

California Student Counselors Reflect on a Study Abroad Experience in New Zealand

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Abstract

Seven counseling and guidance students from California participated in a study abroad program in which they were placed in a high school in Auckland, New Zealand, for one month. Their comments on the experience in response to researchers' questions form the basis of this paper. They suggest that the participants benefited from being immersed in a culturally different context where they had to consider differences in school organization, counseling priorities, and students' cultural mores. This immersion required them to think about their own professional values and to engage in high level learning, appropriate to masters level field experience work. They commented especially on different approaches to cultural and racial issues in New Zealand and California and on experiencing a counseling profession that is more focused on addressing social issues than on college readiness.

Key words: school counseling; study abroad; New Zealand; California

In July and August 2014, a group of seven students from a California masters degree program in counseling and guidance spent four weeks completing one of their field experience requirements in high schools in Auckland, New Zealand. The group all stayed together in a house in central Auckland and traveled by public transport each day to separate schools, where they were supervised by local school counselors. Two of their professors from California accompanied them on the trip, held supervision meetings twice weekly in the evenings to guide them in processing their experiences, and visited them twice in their placement school to observe the work they were doing and to consult with their placement supervisors.

This paper focuses on the reflections of the students on their experience. These reflections were written at the end of the month-long trip in response to specified questions. They are offered here for the value they yield toward a comparative understanding of school counseling in two different countries. Such a comparative study can be of value in both participating countries, as well as to counseling in other countries. It illuminates questions of value, of the influence of different cultural contextual forces, and of divergent historical lines of professional development.

Literature Review

The Comparative Literature

There is not a large literature comparing school counseling in New Zealand and the United States, let alone California. While school counseling in California is similar in many ways to other states in the United States, it is less well-funded and caseloads for counselors are recognized as comparatively high. What exists by way of comparison between the two countries mostly makes distinctions about emphases in counseling in New Zealand against a background represented by the United States. Some articles make comparisons between New Zealand and the United States with regard to specific areas of concern or practice, such as career counseling (Furbish, 2007), health risk behaviors among alternative education students (Denny, Clark & Watson, 2003), or suicide prevention (Clifford, Doran, & Tsey, 2013). There are also explanations of historical distinctions between the two countries, and distinctions between the pathways for professional development in both countries. More widely represented, however, is a New Zealand focus on cultural partnership with the indigenous Maori population that is not replicated in the American counseling profession, which maintains a focus on multiculturalism that attends more to racial difference than it does to cultural difference.

Judi Miller (2012) notes a strong theme in counseling and guidance in New Zealand “about the influence of Maori values and theories of wellness on current counselling practice and counselor education” (p. 188). Several writers (Miller; Crocket, 2012; Rodgers, 2012) have commented on how the responsibility of the partnership with Maori built into the Treaty of Waitangi as a constitutional document in New Zealand has led to a different emphasis in counseling in New Zealand. As Crocket notes, it has opened up a suspicion of conventional Western counseling knowledge as a tool of ongoing colonization. This suspicion led many Maori to be slow to embrace the value of counseling, which became easier when indigenous voices began to be heard in the counseling field and when a vision of partnership began to take hold:

If Pakeha [*white*] practitioners are to step away from colonial positions of assuming the superiority of western systems of knowledge, then being able to recognise barriers to safe conversation becomes critically important (p.216).

Crocket advocates a consideration of cultural safety in counseling which is similar to an American concern about ‘white privilege’ (McIntosh, 1990), but framed more locally and also more clearly indicative of a pathway for change.

Perhaps as a result, counseling in New Zealand has been more wary of what Rodgers (2012) calls, “modernist notions of a single, static, homogenous and unified epistemology” (p. 192) and more receptive, as Miller (2012) suggests, to the “frequent use of postmodern language” (p. 188). This is clearly a difference from the United States context and accounts, in part, for the strength of narrative counseling in New Zealand, which was encountered by the study abroad students in this project. Results have included the fact that the New Zealand counseling profession has “resisted [counselor] registration because it may undermine the

advances the New Zealand Association of Counsellors has made to incorporate Māori ways of working into its policies” (Miller, 2013, p. 106), and Furbish (2007) noticed a New Zealand reluctance to embrace “trait-factor approaches to career counseling, although popular [in the United States]” (p. 118), suggesting that the reluctance stems from these approaches being “particularly problematic in New Zealand” (ibid.) because they are not applicable to Maori. (Trait-factor approaches concentrate on matching individual traits with careers that utilize them, but are built on assumptions about such traits being stable and enduring.).

