

# How does international student teaching shape the participants? Professional and personal perspectives and decisions

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*For valid educational and cultural reasons, many teacher education institutions promote or allow some pre-service teachers to complete their student teaching experiences in a different country. A select, but growing body of literature suggests positive outcomes of these unique international placements. This study extends and refines the data on the impact of overseas student teachers on those who student-taught overseas as part of an undergraduate teacher licensure program. Data collected through surveys and a focus group of alumni from one higher education institution in the US reveal the impact of these international experiences. This impact extends in several directions: professional decisions, extracurricular choices, and personal and professional cultural perspectives. Implications of these findings suggest that these types of cross-cultural experiences can support the preparation of new teachers for the increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students in P-12 public schools.*

*Keywords: study abroad; international student teaching; international internships; higher education; globalization; teacher education*

## INTRODUCTION

Schools and departments of education are constantly seeking to improve their teacher licensure programs in order to better prepare new teachers for P-12 classrooms. Stronger accountability placed on higher education institutions based on state testing programs and national initiatives often lead to more standardization of teacher education and may constrain novel approaches (Mahon, 2007). Cross cultural experiences and study abroad programs offer opportunities for teacher candidates to develop their skills. Allowing some student teachers to complete this final, student teaching practicum in another country is one such approach that may come under increased scrutiny in the US due to the adoption by many states of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the implementation of the Teacher Performance Assessment Consortia (TPAC), better known as the edTPA.

The survival of these global programs may be augmented by research on their efficacy. This paper describes an effort to do so through research on the impact of overseas student teaching on undergraduate participants. A brief history and rationale of overseas student teaching will provide a foundation for this relatively recent alternative. The study is further contextualized with descriptions of one institution's program that has sent student teachers abroad for 20 years. The research involved a survey of individual alumnae (alumnus) from this teacher education program who student-taught overseas between 1997 and 2010, as detailed in the methodology section of

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this paper. The results section describes four major areas of impact that emerged as themes from the qualitative and descriptive data set, namely the impact on professional decisions, extracurricular choices, as well as personal and professional cultural perspectives. The discussion that follows explores these possible impacts in light of the sample, context, and in comparison with studies conducted by others. The study concludes with some recommendations to shape the direction of future research and to encourage other teacher educators in support of overseas student teaching.

## **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Finding quality, suitable student teaching placements can be a challenge for many teacher education programs and is often influenced by factors such as geography, population density, and partnerships with K-12 institutions. Historically, student teaching was typically confined to local schools and nearby metropolitan communities. However, as Baker (2000) notes, the mid-twentieth century establishment of UNESCO's support of international exchanges in education, the Fulbright Program for faculty exchanges, and the Peace Corps for volunteers opened the way for colleges and universities in the US to consider and encourage study abroad programs.

Following the inception of these programs, the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) was formed in 1972 through the collaboration of a number of universities located primarily in the Midwest (Quezada, 2004). A similar consortium developed 20 years later, established by eight, faith-based colleges and universities (Greenhalgh & Harvey, 1998). To date, each one of these consortia has placed over 1,000 student teachers around the world (Interaction International, 2012; Kent State University, 2012). Examples of other consortia include California State University system's International Teacher Education Program and a long-term collaboration among Indiana University, Northern Illinois University and Central Michigan University (Quezada, 2011). A growing number of higher education institutions, 74 of 409 (18%), as surveyed by Mahon (2010), provide opportunities for student teaching internationally and, in the decade from 1997-2007, individual participation in study abroad programs offered by higher education institutions in the US increased by 143% (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2010). However, growth for student teaching abroad is somewhat restrained by state certification or licensure laws which prohibit student teaching overseas in 27 of the states in the US (Mahon, 2010).

In light of changing demographics and the need to prepare teachers for diverse settings, many organizations call on colleges and universities to seriously consider expanding study abroad programs. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) produced a research report that concluded study abroad programs was one of the best ways for prospective teachers to gain international experience (Germain, 1998). This view was supported by the *Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Act*, which was approved by the House of Representatives in 2007 (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2012). While the Bill later died in the US Senate, it did stimulate further discussion on the value of a global experience for an increase in student engagement with diversity. More recently, the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) has clearly articulated this value in the candidate proficiencies expected in its accreditation standards, including: "a commitment to deepening awareness and understanding the strengths and needs of diverse learners when planning and adjusting instruction that incorporates the histories, experiences, and representations of students and families from diverse populations" (CAEP, 2013, p. 22).

