

Reimagining the Curriculum: Future Teachers and Study Abroad

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Introduction

Universities in the United States and elsewhere offer study abroad programs to meet requirements that graduates have cross-cultural competencies and an international perspective on their discipline (McCabe, 2001). After studying abroad, students report increased abilities to navigate unfamiliar cultures, improved foreign language skills, a more critical perspective on the U.S. and other countries, and heightened interest in future study abroad opportunities (Teichler & Steube 1991).

Teacher education institutions are developing study abroad programs with similar goals for preservice teachers¹: Study abroad courses and field experiences for preservice teachers² address two major challenges specific to the teaching profession: 1) how to prepare White, middle class, female students enrolled in teacher education programs to work with the increasingly diverse populations of students³ they will teach in the future (Sleeter, 2001); and, 2) how to develop global perspectives⁴ in preservice teachers (NCATE, 2008). Some programs, further seek to raise preservice teachers' awareness of the struggle for social justice as an international issue (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; Malewski & Phillion, in press).

A Major Challenge in Teacher Education: How to Work with Diverse Students

A major challenge in teacher education is how to prepare the predominantly White preservice teacher population to work with diverse students (Gay, 2000). It is well documented that the gap is widening between White, middle class females who are becoming teachers and the historically underserved, low-income, immigrant, English as a New Language and other minority students they may teach (Ladson-Billings, 2001). During the past three decades, the pressures to attend to these issues in teacher education programs have been increasing (Gay, 2000).

In response to this challenge, various organizations and teacher education institutions have initiated reforms. For example, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has based accreditation of teacher education programs, amongst other mandates, on standards that require teachers to provide evidence that they have had experiences with diversity and have developed an understanding of multiculturalism (NCATE, 2008). National review organizations (e.g. Holmes Group, 2007) have also pointed out the need to better prepare teachers for the increasing diversity of the classrooms.

There is little consensus on how to prepare preservice teachers for diversity in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001). However, there is a general consensus that preservice teachers need *experience* working with diverse populations in order to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to assist minority students to reach their full potential (Goodlad, 1990). Study abroad teacher education programs can provide students enrolled in teacher education programs with experiences in a diverse environment, in a language other than English, and working with students unlike themselves (Sleeter, 2001).

A Second Challenge: How to Develop Preservice Teachers' Global Competencies

A second major challenge in teacher education is how to develop a global perspective in preservice teachers, and how to raise preservice teachers' awareness that social justice issues are interconnected nationally and internationally (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; Malewski & Phillion, in press). [There is little research available, however, to guide this debate; at this point, there are many more questions being posed than possible solutions. Where and when will our future teachers gain the skills and confidence necessary to teach in an increasingly interdependent world? Where and when will our future teachers gain the knowledge of the commonalities of educational issues and how important it is that we learn from each other, no matter where we live? How do we infuse a global consciousness in our students and make international experiences a part of every student's curriculum? How do we design a study abroad curriculum that adequately prepares preservice teachers to meet challenges they will face in the future?

Connecting the Two Challenges: The Potential of Study Abroad

We believe that preservice teachers must cultivate a global multicultural perspective. A *global multicultural perspective* integrates multicultural issues and global issues within a social justice framework. This perspective can be can be

cultivated in international field experiences that infuses the daily lived experiences of preservice students as they engage with local communities, schools, teachers, students and parents into the curriculum.

Review of Relevant Literature

Much of the current literature in study abroad concentrates on the evaluation and assessment of language learning (Engle & Engle, 2004; Mendelson, 2004; Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004; Segalowitz, Freed, Collentine, Lafford, Lazar, & Díaz-Campos, 2004), cultural awareness and learning (Engle & Engle, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Slimbach, 2005), and the overall impact of study abroad programs on student learning and development (Handis, 2005; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Sutton & Rubin, 2004).