These different approaches to issues of culture sit against the background of a different historical context. As Miller (2013) remarks:

The development of counselling in New Zealand was similar to that in the UK and US, where its origins were mainly in vocational guidance. An important difference, however, has been the way that the NZ government has supported counselling’s development by providing funding to educational institutions to address social issues (p. 104).

As Rodgers (2012) states, guidance counselling was only introduced into New Zealand secondary schools in 1966. It began much earlier in the United States. At first at least, the university curricula developed to train New Zealand counselors was “greatly influenced by models of training from the UK and the USA” (Miller, 2012, p. 188). The purpose of school counseling certainly overlapped with its counterpart in the United States, but there were important points of difference. The strong emphasis in the United States on academic counseling and preparing students for college was never as strong in New Zealand. By contrast, counseling in New Zealand schools was established to address social problems, such as juvenile delinquency (Rodgers, 2012; Besley, 2002).

Study Abroad Literature

The study abroad literature does not appear to contain studies explicitly referring to exchanges between USA and New Zealand, although Neriko Doerr (2013) does comment as an anthropologist on staying with a host family in New Zealand for two years. She argues that study abroad helps students formulate “judgment[s] of what is ‘different’ and what is ‘same’ ” and that forming such judgments is “a performative act that results in the diverging understanding of the situation” (p. 76). This comment supports the purpose of asking the questions below about such judgments and it is clear that the responses indicate the performance of learning through making distinctions about what is similar or different. A study by Tarrant, Rubin and Stoner (2014) of study abroad classes found that international education objectives (such as nurturing a global citizenry) were “optimized when students receive deliberate instruction in those objectives in the context of field-based, experiential study abroad” (p.153). The program reported on here meets such criteria. Study abroad experiences are noted by Hannah Covert (2014) to enhance students’ intercultural competence and their sense of agency, although she was referring to undergraduate students rather than to graduate students pursuing a professional degree. A closer equivalent for this study lies in Elizabeth Landerholm and Jacob

Chacko's (2013) survey of teacher trainees studying abroad in two countries and finding that the experience "develop[ed] students' ability to adopt multiple viewpoints" (p. 8). Natalie Graham and Pat Crawford reviewed studies of study abroad programs and found a general theme of transformative experience resulting from them, especially when the program was instructor-led and involving local engagement. Again, both of these criteria were met in this program. Finally, James Shively and Thomas Misco (2012) found that school administrators' hiring decisions were positively affected by student teachers' study abroad experience.

Methodology

The written reflections documented here were collected in response to a group of questions inviting participants to reflect on their comparative thoughts about schools, students, and school counseling in New Zealand and California. They were also asked to reflect on what they had learned from the experience. The participants are all co-authors of this paper. They participated in the design of the research process through being pre-exposed to the questions they would write about and being given the chance to comment on and suggest changes to these questions. As well as being designed for the purposes of this paper, the questions were also designed to maximize the participants' learning from the study abroad experience through the addition of an added layer of reflection onto the experience itself.

The data below are qualitative in nature from a small sample (seven) of students and a small number of New Zealand high schools (again seven). Qualitative data does not allow for the measurement of matters of degree, but does yield information about issues of kind (Deleuze, 1991). It is, therefore, suggested that the following data be read as informative about the kinds of comparative difference in context, rather than on how substantial such differences might be. The questions asked of the participants were as follows.

1. How does life in a New Zealand high school compare with life in a California high school?
2. How does the role of a school counselor in a New Zealand high school compare with the role in a California high school?
3. How have you seen diversity expressed in New Zealand high schools? Is this similar to or different from a California high school?
4. What have you learned about in New Zealand that will affect how you will be as a counselor in California?
5. What has been the value of the study abroad trip for you?

