist.

During the first three years of the program (2003-2006), the curriculum was developed based on the National Visual Arts Standards and the Italian curriculum with the required approval of the *Direttrice*[4] of the local school district. The program has evolved each year since the beginning with adaptations as needed. In 2006, we began meeting with a translator and the lead teachers in the elementary school to identify specific interdisciplinary themes the teachers at each grade level would like addressed in the lessons. The lessons initially focused on Book Arts, as books were believed to be a universally accessible art form with relevance to the Italian children. The units for each grade were developed to address a specific theme and incorporate a different form of bookmaking. Students chose the grade level they wanted to work with and worked in teams, a strategy designed to help overcome language difficulties, to make the lessons more individual and incorporate personal strengths and interests. Once the lessons were developed, the students prepared all teaching materials, including visual charts in Italian and in-process examples. Students tried to make the verbal aspects of their lessons as clearly articulated as possible and to break the lessons down into basic components to simplify communication.

Students also made simple accordion books about themselves as a form of introduction to the Italian children, including descriptions of their families, their pets, the activities they enjoy, and something that they enjoy about Italy. These illustrated books were written totally in Italian with students utilizing basic vocabulary translation,[5] rather than total translation

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[3] Degree requirements in the School of Art do not include study in a foreign language. To require a course would possibly adversely affect enrollment. Students are now encouraged to audit the Italian class offered within the program in Cortona, and the instructor visits the class to introduce students to basic pronunciation and vocabulary and also answer questions the students have in preparation of their introductory books.

[4] The Direttrice was the major educational administrator at the elementary level in Cortona and functioned as a principal over all of the elementary schools within the district.

[5] Sites used include the vocabulary site *www.wordreference.com* (includes options for Spanish, German, and French as well as Italian) and the conjugation site *www.verbix.com* (includes 97 different languages).

Internet sites, to avoid mistranslations. The art education students then visited the school the week before they were to begin their lessons to read their books to their future students as a means of introducing themselves. This activity not only provided important practice in trying to use basic Italian for our students but created immediate interest on the part of the Italian children. Although the art education students had previously viewed a PowerPoint presentation that documented the program, this on-site visit served to further prepare our students for their new teaching environment. Then, each week for four weeks, the students provided an hour of art instruction to the children, an experience that culminated in an exhibition at the school with a reception for the children and their families. The students were responsible for the exhibition of their students' work, and required to display selected teaching resources as well as the children's books.

## Research Design

This study was a qualitative research study informed by phenomenology as it sought to understand the art education students' experience from their perspective (Mertens, 2005). We used multiple data collection methods to facilitate triangulation—participant observation during the Cortona teaching experience, questionnaires, written and oral reflections, and a purposeful sample of interviews by telephone. Individual members of the research team analyzed qualitative data from all sources through coding and categorization, and then we compared coding schemes to identify emerging themes.

### *Data Collection*

#### *The Teaching Experience from the Art Education Students' Perspective*

A one-page survey questionnaire was mailed to all 33 art education participants in June of 2006. Each participant was enrolled in the one-semester course at some point within the time period of the study. In early July, email reminders were sent to all non-responders. Twenty surveys were returned for a 61% return rate.[6] The survey consisted of five open-ended questions: 1) What do you remember most about working with the Italian children? 2) How did you communicate with or understand each other? 3) What did you learn about working

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[6] Student contact information was limited to that submitted during enrollment. Some email addresses and street addresses had changed and despite repeated attempts to locate students, some questionnaires were returned undelivered.

with students who do not speak English? 4) What did you most value about the experience? 5) Why do you think it was important?

While oral reflections in the form of class discussions had taken place immediately after the teaching sessions in each of the first two years, the 11 students participating in the program in 2006 were asked to write more structured reflections about their experience teaching in the elementary school. They were asked to address the following questions and anything else they thought was relevant: 1) What did you learn from this experience? 2) What were the most challenging aspects of this experience and why? 3) What were the most rewarding aspects of this experience? 4) What would you do differently if given this opportunity again? 5) What went well? 6) What will you apply from this experience to teaching in the United States? The reflections were an in-class assignment written after the program in the elementary school was completed.

Based on the analysis of questionnaire comments and written reflections, telephone interviews were conducted in the spring of 2010 to probe emerging themes over time. By this time, four to seven years had passed since the participants had enrolled in the studies abroad course. Attempts were made to contact all survey respondents, but student relocation and email address changes after graduation made this impossible. However, contact was made with 30% of the original survey participants (n=6), and telephone interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes and followed a basic outline script, which could allow for additional questions as responses were given. The following questions formed the basis for each interview: 1) Does the experience of teaching Italian children in Cortona continue to influence you in any way? 2) Are you teaching now? If so, please explain. Have you used any of the communication strategies you learned in Cortona? 3) What issues do you think are most important when working with students of other cultures, particularly English language learners? What suggestions do you have for working with ELL students? 4) What did you learn about yourself as a teacher from this program? What did you learn about students? Did it change your perceptions of teaching in any way? 5) Are there any implications of this experience that you think are important for teacher preparation programs?