Study abroad in teacher education remains under-researched, under-theorized and under-evaluated. In particular, there is little emphasis placed on researching preservice teachers' development of understanding multicultural issues during study abroad programs. A review of the small amount of research on teacher education abroad indicates that study abroad programs provide preservice teachers opportunities to venture beyond their own particular culture, involve them in cross-cultural experiential learning encounters, and broaden their horizons in ways that could never be achieved on their college campuses or in their home towns (Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990). Sleeter (2001) found that field experiences that provide cross-cultural immersion, including study abroad experiences, "seem to transform preservice students and ground them in contextually relevant knowledge" (p. 217).

Relich and Kindler (1996) found that gaining awareness of cultural differences promoted intercultural sensitivity and understanding in preservice teachers. Mahan and Stachowski (1990), in their study of the 13-year Overseas Student Teaching Project, compared novice teachers in the conventional, statewide student teaching program and in those with overseas teaching, living, and community involvement experience. They argue the importance of student teaching abroad in broadening students' views and understanding of diversity. They suggest that "Teacher educators must actively strive to incorporate community, cultural, and global studies into teacher preparation programs..." (p.14).

We conducted a study of the experiences of preservice teachers on a three-week summer study abroad program in Honduras in order to examine how differences in understanding ethnicity, race, class, and gender affect the process of teaching and learning in diverse settings. This article provides an overview of this study abroad program, the qualitative methodology of the research study,

an analysis of students' perceptions and perspectives, and a discussion developing preservice teachers' global multicultural competencies through international cross-cultural interactions.

Overview of the Honduras Study Abroad Program

The Honduras Study Abroad Program, led by two faculty members, is designed for undergraduate students majoring in education. Participants have consisted primarily of White, middle class females in their first year of university enrollment with little or no previous cross-cultural or international travel or experience. The curriculum integrates formal and informal learning with a wide range of in and out-of-class community based fieldwork. Each year we have reworked the study abroad curriculum for preservice teachers to be more inclusive of cross-cultural experiences, with a particular focus on offering experiences working with children of a different racial and ethnic group.

The students enroll in two courses, *Multicultural Education* and *Exploring Teaching as a Career*. They attend class twice a week; course readings foster reflection on ethnic, race, gender and class issues that teachers and students encounter. Written assignments for the two courses comprise autobiographical reflections and journal entries in which students are encouraged to make connections between the reading for the class and their observations and experiences in the context of study abroad. Students are also encouraged to share critical insights into their expectations for the trip, the changes in their understandings, and the possibilities for new ways of acting and interacting in diverse multicultural spaces. Before departing, students attend three on-campus meetings that focus on travel information, necessary paperwork, information on Honduran life, course work, and the daily travel-study schedule.

Once in Honduras, students spend three weeks on-site in classrooms of their choice, depending on their teaching interests, either in a nearby elementary school in Zamorano, or at a secondary school in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. Students are encouraged to observe and participate actively in classroom teaching and activities and interact with students and staff. Students make trips to three rural public schools where they engage in arts and crafts projects. During the weekends, students go on excursions to archaeological and cultural sites. Most students stay at a university guest house in Zamorano; some choose to stay with local Spanish-speaking families. At the end of each day, dinner is followed by informal but extensive discussions on the day's events.

Methodology

This article is based on a six-year study of the experiences of 54 preservice teachers who have participated in the Honduras Study Abroad Program. The methodology that guides our educational inquiry is interpretive phenomenology, an approach that allows researchers to “make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the pedagogic significance of situations and relations of living” (van Manen, 1990, p. 2). The questions we explore are: What is the lived experience of preservice teachers in a study abroad program? What is the meaning of this experience to each preservice teacher? How do they experience and interpret race, ethnicity, class and gender issues within broader educational, historical and social contexts? What is its pedagogic implication for multicultural education? What does it mean to be a teacher in an increasingly globalized classroom? In order to examine these questions we focus on the experience of preservice teachers who have participated in the program.