The aim of these questions was to sample the comparative features they observed of school and community cultural context, of the specific role of counselors in schools, and of the personal value participants gained from the experience. In a sense, the comparative data is not complete since the obverse experience is not included. That would require New Zealand counseling students to spend a month in a California high school and to respond to similar questions at the end of this time. This dimension is beyond the scope of this paper and is a built-in delimitation of the data collection approach. The California school context, therefore,

operates as a backgrounded comparison. All of the students had experienced one fieldwork assignment in a California high school before they traveled to New Zealand and all but one had been to high school themselves in California. California, therefore, serves as the backdrop against which comments are made by participants. This is not unusual, however, for the study of cultural issues. There is always a cultural backdrop against which meaning is made. Sometimes it is left unspoken. Here it is intentionally included.

One aspect that deserves comment, though, is that the background context is specified as California, and not the United States. This choice was made for the following reasons: a) California is culturally different from some other parts of the United States; b) one important difference is that Southern California (where all the participants live) is strongly Hispanic (for many also Spanish-speaking); c) California stands out as a state with almost the lowest per student funding ratio in the United States and this affects the availability of counseling services in schools.

Findings

Now it is time to turn to the reflections on the similarities and differences between high schools in New Zealand and California, beginning with a general question about “life” in the two contexts. This first question addresses general school climate.

1. How does life in a NZ high school compare with life in a CA high school?

First, participants noted a number of similarities. The first comment refers to the general function of schooling.

Generally, there is not a lot of difference; the basic functions are the same. In both locations, adolescent students have specific tracks to follow and benchmarks to meet in order to achieve their post high school goals.

Further comment on similarity in the experience of growing up and meeting life challenges that were brought to the attention of school counselors was represented by this statement:

In terms of counseling, many of the same problems exist in both settings. Young people are still vulnerable to the same pressures and the same exposure to stressful events.

Another participant also commented on how students responded amongst their peers to these challenges:

... there are lots of parallels in the way students interact in NZ and CA. In both, CA and NZ, there is a propensity of students to form small cliques among those with similar interests and usually within the same ethnic group.

General comments about similarities were, however, outweighed by more specific comments on the differences between life in New Zealand and California high schools. The salience of graduation as a goal of high school life in California was noticed as different in New Zealand:

High schools in the US really emphasize graduation as a major milestone. For New Zealand students, it seems to be just another step; there is no fanfare.

In the New Zealand education system, there are multiple levels of NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) qualifications and thus multiple possible exit points from high school, rather than the singular goal of graduation. This comment notes that the systemic difference leads to differences in how students think about their goals.

The emphasis on college entry as a major marker of “educational success” was also found to occupy a different place in the thinking of New Zealand students. Such differences were noted in these three comments:

In the US, the goal seems to be that all students go to college. This does seem to be changing as schools tend towards more job readiness, but the overall focus is still on higher education. In NZ, university is a goal for many students, but there are other options and there doesn't seem to be as much of a stigma attached to attending a polytechnic or tertiary institution to learn job skills as there is in the US. As a result, there seem to be many more options for vocational skill development in high school.

Students could choose to complete credits to achieve different levels that allowed them to attend a trade school or a university. The levels could also be completed with a higher degree of recognition depending on how well the students performed.

Again, the multiple exit points from high school make for a less singular consciousness of personal goals. They also perhaps allow for multiple definitions of what is meant by “success.” In New Zealand, post-secondary education is influenced strongly by a vocational emphasis and promotes less the idea of general education or the liberal arts degree at the university level and/or through polytechnics. This difference appears to exert an influence back into students’ and teachers’ attitudes at the secondary level.

A further area of difference noted by participants lay in the degree of emphasis in high schools on individuals or on community. For the California students, the emphasis in New Zealand high schools on collective or community identity was noticeable. This was sometimes attributable to school size, but was also attributed to intentional school emphasis on relational support. These two comments illustrate such trends.

