

Creating Culturally Relevant Teachers: Influences from a Mayan Primary School in Belize

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Abstract

The globalization of society increased the need for teacher education programs to develop teacher candidates who were able to provide instruction and assessment utilizing comprehensive problem solving techniques that were respectful of the diverse culture and experiences of the students and families that they served. With the goal of increasing global competence through international field experience, one school of education partnered with a university in Belize to provide pre-service teachers an opportunity to participate in Mayan primary school classrooms. Faculty believed that participant reflection of the experience through the lens of “cultural consciousness” could reveal attitudes and values that impacted their practice with diverse students.

Keywords: global competence, cultural relevance, international field experience, teacher education

The globalization of society increased the need for teacher education programs to develop teacher candidates who were able to provide instruction and assessment utilizing comprehensive problem solving techniques that were respectful of the diverse culture and experiences of the students and families that they served. Kissock and Richardson (2010) called for teacher education programs to “internationalize,” preparing candidates for service beyond the community adjacent to the university citing our responsibility to “...cause our students to broaden their life experiences...” to affect the types of critical thinking and skills that their students required to live in an ever changing world (p. 91). It was not enough for candidates to simply recognize cultural difference in students; they needed to be prepared to break down “structural inequalities” that existed in the schools where they would be serving (McGaha & Linder, 2012, p. 167).

Legislative actions both nationally, No Child Left Behind (2001), and in Kentucky, Senate Bill 1 (2009) led to the adoption of learning standards and practices for Kentucky teachers and university accountability for teacher education programs that prepared them. An unintended consequence was limited opportunity for developing the critical awareness needed in a complex, global, information driven society (Gal, 2011).

Preparation of teacher educators for a global community required the implementation of new methodologies to existing teacher education (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). McGaha and Linder (2012) found teacher candidates in a study abroad program developed broader views of diversity, greater understanding of social justice, and empathy for linguistically diverse students. For teacher educators intent on developing these qualities in teacher candidates, short term faculty led international field experiences was one possible iteration of this.

Rationale for the Study

In Kentucky, proficiency on the Kentucky Teacher Standards (KTS [2008]) or the Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education Kentucky Teacher Standards for Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (KTS/IECE) [2003]) was required by law (16 KAR 1:010) for teacher preparation and certification at all levels (Education Professional Standards Board [EPSB]). The standards represented the knowledge and skills teachers needed as effective practitioners. Being able to work effectively with diverse students and families was part of the criteria for several of the standards. Some of the standards and their corresponding indicators were connected explicitly to student and family diversity. Kentucky Teacher Standard 3.3 “Values and supports student diversity and addresses individual needs”

and KTS 4.2 “Implements instruction based on diverse student needs and assessment data” (EPSB, 2008) were examples. Kentucky Teacher Standards for Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education 2.f “Create and maintain culturally responsive environments to support all children and families,” KTS/IECE 3.e “Implement culturally responsive learning experiences to support children and their families,” and KTS/IECE 8.b “Individualize interactions and activities that demonstrate sensitivity to characteristics of each child’s family community” (EPSB,2003) also demonstrated the need for teachers to become culturally relevant in their practice. Other standards were less overt in connection to diversity. Kentucky Teacher Standard 1.4 “Provides opportunities and guidance for students to consider lesson content from different perspectives to extend their understanding” and KTS/IECE 1.c “Individualize curriculum, instruction plans, and assessment strategies for all children” (EPSB, 2003) are examples. For teacher educators consistently looking for strategies to enhance teacher candidates’ ability to meet these criteria, intentionally structured international field experiences could provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to develop culturally relevant practice with diverse students (Grisham-Brown & McCormick, 2013).

Study Questions

In considering the potential impact intentionally structured international field experiences could provide pre-service teachers in developing culturally relevant practice and Kentucky Teacher Standard proficiency requirements, the authors identified two questions concerning a short term faculty led international field experience. What were pre-service teacher impressions about the impact a short term faculty led international field experience in preparing them to work with diverse students and families and to what extent did the field experience prepare them to fulfill the KTS/IECE or KTS?

Developing Cultural Relevance

While the student population in classrooms and schools across the nations became more racially and culturally diverse (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; Hollins & Guzman, 2005), the teaching population remained mostly white and English speaking (Gomez, Strage, Knutson-Miller, & Garcia-Nevarez, 2009). Students who were “culturally different” experienced less school success than their peers of the majority culture (Ford, 2010, p. 50). Studies documented the impact of culturally relevant curriculum (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Milner, 2011; Howard, 2001) on student achievement. Gay (2002) discussed the need for more than the addition of

“multicultural content” to existing curriculum and argued for an intentional and systematic inclusion of represented cultural diversity into all aspects of the classroom environment and practice (107).