Procedures

Our data collection consisted of descriptions of preservice teachers' cross-cultural experiences in their daily journals reflecting on their school experience, interaction with Honduran communities, and understandings of their own location and identity vis-à-vis others. They were encouraged to describe the challenges and affirmations of navigating another culture and give detailed information on how they made meaning of the coursework and their experiences. Program participants also wrote essays that included teacher, school, and student portraits in a Honduran classroom interwoven with their own developing that emerged out of their on-site experience philosophy of education.

In addition to written reflections, we conducted pre-trip, on-site, and post-trip interviews that were audio-taped. In pre-trip interviews, we asked preservice teachers why they wished to study abroad, why they chose the Honduras program, what they hoped to learn, and what they knew about Honduran culture and people. Three on-site interviews were held in small groups and focused on how preservice teachers made meaning of “dwelling” in Honduras, how the curriculum related to everyday experiences, and the ways in which their interaction in another cultural context complicated their understanding of themselves and diverse students. Another source of data collection was audio-taping all class discussions and dinner conversations. In post-trip interviews, program participants were asked to speak about their experiences studying abroad, their interpretation of the coursework and cross-cultural immersion, their strongest memories, the ways in which they understood themselves differently (or not),

and the extent to which their understanding of equity and justice issues might have changed as a consequence of experiential learning. In this final set of interviews, preservice teachers brought in photographs of people or events they found meaningful. All recorded interviews, class discussions and informal dinner conversations were later transcribed.

We analyzed the data to search for themes embedded in the experiences and in the meaning attributed to those experiences. We examined the themes of ethnicity, race, class, and gender to unearth preservice teachers' historical and curricular insights into unexamined cultural assumptions and their consequences for diverse students. Another theme we explored was the formation of preservice teachers' own identities and locations and their impact on the educational experiences working with students who speak a different language and coming from a non-White, non-U.S. background. Taking a cue from these themes, we searched for descriptions that included preservice teachers' examination of their feelings of being culturally different or excluded because of their race, ethnicity, class, or gender positions. In other words, we interpreted what Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) refer to as the "pedagogical dimensions of a critical multiculturalism: racial, class and gender oppressions...implicit in the way knowledge, values and identities are constructed in a variety of social locales" (p. 29).

In the remainder of this article, we focus our attention on preservice teachers' growing awareness of the complexity of multicultural schooling in a global context through a discussion of the experiences of Amanda and Michelle, as well as those of other preservice teachers⁶, who participated in the Honduras Study Abroad Program in 2007. We also include the experience and voices of different preservice teachers who have participated in the program to provide a nuanced understanding of the study abroad experience.

Results

Social Class

Amanda, a female preservice teacher in her first year of college majoring in education, comes from a White middle-class background, was educated in public schools, and reported that her "dream-job is to teach English abroad." She participated in the study abroad program because she was interested in a Spanish-speaking country, since her father originated from a Spanish-speaking country. She hoped that the study abroad experience would help expand her limited proficiency in Spanish and make her familiar with "some Hispanic culture."

Amanda began her discussion with a comparison of Honduran, U.S. American and other nations' cultural practices suggesting that discovering another culture is intimately linked with learning about one's own way of life. She has traveled to Spain, and her first observation in Honduras was that "people don't live in cardboard houses in America or in Spain." She explained that she had heard a great deal about life in Central America and had read about the poverty but had viewed it as "something you see on T.V... you don't really get it until you see it and you touch it and you smell it. And when you smell it, you feel it, that's when you really know— what poverty is like." She remembered being disturbed by the sight of "kids rummaging through piles of garbage with no shoes on," admitting that she has never imagined such "differences in the world." Contextualizing the curriculum within glaring economic differences made Amanda deeply conscious of the cultural realities of Honduran life and the deprivation that many children live through each day. The experience gave her an understanding of what might be happening in other parts of the world, an awareness of the effects of social and economic inequities in education, and the connection of these inequities to classroom tensions and contradictions. She reported rethinking her own understanding of inequities not as abstract or "normal" categories but as concrete relations of daily life that go beyond class differences to translate into social relationships of domination and subordination in educational settings.