Teacher education programs and consortia posit numerous reasons why these global, cross-cultural, student teaching experiences are encouraged and valued. According to the objectives of the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) program (Kent State University, 2012), these experiences allow international student teachers to:

*... gain non-U.S. perspectives on world events; gain appreciation of the differences in family life between the U.S. and the host country, all through participation in a host-family community setting; teach in a bicultural and/or bilingual setting; clarify one's position as a U.S. citizen by experiencing life in a different social and cultural milieu; and, consider ways to bring an international perspective back to their classroom in the United States" (para. 4).*

Similar benefits and impacts are touted by other overseas student teaching consortia, such as Interaction International (2012), EducatorsAbroad *Student Teaching* (2014) and by individual colleges (Jongewaard & Swanson, 2005; Wheaton College, 2014). However, these claims are not always substantiated or supported by the available evidence. An overview of the available pertinent literature yields three broad spheres of impact pertinent to this study: professional, personal, and cultural, with this last sphere overlapping both professional and personal arenas.

In the area of professional competence, Quezada (2004) found instructional pedagogy to be a major theme in his analysis of the literature on the impact of student teaching abroad. The ability to be resourceful with limited materials and the growth in flexibility were identified as examples of professional impact on early teaching experiences (Bryan & Sprague, 1997). Another study by Quezada (2011), pointed to self-monitoring as a source of improvement of instructional practices. While these professional skills and characteristics can certainly be developed in public schools located near many teacher education programs, it appears that international placements may afford the opportunities for substantial growth in these areas, due to the nature of extended, immersion experiences in contexts quite different than one's native home.

Personal growth is often difficult to assess, but several studies point to increased self-efficacy and gains in confidence as a result of student teaching overseas (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Lee, 2001; Quezada, 2004; Willard-Holt, 2001). Cultural perspectives reflect personal knowledge and values and may impact professional competencies. Numerous studies highlight the cultural impact of these international immersion experiences. Specifically, they have been found to improve cultural competence (Cushner & Brennan, 2007), develop world citizens and globally competent professional educators (Quezada, 2011), raise global awareness and perspective (Doppen, 2010; Lee, 2011; Wilson, 1982), increase cross cultural understanding (Stachowski & Sparks, 2007), and those who student teach overseas are rated by Iowa principals as having an expanded world view and a higher level of respect for diverse cultures (Gilson & Matson, 2010).

Many educators, therefore, promote student teaching overseas based on these benefits (Baker & Giacchino-Baker, 2000; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Lee, 2011; Lupi & Batey, 2009; Mahon, 2007; Quezada, 2004; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). However, overseas student teaching programs, including this author's, often rely on anecdotal evidence of the impact of this international experience on participating students. The paucity of evidence of the long-term impact motivated this particular study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Purpose**

Few teacher education research studies are longitudinal in nature (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), and even fewer have been conducted with those who completed student teaching overseas (Mahon & Cushner, 2007). After 15 years of coordinating an overseas student teaching program and, under the leadership of the author, a group of interested undergraduate students gathered to explore questions regarding the long-term effectiveness of this experience. Through exposure to relevant literature and previous studies, our questions slowly evolved from general program effectiveness to a focus on the impact of overseas student teaching on the participating student teachers. More specifically, we wanted to examine any possible impact by trying to capture whether this experience may have resulted in significant changes in the participating student teachers and, if so, in what direction(s).