The school I was placed at in NZ was small - roughly 700 students and approximately forty staff members. This small size created a real sense of community at the school where teachers really knew their students and created systems of support for them. This smaller size also created community and closeness amongst staff members as well.

The biggest difference I noticed was the unity that is formed in NZ schools. The relationships that are formed among teachers, staff, and students are unified by

the communication and support they give one another. They have what they call houses, which are mentors for each grade level and each student belongs or is assigned to the same house their whole high school years or time at the college. Mentors are the ones that have a direct communication with the students and collaborate with teachers to ensure that student is succeeding and receiving the support they need. Also, these houses allow students to build a relationship with their mentor and other students that offer them the opportunity to build security and awareness of who they can go to ask for help. I also noticed the level of spirituality it brings to the school. Each house has their own name, logo, and chant that allow students to represent their house and with pride.

Differences in relation to sense of community were also related by some participants to meeting schedules and the institution of morning tea breaks, which do not happen in California schools.

Thrice weekly whole staff briefings and strongly encouraged whole staff morning tea and lunch hours also supported the sense of family. At my school [in California], we have an hour-long whole staff meeting about every six weeks. We do have weekly meetings in smaller learning communities (English department, freshman teachers, etc.) but I have never felt the same level of connection as the XXX staff seems to experience.

The morning tea was the first really big difference that I noticed. The students and staff have a half hour recess between periods two and three and then have lunch later in the day. I find this far superior to the 11:30 am “lunch hour” (forty-six minutes) that my school [in California] employs.

One California student was placed in a school that operated on an experimental open plan format and noticed the impact of this format on the work of counselors.

The school I was placed in has an open floor plan in which up to three classes occur simultaneously in one space. The school was built with acoustics in mind so this is not distracting to students. This floor plan in itself is extremely helpful to counselors. As a trainee, I could go into classes without opening a door. This avoided the typical reaction of everyone looking when a door opens and avoided putting focus on the student I wanted to pull out of class for counseling.

Judgment is completely avoided in this way. In a CA high school, students get offended if they are taken out of class for counseling or told they should seek counseling. Students often are immediately placed on the defensive since the disruption in the class might be confused for a disciplinary action.

One participant noted a more relaxed climate in New Zealand schools with regard to sex education.

In New Zealand, sex education was more easily discussed. The counselor I worked with told me that she had condoms and had an object that she used to show students how to use the condoms if she felt it was necessary. In CA high schools, this would probably not be done and there would be a lot more barriers to cross for a counselor or teacher to speak to students in this way.

Another participant noted, "... How the teachers, counselors, and school nurse work together so well" and went on:

Sometimes I had a client that I felt needed medical attention, so I could send them to the nurse. Other times the nurse would have a student battling a mental issue or tough time in their life and she could refer the student to me. I received most of my clients in this way.

Another participant commented on the different emphasis on schools producing useful citizens, rather than primarily on academic mastery.

... there is profound difference in the way teachers and staff care about the education and the lives of their students. There is an incredible emphasis in fostering values and virtues that will create good citizens. Students are not a number to bring money into the school, but a person that is learning to become a useful citizen of the country.

There were also comments on the "strong push for restorative conversations" in New Zealand schools:

Counseling in New Zealand also includes a major effort toward restorative justice, unlike in California, where many schools rely on punitive measures where counselors can often get pulled in to discipline.

2. How does the role of a school counselor in a New Zealand high school compare with such a role in a California high school?

With regard to the role of school counselors in New Zealand schools, California students noticed a consistent difference in the extent to which New Zealand counselors were focused on personal and social counseling, more than academic and career counseling.

California school counselors are tasked not just with the emotional well being of students, but also with providing academic and post-high school guidance. They also arrange testing, schedules, awards, scholarships, and other "administrative" type elements of students' lives. Grade-level deans in NZ handle these issues. As a result, the NZ counselors can focus much more on emotional counseling and spend more time on it. A counselor in NZ often spends an hour or more with students and students view the counselor as a regular part of their lives, not just the person to whom they turn when they are in distress. Because of the presence of the career counselors and deans, there are fewer guidance counselors in NZ schools, but again, they have one main focus instead of three, like their Californian counterparts.