At first, Amanda was overwhelmed by the extensive poverty she encountered and upon reflection she realized "Honduras is kind of overshadowed by other countries, so it doesn't get the help it needs." In contrast, another preservice teacher in her class observed that "there's definitely poverty here in America...it's just that you know, American people are just turning a blind eye to and saying, 'it's not something here (in the U.S.) but over there.'" This same student expressed frustration that in the U.S. the subject of poverty is not open to discussion and, therefore, seems non-existent. Both preservice teachers admitted that they had not anticipated that, despite extreme poverty, Hondurans were "family-oriented" and "helped each other more," while in the U.S. "people have this stigma when we look for help." Preservice teachers, including Amanda, realized that often their comparisons showed up as contradictions and juxtapositions that challenged the norm, such as "here people are poor and still happy" or that they did not hide or feel ashamed of their poverty, as "it just is" along with "you have to keep an open mind...it made me aware of poverty here but still want to try and help out in my own country." An awareness of living conditions and lack of resources in Honduras was reflected in many

preservice teachers through a desire to help; Honduran poverty reaffirmed their own superior positions with a measure of relief, and what they felt was “blessedness” in being a citizen of the U.S. (see Phillion, et.al, 2008, for an in-depth discussion of blessedness).

Witnessing extreme poverty prompted preservice teachers to reflect on many interrelated issues. Most declared that poverty was no longer simply an abstraction in textbooks or a romantic media image. Rather it became an embodied part of the living curriculum as they mediated another culture and were, therefore, able to connect domination and privilege to class and race issues in multiple ways.

In spite of class discussions to the contrary, Amanda found it hard to imagine poverty as an American condition, and her denial was in some sense a blind-spot in her introspection as she affirmed her faith in the U.S. social system to be able to protect citizens from falling into the “abyss of poverty.” At the same time, she showed an awareness of complexities that students may bring and challenged the constructed nature of the homogenized values and expectations that White teachers tend to bring into the classroom. She also reflected on the impact poverty had on ethnic school failure and in creating a differentiated curriculum.

Through discussions comparing everyday life in Honduras with social conditions in the U.S. and thought-provoking coursework, preservice teachers problematized poverty and privilege in the world, not as abstract concepts but as Amanda stated, “I got to see those books in action. “According to Amanda, the process of understanding her experience cast light on her stereotyped beliefs about ethnic minorities and disadvantaged children, believing that socio-economic class and intelligence went hand in hand. The cross-cultural encounter broadened her perspective and impressed upon her that “I need to get situated and get my beliefs about how teaching can be done. . .going there I was set, set, set, and then I met kids that didn’t fit into my little set thing. I realized that I have a lot to learn.” By sharing and discussing, Amanda looked at her experience from a different cultural perspective than the beliefs she had earlier espoused. She challenged not only her own assumptions but other preservice teachers’ as well.

Gender

In a post-trip interview, Amanda spoke of an encounter that made her think about the way Hondurans perceived U.S. women. She described how some Honduran students based their opinions on media perceptions and stereotyped all U.S. women as having “a cell phone, driving a red convertible and shopping

everyday and going to parties, like Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie.” She was upset at the derogatory references to women but blamed the media, rather than the students, for their misconceptions. Stephanie remarked that “while we were down there we definitely had to keep safety a big priority, just because we were American women.” She was extremely frustrated that “Honduran fathers told their sons American women didn’t have any dignity, any pure morals,” and that such myths about U.S. women were ample reason to reconsider safety and security measures in Honduras while moving around on her own.⁸

Other preservice teachers addressed gender issues. They explored differences and beliefs in understanding gender and gender roles, such as why women were over-represented in school teaching in Honduras and the US, and the fact that women and men in Honduras socialized separately. One of the preservice teachers questioned traditional gender roles that she had earlier taken for granted, such as the presence of women in the teaching profession; and at other times she struggled with the local perception of teachers as ‘women’ above all else in the eyes of Honduran men. Observing that “we got more attention as we are American women,” there were also times when she recognized the limitations imposed on her as a woman in the U.S. saying, “we have to be more careful, like walking around...you have to do that on your own college campus.” She was conscious of the centrality of the body in defining women’s lives that seemed to cross national boundaries..