### **Participants**

From 1997 through 2010, 46 student teachers completed their student teaching placement in international, cross-cultural settings. These students were enrolled in a teacher certification program at a small, liberal arts, historically faith-based college. Ten percent of the student body were students of colour in 1997; today, the percentage has grown to 20%. Financial aid is based primarily on financial need and admissions are selective. All international student teachers were in the final year of their licensure programs and had completed other required practica prior to student teaching, the final internship. Of the 46 participants, 25 (54%) were completing elementary education certification (grades K-8), while 21 (46%) completed certification for a secondary discipline (grades 6-12), including special programs, such as music education or foreign language (grades K-12). In terms of gender, 36 (78%) and 10 (22%) were males, reflecting the current gender imbalance existing in teacher education in both the institution's teacher education program and the US as a nation (National Education Association, 2010). Four (9%) are categorized as minority students. This substantiates the disproportionately lower rates of participation by minority students described by Stroud (2010). The cost of student teaching internationally is similar to the cost of student teaching near the main campus. Lower room and board expenses generally offset the additional cost of international travel. Therefore, it would be hard to argue that more wealthy students are advantaged in participation in this international program. The participants originated from many regions of the US; one participant is categorised as a Third Culture Kid (TCK), due to growing up overseas while possessing a US passport.

It would be natural to assume that pre-service teacher candidates interested in student teaching abroad might self select based on previous international experiences. Surprisingly, 46% of the respondents self reported they had no or little previous cross-cultural experience, 30% reported moderate cross-cultural experience, and only 25% reported high-moderate to extensive cross-cultural experience prior to student teaching overseas. However, student teaching abroad requires an additional application, interviews, recommendations, so may draw students who possess more initiative. In addition, those provisionally accepted for international placements were required to attend an intense, three-day orientation the semester prior to student teaching.

### **International student teaching contexts**

All but four of the overseas student teachers completed the student teaching practicum in the fall semester, beginning the experience in August. The other four began student teaching in the second

academic semester, starting in January. Student teaching follows a four-week methods' practicum completed in the US at schools near the college. The student teaching practicum extended for a minimum of 12 weeks for all but one student, who left the host African country one week early for safety reasons after a military coup. This length of time overseas may be notable due to the fact that only 38% of the college/university undergraduate students who study abroad participate in semester-long programs, with the majority participating for fewer than eight weeks (Institute of International Education, 2007). Stroud (2010) suggests, "programs of longer duration provide better opportunities for language acquisition and deeper immersion in the culture" (p. 494). Additionally, a limitation of many study abroad programs is they often shelter or segregate the group of participating students through their configuration (Allen, 2010), contrasting with the experiences of individual student teachers abroad. Housing was arranged by each student through communication with the contact person at the host school and varied from dorm rooms on campus to separate or shared apartments to homes with national families.

During the span of the participation of student teachers in this study (1997-2010), 21 different countries hosted the 46 student teachers, with two different schools in Ecuador hosting nine student teachers, followed by schools in Senegal and Ivory Coast each hosting five student teachers. Eighteen different individual countries each hosted one to three student teachers, including Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, Cameroon, Germany, Austria, France, Brussels, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, and India. Historically, many US teacher education programs sent student teachers to national schools in English-speaking countries, such as Australia, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland and South Africa (Quezada, 2004). In contrast, this program places individual student teachers in accredited international schools, regardless of the national language or location, as the English language is the medium used for instruction in these schools. The school curriculum is similar to that used in the US, however, many of the K-12 students enrolled in these international schools carry passports from other countries. For instance, a class of 15 may have students representing 10 different countries of origin, requiring teachers to consider the English Language Learning (ELL) needs of their students and the cultural differences that may impact conceptual understanding.

Not surprisingly, individual school experiences varied widely. All international schools represented in this study are tuition based. A number of schools offer dorms for boarding students while others are exclusive to commuting students. Some are dominated by the children of nationals while others require a different passport than the host country in order to attend. These various contextual features, combined with the wide range of educational training and experiences of individual teacher mentors, leads to unique student teaching experiences. For example, a student teacher in Indonesia, sharing a home in the rain forest, teaching a class of 12 second graders from 10 different passport countries has a different set of experiences than a student teacher in Paris, living in an apartment, teaching several high school English classes with at least 20 students each.

### **Data collection**

The primary source of data was a thirty-item survey (see Appendix), created by using relevant questions emerging from the literature, adapting questions from several instruments used for similar purposes in other studies, and supplemented by questions based on the interests of the undergraduate study group. While some survey questions included multiple choices, most were open-ended and invited participants' explanations. SurveyMonkey provided the vehicle to distribute the survey via email. To increase validity for this qualitative approach, the survey was piloted with overseas student teachers from 2011. Additional data were collected through a three-

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hour, focus group interview with all five recently returned overseas student teachers. This cohort of international student teachers did not complete the survey, but met as a group to process their experience. Ancillary data was gathered from notes from semi-structured, post student teaching exit interviews conducted with each individual overseas student teacher over the years covered by the survey. This triangulation of these data sources increased validity. Of the 46 alumni who student-taught overseas from 1997-2010, 44 (96%) completed and returned the extensive on-line survey, representing a high degree of commitment or interest in this program and the people who support it.