Teachers’ ability to develop a culturally relevant practice was tied directly to their ability to develop cultural competence. Milner (2011) documented the need for teachers to develop “authentic” relationships with students based on their individual identities (87). This implied a deeper understanding of culture and race than simply a knowledge base. Hunter, White, and Godbey (2006) suggested that global competence began with understanding other’s cultural expectations through cross-cultural communication. Garii (2009) documented evidence that pre-service teachers in study abroad programs developed “flexible pedagogy” and “culturally nuanced understandings” into their practice (p. 98).

Developing Global Competence

With the goal of increasing global competence through international field experience, one school of education partnered with a university in Belize to provide pre-service teachers an opportunity to participate in Mayan primary school classrooms. Faculty believed that participant reflection of the experience through the lens of “cultural consciousness” could reveal attitudes and values that impacted their practice with diverse students (Lastrapes & Negishi, 2012, p.37; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011) .

Post-field experience survey and focus group data suggested significant changes in participant perspectives on diversity. In addition to acquiring strategies modeled by teachers to support culturally and linguistically diverse students, participants reported the unexpected experience of being viewed personally as representatives of a diverse culture. Pre-service teachers expressed increased empathy for students in a classroom who may be different. This increase began the shift in perspective necessary to develop a culturally relevant practice (Hunter et al., 2006; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski 2011).

Belize as a Field Experience Site

Gomez et al. (2009) discussed the importance of matching field experience placements with specific learning outcomes. Belize was selected as the site for this field experience due to similarities in the overall structure of the educational system to the educational system of the United States. Belize provided educational opportunities for students in early childhood (pre-primary) through high school (secondary). The International Bureau of Education division of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

reported that education in Belize was based on national standards, and students were assessed in both primary and secondary levels with achievement data being collected to inform practice (2010). Faculty organizing the experience believed that these similarities would enable teacher education candidates to connect experiences in the Mayan Primary School with field experiences in Kentucky. Working through partners at the University of Belize, faculty organized field experiences at the University of Belize Pre-school and Kuxlin_Ha Primary School.

A second reason Belize was selected as the site for this field experience lay in the ethnic and language diversity that candidates were likely to encounter in the classrooms. While all instruction in the schools was in English, candidates experienced five languages including Spanish, Creole, and Mayan dialects and a variety of student ethnicities including mestizo, Creole, Maya, and Garifuna (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). In addition, candidates lived in host homes experiencing family life with children of all ages and a variety of cultures. Gomez et al. (2009) noted that field experiences with culturally and linguistically diverse populations enabled teacher candidates to begin to question social inequities that they experienced in the classroom.

Method

Data was collected utilizing a concurrent nested strategy (Terrell, 2012) mixed-methods research methodology. This allowed all data to be collected during the debriefing meeting for the Belize International Field Experience. Mixed-methods were employed to address research questions that confirmed and explained participant experiences (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Terrell, 2012; Truscott, Swars, Smith, Thonton-Reid, Zhao, Dooley, Williams, Har, & Matthews, 2010).

Sample

Participants for this study were from the school of education in a small private university in the south. Purposive sampling techniques were employed based on the stated research questions.

Table 1
Demographics of Student Participants

Participant	Age	Prior Field Experience Hours	Year in School	Highest Education Level	Current Assignment in Education	Time in Current Assignment
1	44	0	Graduate	Bachelors	Teacher	8 years
2	21	0	Senior	Associate		
3	21	0	Junior	Associate		
4	21	0	Senior	Associate		
5	21	55	Junior	High School Diploma		
6	60	Numerous		Rank I	Developmental Interventionist	12 years
7	23	60	Senior	High School Diploma		
8	33	250	Junior	Associate	In-Home Childcare/Preschool	10 years

The researchers read and explained the informed consent document to the participants prior to collecting data to ensure that they understood their participation was voluntary (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Other consent related topics were discussed such as privacy, confidentiality, and the ways the data would be used. Participants were encouraged to ask questions relating to the informed consent. Participants were informed that they had the right to participate to the extent that they felt comfortable, and they could withdraw from the study at any time during data collection or after the data was collected without any harmful effects. The participants and researchers signed the documents, and a copy of the signed document was given to the participants.

Context

Data was collected during a debriefing meeting for a short term international field experience. All trip participants were invited to participate in the study, and everyone who attended the meeting elected to participate. The meeting took place in a seminar classroom in the _____ School of Education. After eating food prepared using recipes from host families in Belize and a slide show with photographs that had been submitted for a photo contest connected with the field experience, informed consent was obtained and data collection began. Participants were asked to complete a survey based on the KTS/IECE or KTS that they would be expected to demonstrate proficiency in upon

certification. After they completed the survey, a focus group, made up of the same participants was conducted.

Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Participant scores on the KTS/IECE were compared to each other and a mean was determined for each response. Participant scores on the KTS compared to each other and a mean was determined for each response. The mean for the KTS/IECE were compared to the mean for the corresponding KTS. Qualitative data from the survey and from the focus group were used for triangulation purposes and to support or identify discrepancies. Document analysis of KTS/IECE and the KTS and their corresponding diversity proficiencies was utilized for triangulation purposes as well.

Structured qualitative protocols were established which included conducting a recorded focus group that was transcribed producing data elements of the questions and answers (Johnson, Dunlap, & Benoit, 2010). Denaturalized transcription methods sustained the accuracy of the interview and eliminated reader bias based on grammatical patterns of speech and the distraction of involuntary vocalizations (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). The focus group was conducted with all researchers present. While it was not possible to anticipate every probe that might be needed, the researchers discussed listening strategies in order to ask appropriate questions that would allow participants to discuss their experiences and perceptions fully (Johnson et.al, 2010). A transcript was analyzed looking for themes that emerged throughout participant responses and identifying textual evidence that represented these themes (Johnson et. al, 2010).

Validity and Reliability

Validity was established by choosing performance standards that had been operationally defined by the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board (Abowitz & Toole, 2010). Questions were developed to investigate the depth and quality of the field experience participants had and the level to which that experience prepared them to meet the standards. The questions allowed candidates to explore their experiences in the schools and classrooms and in their host homes and the community as well. Probes were utilized for some questions in the focus group to enable participants to describe their experiences entirely and ensure measurement validity (Abowitz & Toole, 2010; Johnson et.al, 2010).

Measurement reliability was established by developing interview protocols and a script that was utilized in the focus group by both researchers (Abowitz & Toole, 2010).

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that the data was self-reported and affected by the level of self-awareness of the participant with regards to perception and objectivity (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfelt, 2010). Data was reported to school of education faculty who had personal and professional relationships with some of the participants. Participants could have felt a need to please faculty which could have impacted their responses.

Another limitation was the small number of participants which narrowed the generalizability of the results (Washburn-Moses, Kopp, & Hetttersimer, 2012). The participants in the international field experience who did not participate in the study may have had different experiences and perceptions than the field experience participants who chose to also be part of the study.

Results

Three of the participants responded to the KTS/IECE Survey which asked them to circle the number that represented the extent to which they believed their field experiences in Belize prepared them to fulfill the IECE Kentucky Teacher Standards. The survey utilized a likert scale with number one meaning the field experiences did not prepare the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard, number two meaning the field experiences somewhat prepared the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard, number three meaning the field experience mostly prepared the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard, and number four meaning the field experience completely prepared the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard. Space was also provided for the participant to provide additional comments related to their responses.

Table 2
Participant Responses to Survey for KTS/IECE

Participant	IECE KTS 1	IECE KTS 2	IECE KTS 3	IECE KTS 4	IECE KTS 5	IECE KTS 6	IECE KTS 7	IECE KTS 8	IECE KTS 9	IECE KTS 10
1	4	4	4	4	4	4		4		
6	2	1		1	2	4	1	1	1	2
8	3	3	3	4	4	4	1	4	4	4

Scale: 1=Did Not Prepare, 2= Somewhat Prepared, 3=Mostly Prepared, 4=Completely Prepared

The participants of this survey believed that the field experiences completely prepared them, a mean of four on the likert scale, to fulfill KTS/IECE 6 “Collaborates with Colleagues/Families/Others” (EPSB, 2003). Two of the participants commented about the fact that the field experience took place during Early Childhood Month in Belize which involved many “community helpers”. Another standard that these participants felt mostly or completely prepared to fulfill, a mean of 3.3, as a result of this field experience was KTS/IECE 5, “Reflects on and Evaluates Professional Practice” (EPSB, 2003). One participant commented that teachers reflected independently but then got together to discuss their reflections.

The lowest mean, .6, was for KTS/IECE 7 “Engages in Professional Development” (EPSB, 2003). One participant commented that this field experience increased her awareness of the “plentiful” professional development opportunities that were available to her in Kentucky. She said she was not aware of professional development opportunities for the teachers with whom she worked. Another standard that participants felt this field experience did not prepare them to fulfill, with a mean of 1.6, was KTS/IECE 9 “Demonstrates the Implementation of Technology” (EPSB, 2003).

Participant 8, who reported the most field experience hours prior to this international field experience and who operated an in home child care/preschool, found that this international field experience mostly prepared (3) or completely prepared (4) her to meet all of the KTS/IECE except standard seven, “Engages in Professional Development” (EPSB, 2003). Participant 6, who reported “numerous” field experience hours prior to this international experience and who worked as a developmental interventionist for 12 years, found this international field experience did not prepare or somewhat prepared her to fulfill the KTS/IECE in all but standard six. She felt this field experience completely prepared her to fulfill KTS/IECE Standard 6, “Collaborates with Colleagues/Families/Others” (EPSB, 2003).