## Findings

### *Analysis of Art Education Student Questionnaire Responses and Written Reflections 2006*

The responses to the questionnaire were compiled by question and recurring themes identified. The written reflections from 2006 were also analyzed and further validated the questionnaire responses. For example, while the questionnaire directly asked about communication and teaching non-English speakers, the reflection assignment did not; however, this topic also emerged as a major theme in the reflections.

Seven factors emerged as important within the art education students' responses: a greater sense of confidence in their teaching, increased knowledge and understanding of specific teaching practices, increased cross-cultural understanding, a clear application to working with ELLs in the U.S., the realization that art can transcend verbal language barriers, a greater awareness of communication issues, and a recognition that they also learned from the children in the classrooms.[7] Each factor will be expanded below with verbatim quotations from individual participant responses:

> 1). The experience appeared to be transformative for the art education students giving them greater confidence as future teachers:
> "I most value the confidence it gave me to teach and communicate ideas to any group." "I will never forget what I learned about teaching." "I think I will be well-prepared going into student teaching. If I can lead a class that doesn't speak English, it will be a lot easier to lead one that does."
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> 2). Students gained knowledge of effective teaching practice in differentiated instruction and teacher collaboration:
> "The experience made me take a better look at how the simplest art lesson may be taken to a greater art experience by rethinking instructional approaches." "I am now aware of how critical it is for a teacher to plan additional activities for the gifted, faster working students, as well as consider what encouragement is needed for the slower working students to complete a project." "Communication was very important, not just between the Italian students and us, but also among ourselves as collaborative teachers."
>
> 3). Students acquired greater cross-cultural understandings relevant to teaching:
> "I most valued learning about a different culture. Being able to go into the Italian school allowed us to see into the Italian culture even more so than just living in their town." "It taught me to appreciate another culture for its differences, and gave me knowledge and insights that I will be able to. . . use in my own classroom."
>
> 4). Students' awareness of application to teaching English language learners included an awareness of the importance of trying to use the students' language, of using gestures, facial expression, and body language, of incorporating dramatic performance

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[7] These factors were initially reported by the authors (Henry, C. & Costantino, T.) at the *4th International Conference on Imagination and Education* in Vancouver, BC. (Visual Art as Cultural Mediator, 2006).

to communicate meaning, and of developing close relationships and a sense of rapport with students:
"I learned that it is quite possible to get through to students who do not speak your language. Through demonstration, body language, exemplars, and anything visual, a teacher can get a concept across. Showing a student that you're trying to learn his/her language is important in developing a connection with the student."

5). Students recognized the importance of art as a common visual language to facilitate communication:
"I learned that despite our language and cultural differences, the students were able to work well with our demonstrations. . . I feel the subject of art is universal and bridges any sort of language or cultural gap." "Art allows for communication other than and beyond spoken words." "Words aren't always necessary. Color is color. Form is form, and line is line."

6). Students gained greater insights into communication issues:
"Communication by language was difficult but demonstration and body language seemed to work best. I think this proves how important demonstration in the art room is." "I taught with emotion and excitement, and. . . was especially expressionistic . . . " "I remember their patience with my minimal language skills and their polite and enthusiastic willingness to help me. . ."

7). Students became more aware of the potential for cooperative learning where the children helped teach one another and helped the art education students with their language difficulties:
"Even though we were their teachers for those days, we almost couldn't help being their students as well." "They were young, eager and excited. And with every lesson I taught them, I learned just as much."

### *Analysis of Follow-Up Interviews 2010*

We were interested in seeing how this experience impacted the participants over time and conducted follow-up interviews with survey respondents in 2010. All interviews were conducted via telephone and were tape-recorded with the respondents' consent. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes. Six major themes emerged particular to this study: the most significant one being that teaching art to the Italian children was a meaningful and lasting experience that transferred into other contexts. The other themes included: 1) a realization of the importance of understanding students' culture, 2) an awareness of the complexity and necessity of preparing instruction and engaging learners, 3) a recognition of the importance of alternate forms of communication, 4) the

necessity of creating a warm, safe learning environment; and 5) an increased confidence in their role as educators. Each of these themes will be discussed briefly below.