### **Data analysis**

The data collected through the survey yielded extensive descriptive written responses. The analysis of this primary source data was conducted using an inductive coding system with categorizing strategies (Maxwell, 2005). This bottom-up approach focused on the specific comments of participants, then categorizing the responses into themes, which led to broader generalizations. Internal validity of potential themes was enhanced by regular discussions and cross checks with and among the researchers analysing these rich data. Emerging themes were compared with those of a focus group of five recent overseas student teachers described above and to individual post-program questionnaires completed by each participant within a month of returning from student teaching abroad. This helped increase respondent validation and reduced the risk of systemic biases (Maxwell, 2005).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the 44 valid survey responses received through SurveyMonkey (96% response rate) resulted in themes that emerged in four arenas: professional decisions, extracurricular choices, personal cultural perspectives, and professional cultural perspectives.

### **Professional decisions**

Professional decisions stem from the employment that followed within two years of overseas student teaching. A question raised by potential overseas student teachers is whether this international experience will limit classroom teaching employment options upon completion of all certification requirements. Of the 44 respondents, 39 (89%) were hired as a teacher within two years of graduation. This compared favourably with recent institutional data, displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Annual hiring rates of all teacher candidates**

<b>Graduation Class of Teacher Candidates</b>	<b>Percentage of those employed in education one year after graduation</b>
2010	90%
2011	91%
2012	89%
2013	93%
2014	84%

Source: (WheTEACH, 2015)

Student teaching overseas, therefore, 1) does not necessarily discourage participants from continuing their career path toward teaching, and 2) does not seem to deter new teacher applicants from being hired after student teaching overseas. This latter point supports the findings of Gilson and Martin (2010) based on the perspectives of Iowa school administrators in their hiring practices.

Comments by the respondents included clear statements of the professional impact of this overseas student teaching experience (pseudonyms are used for the names of participants). Toni wrote: “it definitely made me a more desirable candidate in the teaching field and no doubt helped me get my first job teaching in a public high school.” Sara concluded: “I graduated feeling very prepared for my career field and life because of my experience student teaching overseas.”

In terms of their interest in education as a profession, 75% of the respondents claimed student teaching overseas had a significant or strong impact on this interest. While we have no comparative data from those not student teaching overseas, it is clear that the student teaching experience strongly impacts the participants as future educators (NCATE, 2010).

After graduation, 85% of the overseas student teachers either taught in cross-cultural settings in the US or went overseas to teach. While these data will be unpacked further when discussing cultural perspectives, this is a relatively high percentage of graduates involved in global or cross-cultural settings. However, it may also be reflective of an increasingly diverse school population in K-12 schools.

### **Extracurricular choices**

In an integrated, non-compartmentalized world, it is difficult to distinguish professional decisions from extracurricular choices. It is even more difficult to ferret out differences between extracurricular choices and cultural impacts, since most of the extracurricular choices relate to engagement in or with other cultures. How would one discern the extent of the influence of one’s existing cultural perspectives on later decisions and activities? In this study, students who completed international student teaching had similar cross-cultural experiences to those who student taught in domestic settings. In spite of this complexity, extracurricular choices emerged as a relevant theme based on reported activities and decisions: activities deliberately chosen by alumni and decisions related to volunteer efforts, employment contexts and cross-cultural activities.