Displaying a variety of complicated and sometimes contradictory understandings of the role of gender in Honduras and the U.S., many preservice teachers’ journals, interviews and autobiographies reflected self-examination and recognition of their position as women in relation to male domination. At the same time, introspection on the raced, classed, and gendered nature of their experience reflected the constructed hierarchies of social relationships that are contingent upon individual location and identity.

Ethnicity and Race

Michelle is a White female preservice education major; her participation in the Honduras Study Abroad Program was her first opportunity to travel and experience diversity outside the U.S.. In her journal she spoke of a happy childhood growing up in a White suburban school and often felt that “the world is huge and it would be awesome to go to every different country and see how education works and just to get to know the culture.” She selected the Honduras study abroad over others offered by the college because “ [on the home campus] the multicultural course would have been mostly from textbooks and

lectures,” whereas studying in Honduras would be “real to me because I’m actually experiencing diversity in a different country.”

Speaking of the challenges of being “the one in the classroom who doesn’t speak the native language,” Michelle stated that language was a struggle as she felt excluded and the isolation helped her realize what it feels like to “just kinda feel totally out of the loop.”⁹ The experience of being left out allowed for a growing awareness of the role of language in defining and demarcating who is at the cultural center and who is marginalized. More importantly, through her experience she created new meanings, ones that contested the often negative pressures imposed by schools upon non-English speaking minority students. She reflected that “Just as a kid, an ESL child would feel in America in the classroom. Like, ‘what are they talking about? What is going on...we go to another country and then we are the minority and we’re experiencing a totally new thing by being outsiders.” She tried to make sense of the experience that placed her at the margins of all conversation and began to understand that not only race but language and context matter too. Her dependence on English limited her perspective on other languages, but probing beyond her difficulties she reflected on the processes and structures of social relations between dominated and dominant groups, minority education and language norms. She was challenged by her own unquestioned assumptions of teaching and learning and in turn examined the role of education in imposing conformity through language at the cost of honoring the cultural diversity of students for whom English is a new language.

Another preservice teacher, Rogena, spoke of immigrant students “having to get across a cultural barrier, like a White teacher teaching these kids.” Some, like Ashley, enjoyed the challenge of negotiating a foreign language, especially learning from children in the classroom and seeing for the first time differences within Spanish speaking countries. According to her, “I already knew there were differences in the world but like Mexico and Honduras are Spanish-speaking countries...the kind of Spanish spoken is different. No country in Central or South America can be considered the same. Even their accents are different.” For Ashley, and for many other preservice teachers, the opportunity of cross-cultural exchanges and discussions allowed for a more complex understanding of ethnic identities that challenge the reductionist, essentialist representations of racial difference and ethnic diversity sometimes found in school settings.

Program participants began to see teachers as implicated in the assimilation process of linguistically diverse students to American English speaking norms. For example, Ashley was upset by her own presumptions saying, “Oh my God! Imagine a second or third grader moving from Mexico and being

thrown into the American school system. And a lot of teachers say, well, he's in America, he should just know English." Another realization for her was the alienation felt by people when they enter a new country and that "we as Americans stick together really well overseas," which also increased her understanding of what it meant to be culturally isolated and find oneself outside the dominant language, culture and life in another country.