The mention of three points of focus for American school counselors is a reference to the American School Counseling Association's (2008) National Model of School Counseling in the United States. It specifies that the role of school counselors is to provide students with personal-social, academic, and career counseling. By contrast, in New Zealand:

The focus of a NZ counselor is to help students with emotional or psychological challenges or troubles that interfere with their learning and school.

Another participant noted that the personal-social counseling extended also to teachers:

... To my surprise, staff members would even seek her [the counselor] out.

Another participant made much the same point:

In California, the counselor's role includes a major push toward College and career readiness. Most counseling is academic, including what the student needs to do in order to graduate, and what their options are for after graduation. Much of the counselor's duties include administrative tasks, paperwork, and extra projects. In terms of emotional counseling, the counselor has limited time to offer students. Most often they may provide a referral for outside counseling. In New Zealand, the counselor's only role is the social/ emotional development of the students. There is a major cultural push toward pastoral care.

The use of careers advisors in New Zealand schools also removed much of the emphasis on career counseling away from school counselors.

At the school I was placed, a career advisor deals with most of the class choices, class scheduling, and university eligibility, which frees up the counselor to do more therapeutic counseling. In a CA high school, counselors spend most of their times doing these things and spend little time providing therapeutic counseling.

Participants noted that the role of careers advisors in New Zealand was to:

... Provide students with information in career choice, universities, and different options for career paths. They prepare them in areas like job searching and navigating all the requirements to assure employment. Furthermore, they take care of credits and graduation requirements, which freed the counselors to focus on emotional support.

This different role focus led to a different regard by students for the work that counselors do in New Zealand.

... In New Zealand the "stigma" ... associated with counseling in CA is nonexistent. Counseling is a commonplace experience and is a typical resource that students use.

The school counselor is viewed as a trustworthy individual ... that is not meant to get you in trouble, but to help you through the challenges.

People don't feel offended when offered counseling and seem to have an understanding of what a counselor is there to do, which does not include judging or offering advice on what they need to do.

Counseling in New Zealand is ... well appreciated by students...

The next section of this comparative account concerns diversity. Its conclusions are no doubt preliminary and limited by the fact that the California students were in New Zealand for just one month, but first impressions are nevertheless important and are sometimes when differences stand out most sharply. Schools where the California students were placed ranged from decile one to decile ten in terms of socioeconomic status (indexed to the New Zealand census) and there was considerable difference in the ethnic mix in each school as a result. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

3. How have you seen diversity expressed in New Zealand high schools? Is this similar to or different from a California high school?

The first comment was that school uniforms in New Zealand schools masked some of the diversity from immediate observation.

Because the students in my NZ school wore uniforms, I didn't see much diversity ... Clothing is the easiest way to express one's personality and that option is not available for NZ students.

By contrast, another participant noted the diversity in New Zealand schools immediately.

The first thing I noticed when I walked in a NZ school was the diversity among the students and staff members. The accents and physical traits vary among all students and individuals, which allows others to become curious to learn about other cultures and practices.

Perhaps this difference in response might be explained by differences between schools but it might also reflect a different emphasis in New Zealand on culture, rather than race, which is a more common focus in American society. As one participant noted:

The word race is uncommon in NZ, as opposed to CA high schools, where race is used to distinguish your ethnic group.

Further comments noted the differences in school responses to Maori and Pasifika (Polynesian) students.

There is a marae on campus as well as a Maori language class and support, but there wasn't anything similar for the many other Pasifika students.

The special constitutional place granted for Maori as “tangata whenua” (people of the place or of the land) was noticed in the way schools structured the experience of Maori students. The following statement developed this point.

Every school I have encountered in the States has had a school policy on diversity and acceptance of difference. But American culture in general is not very accepting, even in the most liberal states. In New Zealand, there is a very visible

and active effort to uplift the cultural diversity of its people. At my school, there was a whanau program, which celebrates the cultural traditions of the Maori people, although not exclusively Maori. The whanau program provides a Maori pathway for students and their whanau (extended family). It provides students with an opportunity to be in an environment that embraces all aspects of tikanga (Maori custom) and te reo Maori (Maori language). Celebrating and maintaining identity as Maori enhances students' development, confidence, connection to community, and education.