Survey data indicate that 81% of the alumni respondents either volunteered or worked in cross-cultural settings since student teaching. Of these, 63% stated the setting was an international context, while 28% were involved in cross-cultural settings exclusively in the US and the remaining 9% did so in both international and US settings. Further analysis reveals these cross-cultural settings include low-income schools, linguistically and racially diverse schools, international schools, volunteer service projects, and mission trips. Respondents described a number of their activities regarding engagement with the home (US) culture, including choosing to live in a culturally diverse area, seeking opportunities to volunteer in an effort to address social justice issues, using Spanish to communicate with immigrants, serving refugees or international students, and noting the impact of international political decisions. Grant describes this in detail:

*We talk about our travels, what’s going on in the world, NGO’s, poverty, etc., perhaps more than people who haven’t worked overseas. We like to support overseas ministries and relief and development efforts. We care about fair trade and try to “vote” with our dollars. Our home reflects the fact that our lives have been impacted by time overseas just by the decorations, maps, souvenirs, etc.*

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Another extracurricular choice involves continued contact with people met while student teaching overseas. One survey question inquired about these interactions and we found that 68.3% of the respondents continue to keep in contact with one or more people met during the international student teaching experience. Of those, over half (35% of all respondents) state they regularly keep in contact with four or more people met while student teaching overseas. While we were unable to disaggregate the data by date, ascertaining how time may correlate with ongoing communication, we do have evidence of at least one participant who later married a national met during student teaching in South America.

While this study did not have comparison data from a similar group of alumni not student-teaching overseas, these findings do nothing to weaken the results of other studies that suggest students involved in these types of international placements are more likely to be involved in international or cross-cultural activities and are more aware of global and cross cultural issues (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Doppin, 2010; Greenhalgh & Harvey, 1998; Haines, 2012; Lee, 2011).

### **Cultural perspectives**

As a general construct, culture permeates all aspects of our lives. Those who are immersed in a world unlike their home or native culture often face cultural dissonance, despite preparation through cross-cultural workshops, books, and conversations. The extent or impact of these experiences is modified by one's previous experiences, the length of time immersed in the new culture, the availability of support when negotiating a different culture, and the profound nature of the variance between cultures. This study seems to point toward two areas of cultural impacts: one's personal cultural perspective, which tends to include psychological phenomena, and one's global cultural perspective, which looks beyond the individual participant in overseas student teaching.

### **Personal cultural perspectives**

When describing the impact of overseas student teaching, more than one-third of the respondents mentioned gains in personal confidence and independence. Living away from family, friends, and traditional support groups forced the international student teachers to rely on their own resourcefulness, develop practical skills, and make independent decisions. Kaitlynn's response, typical of many, was:

*The biggest challenge was probably learning to live on my own. I needed to learn how to cook in order to feed myself (there was not a Subway). I needed to learn a bit of French so that I could take the taxi to and from school every day. I needed to budget out how much money I was spending on rent (and expensive phone calls back to the States) and other expenses so that I did not run out of money in Cameroon.*

These growth opportunities may have been tempered by a wide range of housing arrangements available to student teachers as well as the growing ease and availability of international communication. Some lived in comfortable homes of teachers from the US while others lived alone or in the typical home of a national, perhaps with limited utilities. The experience of those who student-taught overseas in 1997 is also much different, in terms of communication with family, friends, and professors back home, than what is experienced by more recent overseas student teachers. Technological advances alter communication patterns in frequency and in kind, with the ease of Skype/Facetime-type conversations. These can temper student immersion in a different



culture, but can also provide support in the midst of cultural conflicts. Nevertheless, respondents from across the years alluded to learning much about themselves through regular interactions with people in these different cultures. Whitney summarized this nicely: “If you knew me, you would find it surprising that I was willing to leave my comfort zone to do something like this. The experience helped me grow in ‘good’ independence and understand the ‘good’ dependence on family.”

This theme supports finding from earlier studies, such as one by Lupi and Batey (2009) on students from Florida who completed internships overseas. Participants deepened in their understanding of their own and other cultures. This extends to linguistic challenges and an appreciation of the value of other languages, as noted in the research of Kissock (1997). Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue persuasively that student teaching and other educational internships should take place in diverse contexts, with culturally responsive teachers. As noted by other researchers, cultural competence is enhanced by this type of immersion experience (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007).