*A Meaningful and Lasting Experience that Transferred into Other Contexts*

The interview participants represented a range of career goals and geographic locations. Two had subsequently studied museum education and worked with special populations in museum programming in major cities in the Northeast, two others earned masters degrees in art education and were education coordinators for community art centers in the Southeast, one had been an elementary art teacher in Georgia and now teaches art at a school for refugee children in the U.S., and another was in a teaching program as part of his MFA work in New York, preparing to teach at the college level. They each expressed similar thoughts in that the experience was still meaningful to them:

"It shaped the way I approached teaching ... having those instances to relate back to, to pull from…" "It was influential in what I decided to study in graduate school." "It helped me revisit the lesson plans that I had been doing with different community programs." "I gained a skill set that I could use—in those instances [with ELL students] in the U.S.—that maybe I wouldn't have gotten otherwise."

*Importance of Understanding Students' Culture*

This experience was unique in that the art education students were immersed within the Italian culture in a way that took them out of their normal 'comfort zone' and challenged their ability to be effective in the classroom in a very direct and immediate way. The experience of teaching within another culture was especially meaningful and provided valuable insights that the participants discussed in depth:

"It's important to make an effort to learn about the culture so the people you are trying to teach have the understanding that you're not just trying to teach them something, you're also trying to learn-it's a form of respect." "Even though the students were part of a culture that I was not a part of, I felt like eventually –through them-I was able to become a part of the culture." "I learned that we live in a multicultural society and we must interact with diversity in a competent and respectful way. . .[teachers need to] understand how cultures differ and how this affects the ways in which their students learn and even behave."

*Awareness of the Complexity and Necessity of Preparing Instruction and Engaging Learners*

Participants spoke in depth about the degree of preparation that was required as well as the effort and energy needed to engage learners, not only in the experience in Italy but in teaching in general:

"It takes more effort than you initially think--learning about the culture, and learning about the language and where your students are coming from." "I had thought that with teaching you just would give these instructions and then the kids would run away with it." "I realized how detailed teachers had to be . . . writing out explicit goals and questions or prompts to reach these goals." "Teaching is pretty hard, actually. . . teaching is challenging, but it can be really rewarding. . . More rewarding than most things you ever do." These observations were rooted in the students' experience in Cortona and provided an important foundational awareness for subsequent teaching experiences in the U.S..

*Importance of Alternate Forms of Communication*

One of the most important discoveries was the realization that multiple forms of communication were not only possible, but crucial, especially when working with non-English speaking students. We delineated five categories of alternate means of communication:

> 1) Art as universal language - "What I took out of it was the ability to teach art despite language barriers, and art as a sort of universal language."
>
> 2) Acting/performing - "I felt like I was playing charades half the time because there is a lot of acting you have to do… if you're trying to convey a concept sometimes you just have to put yourself in the students' shoes and act it out."
>
> 3) Body language, gestures - "Body language, and all the forms of communication you do have is so important. It magnifies the modes of communication outside of language… like imagine teaching without your voice, how could you teach?"
>
> 4) Eye level; face-to-face - "Being face-to-face with the students, not being over them while they're working, but at eye-level."
>
> 5) Visual resources - "I've been communicating more in a visual manner… I know that's the only way a lot of the students in Cortona could understand so I feel like I emphasize visual aids a lot more now."

As the participants sought to communicate the content of their lessons to the Italian children on a daily basis, these alternate means of communication became ingrained in their practice and are part of how they engage their students today.

*Creating a Warm, Safe Environment*

Entering a classroom in another culture where the spoken language was not their own made the art education students acutely aware, on a personal level, of how it felt to be the "other"--the person who does not communicate in the dominant language and helped them see the importance of creating a warm, safe learning environment to help transcend those linguistic barriers:

"We tried to create a warm environment that had nothing to do with language." This realization made a lasting impression as evidenced in comments describing their current efforts to create warm, non-threatening learning environments, particularly for non-English speaking students. "Making sure that when people are entering a real life situation and they are talking about things in the language that's not their first language, that you just have to make them feel comfortable with making mistakes and not getting it perfectly so they still feel like they can communicate their ideas-without being afraid the language aspect is going to get in the way."

*Increased Confidence in Their Role as Educators*

Being able to successfully teach the Italian children despite the differences in culture and language led to greater awareness of their own potential as teachers:

"You learn more about yourself as you teach." "If I could teach somebody who didn't speak a language I spoke, I could definitely teach students who spoke the same language I do." "Figuring out the way to communicate what you are trying to communicate--having that experience with the kids gave me confidence in working with other audiences that may not be as easy or seem as easy to work with."