In another school, the question about diversity produced a comment about international students or immigrants from other countries. It was an implicit acknowledgement of the effects of globalization on school communities.

The school I went to hosted many international students. I am from America and another trainee was from China. I met students from Japan and Korea. There were many students and teachers that had re-located from England and South Africa in search for a better life.

Another participant commented appreciatively on how one school worked toward hospitality for each ethnic culture in the school.

In my school they have one week a term dedicated completely to the celebration and embracing of each ethnic group in the school. Regardless of the number of students ... of each particular ethnicity, all groups are given the same level of attention and respect. However, the focus of the celebration is not only to learn about their culture but also to share with others. It fosters curiosity about each other and a better understanding of similarities and differences that might exist. This is different from the way it is done in California through groups like Mecha, Asian Club or the African-American pride group, for instance, that attempt to foster the cultural pride, but it might sometimes encourage division by emphasizing the differences and the shortcoming of the other groups almost in a competitive way.

For another participant what stood out was the expression of cultural differences through art.

Students in CA schools look very different, but most of the students have similar cultural backgrounds. Schools in both NZ and CA seem to have the potential for diversity, but CA schools seem to emphasize a cookie cutter experience that does not emphasize the value in the students' cultural experiences. The creativity of students was also accentuated in this way. Students were extremely talented and were encouraged to put their emotions into art. I took advantage of this as a counselor and asked students to explain what their art meant to them and ask curious questions about the values they hold dear or the strengths they used to get past tough times.

This last comment is particularly important for counselors to focus on. It applies particularly to visiting students but might also stand as a principle of practice for all counselors.

With regard to diversity of sexual orientation, on the other hand, one participant noticed the lack of official school support.

I was aware that there was a lesbian student who wanted to start a group on campus similar to the Gay Straight Alliance clubs you see in most American high schools. She was told that the principal “did not want that rubbish on campus.” I would say that diversity clearly existed on campus, but was not expressed freely.

The final question participants responded to invited them to reflect on the value of the whole study abroad experience. The question asked was:

What has been the value of the study abroad trip for you?

The first noteworthy response has to do with how the intensity of working full-time in a school for a month simulated working full-time as a counselor. By comparison, part-time placements over a longer period afforded a less realistic impression of the job.

The opportunity to spend whole days at a time as a counselor was invaluable. In earlier fieldwork, I was working as a counselor in small chunks of time and usually only with groups. Having this chance to see what it means to be a counselor for six hours a day and to be immersed in that mindset was so eye-opening and really helped me to see what I need to work on personally to be a better counselor.

During our recreational time, one of the interns referred to this experience as “Counselor Boot Camp.” This is because I was able to concentrate on counseling fieldwork as my only job. I was more immersed in counseling than I have ever been and received more attention from my professors on a level that I never have and probably never will again. For example, when does your professor come over to your house to discuss your work in a typical university setting? When do they have time to individually counsel you about an issue you are struggling with as a counselor? In New Zealand, I received supervision that is crucial to my counseling career and has given me more confidence in my work. I got to practice many different things such as a “remembering conversation” and dealing with a student who was thinking about suicide.

The professional development also involved, among other things, particular cultural learning.

In a professional aspect, I learned new skills as a counselor such as cultural awareness, finding meanings, building relationships, and organizational skills. In a personal aspect, I became more aware of what I like, such as using arts and crafts and how cultures are so interesting and by traveling you can get to learn more about other cultures. I learned and I am aware that personally I don’t feel

so confident in myself, so working towards that and growing from it builds more on my awareness.