### **Professional cultural perspectives**

As noted earlier, changes in cultural and global perspectives are most often highlighted in research of the impact of study abroad programs (Germain, 1998). McKeown (2009) concludes that study abroad programs lead to profound value changes due to cross-cultural engagement. The analysis of the responses to this survey substantiates these findings. Student teaching overseas was an “eye-opening” experience as it opens “your mind to the vastness of the world and the opportunities out there.” Another overseas student teacher claimed to gain “new insight into the depth and variety of cultural differences [that] are out there.” These new cultural and global insights seem to lead to a higher interest and engagement in global issues. This was stated clearly by Grace: “It has made me more world conscious and caused me to desire to be more informed about the various goings on throughout the world.” Additionally, Henri reflected:

*Student teaching overseas offers you a peek into education at a global level and inspires a student teacher to return to the U.S. and seek to diversify the current education system: through the teaching and raising awareness of different cultures, philosophies, ideas, and correcting biases, whether by word or action.”*

This deeper global perspective gained by student teaching overseas seems to influence the other themes already described. It influences one’s professional decisions of where and in what kind of context one teaches. Choices of extracurricular involvements reflect this cultural perspective. And one’s sense of self, in relation to others, is also affected: “I am very sensitive when people try to criticize less developed countries when they don’t understand the root of their struggles or what they have achieved in overcoming these difficulties.” The comprehensive impact of cultural perspectives is difficult to parse, but the broad impact seems to be evident in the behaviour of past overseas student teachers, as evident in Lynnette’s reflection:

*I think spending the semester teaching overseas was the best decision I could have ever made. I learned way more than another other semester that I spent at [my college]. It taught me so much about myself, stretched me in new ways because I was thrown into a completely new environment where I knew no one, and it gave me another great view of an educational system. It helped me learn to ask questions and to realize that even if it was hard, it would get easier and it meant I was learning something. Most importantly, I think it prepared me to*

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*stand on my own two feet and to leave [college] ready to use everything I had learned.”*

### **Other themes**

Survey respondents did include other details about the experience, but they were unique or did not easily coalesce into a theme. Some were specifically positive, such as finding one’s life partner in the process of international student teaching, something experienced by two participants. Other comments were negative, including working with a weak teacher mentor, struggling with language barriers or safety concerns, or living in a challenging context. While the negative comments were few in number, they most often related to cross-cultural challenges. For example, a few students articulated a frustration with the lack of cross-cultural engagement by other teachers at the school. They noted that short-term teachers spent free time with other teachers and were less likely to mix with nationals. As these were infrequent responses in comparison with the frequency of other responses, they did not lead to additional themes.

### **Limitations**

In considering the findings of this study, a number of limitations must be clearly noted. Due to the characteristics of a specific population in time and place, and enrolled in a particular institution, external generalizability is obviously limited. Limited comparative data additionally restrict interpretation. Reliance on too much inference can lead to unwarranted conclusions. The methodology employed has hopefully reduced inaccurate conclusions.

Additionally, the researcher is the one who coordinates the international student teaching program, which can lead to bias on the part of the researcher, as well as possibly influence the responses of the survey participants, all of whom worked with the researcher while enrolled in the program. In an effort to reduce bias in the questions, many open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, student researchers who were unfamiliar with the survey participants analysed and coded the responses. The SurveyMonkey tools did keep the individual responses anonymous. While familiarity with the researcher dramatically increased the response rate, it may be argued that it also makes it more difficult to reduce bias.

The nature of self-report bias also lends to scepticism in the responses. Are the responses of the overseas student teachers their *perceptions* or are they their *beliefs* about what happened during and after student teaching abroad? How do their perceptions reflect the reality of their experiences? How have their perceptions of reality been tempered over time? How are participants in this program inherently different than those who do not opt for an international placement?

The wide range of years (1997-2010) can also skew responses, influenced by the year and location of the student teaching. Due to issues of confidentiality, responses were not disaggregated by graduation year. Therefore, it was not possible to compare the responses of earlier alumni with that of recent alumni. In spite of these caveats and cautions, it bears restating that high survey response rate (96%) ensures that the data provide a robust view of *these* overseas student teaching experiences and suggests how these international student teaching experiences may continue to influence the participants after some years.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

A study like this often leads to more questions than provides answers. Based on the current research in this area, including the contributions of this study, the following three recommendations are suggested:

- 1) Higher education institutions with study abroad programs, particularly those with teacher preparation programs, should engage in systematic and ongoing formal data collection and the assessment of these international programs, based on their various purposes or claims. Much anecdotal evidence is available regarding student reflections, but comprehensive assessment approaches are required to validly confirm the claims of many programs. For example, thorough surveys of participants, both before and after the experience, may yield data for program improvements and capture short-term impacts. Exit interviews and focus groups may help clarify information and also aid in students' processing of the experience. And longitudinal studies may help capture impacts and behaviours not readily measured immediately following student teaching overseas.
- 2) Related to these assessment schemes, it is also important to research the impact of the explosion of social media on the effects of these international experiences. Students may be physically present in a diverse culture, but so connected to their home culture that the impact of the "immersion" experience is significantly muted. Are there significant differences in the impact on students involved in these programs who have unplugged from social media versus those daily using their smartphones and internet to simultaneously relate to their friends on Facebook, Instagram, or followers on Twitter? In the case of this study, we were unable to make this distinction, and this is an important arena needing further study.
- 3) One additional recommendation is to explore how preparatory activities, training, and orientations, coupled with post-international student teaching debriefing and processing, influences the actual short and long-term impact of this semester abroad. In addition to one-on-one advising, students included in this study each attended an extensive, three-day orientation prior to student teaching overseas. Afterwards each participated in an individual debriefing session, participated as a group in further discussions, and submitted written reflections of the experience. How do these pre and post student teaching experiences shape expectations and the impact of student teaching overseas? Not all overseas student teachers have similar intensive preparatory or formal debriefing activities. Allen (2010) posits that curricular intervention in study abroad programs and student responses to student teaching internationally are likely shaped by the quality of these types of interventions.

This study suggests that over a fourteen-year period, those involved in student teaching overseas through one institution were, even after several years, impacted in multiple ways by this experience. While more questions for research are suggested, four impact trajectories emerged from the rich survey responses of the participants: 1) professional decisions; 2) extracurricular choices; 3) personal cultural perspectives; and 4) professional cultural perspectives. These influences suggest that cross-cultural, extended, immersion experiences, such as student teaching abroad, may help better prepare teacher candidates for the linguistically and culturally diverse students enrolled in K-12 schools today.

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## APPENDIX

### International Student Teaching Survey

#### Background

1. What kind of personal experience(s) did you have with other cultures outside of the U.S. prior to your overseas student teaching semester?
2. What was the most significant challenge you faced while student teaching overseas? Were you able to meet or overcome that challenge? How?

#### Employment

3. Were you hired as a teacher within two years of your graduation from college? (If yes, please answer questions #4 & 5, then skip to #8. If no, answer # 6 & 7)
4. If Yes, what kind of school? (Public? Private? Charter? Other?)  
Location? (City, State, Country) For how many years?
5. Do you currently hold a teaching position? If not, why did you leave?
6. If you answered “no” to # 3, what might be the possible reason(s)?
7. Do you intend to look for a teaching job? Why or why not?

8. Did your overseas student teaching experience influence your choice of present employment? If so, please explain.

**Impact**

9. Have you worked or volunteered in any cross-cultural settings since student teaching overseas? If yes, explain the context(s).

10. Did student teaching overseas impact your subsequent cross-cultural engagement? (Circle the appropriate number)

Weak Impact 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strong Impact

11. Did your overseas student teaching experience help prepare you for this cross-cultural engagement? If yes, explain.

12. Do you still keep in contact with anyone you met while student teaching overseas? If so, how many people? How frequently do you communicate with them?

13. To what extent did student teaching overseas influence your present vocational interests in education?

Weak Influence 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strong Influence

Please explain your choice.

14. To what extent has student teaching overseas influenced your present cross-cultural skills?

Weak Influence 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strong Influence

Please explain your choice.

15. How has student teaching overseas influenced your current global perspectives?

Weak Influence 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strong Influence

Please explain your choice.

16. To what extent has student teaching overseas impacted your current teaching style?

Weak Influence 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strong Influence

Please explain your choice.

17. How did student teaching overseas influence your view of your home culture?

18. How did student teaching overseas influence your engagement with your home culture?

19. At the time of your graduation, how would you have rated the overall impact of your overseas student teaching experience?

Weak Impact 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strong Impact

Please explain your choice.

20. The primary impact of student teaching overseas is best summarized as follows:

21. Is there anything else you can share that will help us understand how student teaching overseas may have impacted you?