One of the most exciting challenges preservice teachers remembered was communicating meaning across language and cultural barriers in a Honduran rural public school. They worked with the children on art and craft projects, exchanged songs and dances, and felt they were actively participating in cultural and linguistic diversity. Speaking of the children in class, Michelle observed that "they're so appreciative and they never once looked at the clock... once we teach here we are not going to want to teach in the United States." Amanda felt that contrary to her friends' warning about "going to some third-world country and living in a nasty environment," her experience had made her realize that Honduran children "have a lot going against them" but "they are a lot more family oriented, and support family and friends." Ashley tried to relate her experience at the rural school to her own life. Making comparisons she noted, "yes, the children were poor and had very little at the rural school but they were okay with it...it was tiring not speaking Spanish, food was different, water was different, bugs everywhere." But she found the experience was insightful: "we were coming here for ourselves, we weren't coming to help them in any way at all...they were teaching me how to be a good teacher and I might like teaching in inner city Chicago."

Discussion

A carefully planned study abroad curriculum that gives White preservice female teachers a direct, multi-dimensional experience with diversity in an international context, and creates opportunities for exploring and teaching multicultural and global issues. Study abroad provides preservice teachers an opportunity to apply classroom teaching to concrete situations and the conditions for reflecting on the role of historical and cultural processes that affect the schooling of minority, immigrant and other diverse children in U.S. American classrooms. When preservice teachers participate in the differentiated realities of diverse children's lives in and out of schools, we hope that it informs their understanding of the variability and diversity of ethnic, racial, class and gendered differences that they might encounter in their teaching careers. The theoretical and practical insights gained from engaging in and exploring first-hand

the cultural practices and beliefs of an unfamiliar worldview—the questioning and analyzing their own assumptions of what it meant to be the White normative majority in relation to minority groups after experiencing a reversal of the majority/minority positioning—allowed for a complex understanding of the behaviors and attitudes of minority students. It also helped preservice teachers to recognize the needs and interests that emerge from cultural differences and a commitment to work through the challenges that might allow them to break the barriers that now exist between White teachers and children from the developing world in U.S. schools.

Course assignments, discussions, and interviews underscored preservice teachers' learning experiences and improved understandings of differences in ethnicity, race, class and gender that may have otherwise remained abstract and disembodied. Students realized that awareness of the realities of social and economic differences combined with a greater understanding of cultural practices of diverse ethnicities helped them examine their own knowledge, relationships, and practices in shaping the educational experience of diverse students. When we compared preservice teachers pre-trip interviews with on-site interviews, we noted they acknowledged the stereotypical perceptions and fixed notions of non-White cultures that they brought with them. For example, when a White preservice teacher encountered poverty, she was shocked at first, but after interacting with Honduran students from what she had thought of as “underprivileged” backgrounds, she expressed a newfound respect for their dedication to learning and was surprised to find them both “happy and intelligent.” Upon further reflection, she identified her own complicity in perpetuating school failure by holding low expectations of students who were economically disadvantaged or culturally different. Specific experiences gave preservice teachers opportunities to ask complex questions, examine their previously held beliefs and make a conscious effort to develop skills needed for teaching in multicultural contexts.

Most preservice teachers realized that a limited understanding of culture on the teacher's part can lead to stereotyping students that compound the educational difficulties of students from minority racial, ethnic, and language backgrounds. This is a recognition linked to the major challenge in teacher education and central question we offered in the introduction: How do we prepare predominantly White preservice teachers to work with diverse students? What was significant was not that preservice teachers sympathized with students who had to “walk miles to school,” or “came to school without shoes,” but that these experiences led them to a deeper examination of inequality in

schooling that radically altered their own assumptions and attitudes. One of the preservice teachers spoke about the discomfort she felt with regard to her earlier perceptions and commented on how easy it was to “other” someone who is different from the majority culture, saying “you yourself have to experience what it feels like to be a stranger and now you have to learn their language, speak their language, and hope that someone understands you.” The study abroad experience provided preservice teachers with opportunities to compare and contrast other people’s experiences with their own; as Amanda observed, the result of comparison and questioning was that “you have trouble with understanding but later you tell yourself, it is not about tests and scores but getting to really know the kids.”