*Implications for Teacher Preparation*

The art education participants also discussed how they thought teacher preparation programs could better prepare students for teaching in more culturally diverse educational settings. They emphasized the importance of teaching experiences in actual classrooms early in the art education program. They emphasized the value of learning about different instructional strategies for working with diverse populations. As would be expected, they strongly believed that students should be exposed to culturally diverse populations, and that the process of reflection, similar to their weekly reflections in Cortona, should be integrated throughout the program.

## Conclusion

The need for teacher preparation programs in all content areas to provide greater emphasis on developing the communication skills and the confidence needed to work successfully with ELLs is underscored by the National Council for Education Statistics' finding that meeting the

needs of students with limited English proficiency is the area of professional development "in which teachers are least likely to participate" (McKeon, 2005, n. p.). In a more recent article by Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez (2011), the authors review existing program models and conclude that "schools must address the language, literacy, and academic needs of English learners more effectively" and that "the quality of instruction is what matters most" (p. 103) in successful programs. They emphasize that considerable effort and funding will be necessary "to retool all educators through comprehensive professional development" (p. 119). A recent study conducted by Greer (2010) found that respondents in a national survey of elementary art teachers communicated challenges in working with ELLs related to their teacher preparation. The art education students we interviewed, now educators in the U.S. in schools and community art centers, have since had numerous opportunities to apply what they learned in their experience teaching art to the Italian children; they now have these reflected on experiences to draw upon as they work to reach a more diverse population.

The study presented here demonstrates the value of immersing preservice art teachers in structured educational experiences providing them the opportunity to interact with students of other cultures within a studies abroad program. Merryfield (2000), known for her work in global and international education, writes that this "personalized experience of what if feels like to live as the other" (p. 434), either in face-to-face international experiences or through simulated experiences via the internet (Merryfield, 2003), is an important component in teaching for greater cultural understanding. The nature of the program necessitated the art education students becoming "the other" and experiencing first hand what it is like to enter into another culture and not understand the language spoken, an anxiety inducing situation many immigrant children face each day in the U.S. (Miller & Endo, 2004).

While it is not feasible to expect all preservice programs to provide such immersive opportunities as described within this study, the results demonstrate that participation in studies abroad opportunities that incorporate teaching experiences can contribute to greater cultural sensitivity and understanding as well as increased confidence in teaching others, including ELL students. Our recommendation is that opportunities be sought within local communities for preservice teachers to interact with immigrant populations, to learn to engage those populations through a range of communicative strategies and instruction that allows for intellectual and emotional response and collaboration, and to integrate critical reflection on these experiences throughout the program. We believe that actual experience rather than readings and class discussions alone are essential for, as Munby, Russell, and Martin (2001) explain, "The overwhelming evidence of a decade of research on teacher knowledge is that knowledge is acquired and developed by the personal experience of teaching" (p. 897).

Our hope is that all preservice teacher programs can more consciously address the realities of working with diverse populations in the U.S. and that, in particular, the role of art instruction as a component of effective, engaging instruction for students with limited English proficiency, be a part of that preparation. As Latta and Chan (2011) explain, engaging in artistic ways of thinking allows ELLs to learn "in ways that support, nurture, and develop proficiency" (p. 65) in English acquisition. Such experiences during teacher preparation will help ensure a better education not only for ELLs but for our future teachers as well.

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**About the Authors**

Carole Henry, Ed.D., is a Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor of Art and Chair of Art Education at the Lamar Dodd School of Art, The University of Georgia in Athens, GA. She authored *The Museum Experience: The Discovery of Meaning*, published by the National Art Education Association (NAEA) in 2010 and chaired the revision of the NAEA *Standards for Art Teacher Preparation* and the *Professional Standards for Visual Arts Educators* (2009). She has long been interested in the field of art and museum education and has numerous published articles addressing the art museum as an educational site. In 2009, she served as an international art education consultant for the development of standards-based reform for teacher preparation in Egypt under the auspices of USAID. Prior to joining the faculty at the University of Georgia, she taught art in public schools for 14 years, primarily at the middle school level. In 2006, she was named an NAEA Distinguished Fellow.

Tracie Costantino, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Art Education at the University of Georgia. She received her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction, focusing on aesthetic education, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on the nature of cognition in the arts, creativity, and the transformative potential of aesthetic experience as an educative event. In addition to numerous published articles and book chapters, recent work related to the transformative potential of aesthetic experience was published in the book Costantino co-edited with Boyd White, *Essays on Aesthetic Education for the 21st Century* (Sense Publishers, 2010). Her second co-edited book with Boyd White, *Aesthetics, Empathy, and Education* (2013), was published by Peter Lang.

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