The exposure to diversity is unlike anything I could have experienced in the States, and incredibly important in the development of my multicultural awareness. I learned to be more culturally aware and curious of others' practices. For example, I always thought that making eye contact with others was respectful and meant you paid close attention. However, in the Maori culture, not making eye contact is respectful. At first it was difficult to understand until I noticed and asked about the eye contact and for me it was new concept. It opened a door of curiosity and new conversations of, "Tell me about your culture and customs," always held in a respectful manner. It was fascinating learning about new cultures. I understand how crucial it is to be culturally aware as a counselor, but when you are exposed to new cultures, I believe cultural awareness begins to develop. Also, it then becomes projected, because the importance of becoming culturally aware becomes meaningful.

There is a better way to do school counseling than what we have in the States.

Participants also used the experience of studying abroad to think about their particular career preferences. For example:

I am looking forward to being an American high school counselor, where my job duties include emotional care, but also helping kids get to college, finding the right academic path for them, and celebrating their accomplishments at school. I think that, for now, that is a better fit for me and, after some more time and practice, I will be ready to move into an arena more focused on emotional care.

There were comments on the personal growth involved in the whole experience as well.

On a personal note, this trip was more than invaluable. There are really no words. I learned HEAPS about myself as a counselor, as a professional, and as a person. These were things I needed to learn now and was ready to learn. The trip started with Matariki (Maori New Year), a time of looking ahead and making plans, and ended with my 35th birthday, a usual time for reflection and goal setting. I really like the person I found in NZ and the counselor and friend that she is. I am excited about her plans and goals for the future.

The value I found in studying abroad was the value of becoming aware. Awareness is built upon knowledge, growth, and experiencing new things and this trip made me aware of what kind of counselor and person I want to be or become.

One participant had developed enhanced feeling for people who immigrate into the United States and appreciation of what they go through.

The value that I found was relating to people who are from other countries and trying to immerse themselves in a different culture. I knew that it must be hard but, after this, I have the upmost respect and empathy for them. I went to a country that speaks my language and holds many of my values, yet I found myself lost at times. I can only imagine how someone who can't read signs or speak to people fluently must feel.

International experience was also connected with enhanced professional understanding for some participants.

I also found tremendous value in the opportunity to work with professionals from around the world. The local staff and other interns at the high school gave me the chance to learn and explore in a supportive and professional environment.

The study abroad experience has been vastly important to me. It has cemented that counseling is the path for me. It has cemented the fact that narrative therapy is the model that fits best with who I am as a counselor. It has helped me define my counseling style, and become more confident in my counseling abilities. It has shown me how narrative therapy can work in a school setting. It has helped me make connections and form long-lasting relationships with my supervisors. It has helped me build stronger therapeutic allegiances.

This experience also solidified that I am doing the right thing with my life.

The participants in the whole study abroad experience shared some experiences with each other in ways that impacted greatly on them personally and relationally.

It was also valuable for me to hear about the experiences that the American classmates I came with experienced. We were able to relate to each other and contribute valuable feedback to one another. We also created a special bond with one another that I will never forget.

It was stressful, and difficult, but I would not change a thing about the experience. I loved my placement, my supervisors, my students, and my time in Auckland.

Discussion

These data suggest that the study abroad experience achieved its transformative purpose. Participants were immersed in a culturally different context and were forced to consider new possibilities for making sense of school organization and climate, counseling priorities, students' concerns, and cultural differences. This immersion required them to do some thinking about their own professional values and commitments as well as about those that might be embraced

by a school. In other words, high-level learning was taking place in an integrative way that is the intention of field experience work. At the same time, the differences between New Zealand and California schools were not so vast that the students were not able to function effectively.

The differences that the participants identified in a relatively short timeframe can be seen to reflect significant national differences and were consistent with the different emphases in school counseling in the two contexts. The comments included above pick out a number of salient distinctions that are consistent with what the (modest) literature claims. Most important among these distinctions is the different approaches to cultural and racial issues in New Zealand and California and in the differences of a counseling profession that is more focused on addressing social issues than on college readiness.

The work that students were able to do as counseling trainees was valued by participants for the way it stretched them into new dimensions and consolidated what they had been learning. There was, of course, variability in the supervision that they received in their placements, but for each of them this paper records the learning value they received from the trip. In terms of the value of study abroad in general, these comments support the contention that study abroad multiplies students' perspectives and widens their understanding of the world.

Notes

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