Interestingly, one of the most revealing moments that preservice teachers experienced was when they encountered the host culture’s gendered assumptions of U.S. women. Discussions that followed the experience centered on women having to live in a gendered world but with very different perceptions and analysis. One of the preservice teachers felt that differentiated roles for men and women restricted not only women’s physical movement in terms of safety but also their ability to move upwards in the professional sphere. Another preservice teacher who had earlier commented on segregated socialization in Honduras now recognized that in spite of profound cultural differences, the social construction of gendered behavior expectations for women seemed to be the same in Honduras and the U.S.. While most agreed that inequitable power relations exist among men and women in the world, some preservice teachers seemed to accept it as a natural condition; others argued that this was victimization of women, while still others felt that this was one of the challenges they were now consciously going to work against in their teaching practices. For some preservice teachers, one form of affirmative action was traveling and intermingling with other racial and minority groups as an essential informative exchange of cultural knowledge. Experiencing some of the conflicts, contradictions and challenges helped preservice teachers to appreciate the importance of valuing cultures different from their own.

Conclusion

Our research indicates that the lived experience of studying abroad provides preservice teachers the intellectual and critical starting point for multicultural awareness of the educational, social, and political relationships between their lives and other cultures. With course work and field experiences that are grounded in multicultural life-experience, we have found that

preservice teachers begin to develop the awareness, sensitivity, and skills they urgently need to bridge the gap between White teachers and their historically underprivileged student populations and to understand the rapidly diversifying classrooms in which they will teach.

Student teachers must be encouraged, indeed required, to venture beyond the walls of their assigned classrooms, beyond the grounds of their elementary or secondary schools, and into the community and world of which schools are a part.

Experiencing, reflecting and leaning should not be confined within one building and one domain (i.e. classroom teaching), and they should not cease when formal university education is completed. (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990, p. 14)

A reimagined study abroad curriculum is a point of access where preservice teachers, distanced from the insulation of home, are exposed to and challenged by their own practices and beliefs. In our experience with preservice teachers in the study abroad program, most preservice teachers were able to translate their lived experience into classroom practice by examining their taken-for-granted superior positions and its relation to social justice issues in the classroom that deeply impact the learning of students from minority and diverse cultural backgrounds. At the same time, the experience would make all the difference to their success as confident, open-minded, and aware teachers willing to learn from the challenges of working in a multicultural classroom.

Apart from being focused on maximizing their learning experience, preservice teachers felt that negotiating cultural differences within a global context outside the comfort of their privileged, White middle-class norms had a greater impact on their multicultural understandings and global competencies than traditional classroom learning. This is a realization in terms of meeting a second key challenge in teacher education: how to develop global perspectives in preservice teachers and how to raise preservice teachers' awareness that the struggle for social justice is an international issue.

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Notes

¹A preservice teacher is a student enrolled in a teacher education program.

²Field experiences refer to a mandated period of time preservice teachers must spend in schools, classrooms, or related educational or community sites. These experiences are generally required in all teacher education programs although place in program sequence and duration of experiences vary.

³For the purposes of this article, the term “diverse populations of students” refers to students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Multicultural courses are designed to address these categories.

⁴A global perspective denotes an understanding of the interdependency of nations and peoples and the political, economic, ecological, and social concepts and values that affect lives within and across national boundaries.

⁶Pseudonyms are used for participants in the study.

⁸For the majority of preservice teachers, gender issues were primarily discussed in terms of who they are, less so in cultural/social terms. That is to say, who they were as “American women,” how they experienced being female in Honduras, particularly in terms of their body and sexuality, was the focus point.

⁹As with gender, issues related to race and ethnicity were primarily discussed in relation to who they are and how they experienced Honduras. Interestingly, but perhaps due to the majority of the students not being fluent in Spanish, language was intermingled in discussions of race and ethnicity.