Overall, participants felt mostly prepared (3) or completely prepared (4) to fulfill KTS/IECE with diversity proficiencies, standards one, three, six, and eight, by their international field experience. The diversity proficiencies within those standards were

KTS/IECE 1. C. Individualize curriculum, instruction plans, and assessment strategies for ALL children.

KTS/IECE 1.g. Plan experiences and instruction based on family strengths, resources, priorities, and concerns.

KTS/IECE 3.e. Implement culturally responsive learning experiences to support children and families.

KTS/IECE 6.f. Articulate individual outcomes and unique needs for each child to staff and volunteers.

KTS/IECE 8. b. Individualize interactions and activities that demonstrate sensitivity to characteristics of each child’s family community (EPSB, 2003).

There was only one KTS/IECE with diversity proficiency that participants felt that the international field experience did not prepare them to fulfill, standard nine. The diversity proficiency within this standard was KTS/IECE 9.d. “Use technology to meet special needs of children” (EPSB, 2003). There was also only one KTS/IECE with diversity proficiency that participants felt somewhat prepared them to fulfill, standard two. The diversity proficiency within this standard is KTS/IECE 2.f. “Create and maintain culturally responsive environments to support all children and their families” (EPSB, 2003).

Five of the participants responded to the KTS Survey which asked them to circle the number that represents the extent to which they believe their field experiences in Belize prepared them to fulfill the Kentucky Teacher Standards. The survey utilized a likert scale with number one meaning the field experiences did not prepare the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard, number two meaning the field experiences somewhat prepared the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard, number three meaning the field experience mostly prepared the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard, and number four meaning the field experience completely prepared the participant to fulfill the corresponding standard. Space was also provided for the participant to provide additional comments related to their responses.

Table 3
Participant Responses to Survey for KTS

Participant	KTS 1	KTS 2	KTS 3	KTS 4	KTS 5	KTS 6	KTS 7	KTS 8	KTS 9	KTS 10
2	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4
3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	3
4	3	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	2
5	2	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	1	1
7	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	2

Scale: 1=Did Not Prepare, 2= Somewhat Prepared, 3=Mostly Prepared, 4=Completely Prepared

The participants of this survey believed that the field experiences most prepared them to fulfill KTS 3 “The Teacher Creates and Maintains Learning Climate,” with a mean of 2.8 (EPSB, 2008). Participants reported learning how to set up and take charge of large classes.

One participant noted that the activities sent home with the children were similar to activities she sent home with her students in Kentucky.

There were three standards that participants felt somewhat prepared to fulfill based on the international field experience, with a mean of 2.0 for each. The standards are KTS 3 “The Teacher Demonstrates the Implementation of Technology,” KTS 8 “Collaborates with Colleagues/Parents/Others,” and KTS 9 “Evaluates Teaching and Implements Professional Development” (EPSB, 2008). One participant reported that there wasn’t any technology available. Another participant commented at her surprise at how well the teachers used what little technology was available.

Participant 2, a senior with an associate’s degree, reported she felt the international field experience completely prepared her to fulfill several KTS. The other four participants, two with an associate’s degree and two without, did not feel that this international field experience completely prepared them to fulfill any of the KTS.

The participants of this survey felt the international field experience somewhat prepared them to fulfill the KTS with diversity proficiencies, standards two, three, four, five, six, and eight. The diversity proficiencies are listed below.

- KTS 2.2 Uses contextual data to design instruction relevant to students.
- KTS 2.4 Plans instructional strategies and activities that address learning objectives for all students.
- KTS 3.3 Values and supports student diversity and addresses individual need.
- KTS 4.2 Implements instructional strategies and activities that address learning objectives for all students.
- KTS 5.4 Describes, analyzes, and evaluates student performance data to determine progress of individuals and identify differences in progress among student groups.
- KTS 6.3 Integrates student use of available technology into instruction to enhance learning outcomes and meet diverse student needs.
- KTS 8.1 Identifies students whose learning could be enhanced by collaboration (EPSB, 2008).

Data obtained through denaturalized transcription (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005) of a recording of the focus group were organized around themes that emerged during analysis. The participants were eager and excited to participate, sharing inside jokes and laughter throughout the process. The overarching theme that emerged throughout the focus group was the difference between the field experience in Belize and field experiences in Kentucky. Participant responses were categorized into two areas—differences in the student experience, from which two subtopics emerged, inclusion and school culture, and personal changes

experienced by the participants, from which two subtopics emerged, classroom practice and attitudes.

Inclusion

Participants were struck by the way language diversity was incorporated in conversation within the classroom and among the students during recreational times. One participant shared,

I thought it was interesting that we went to the school and there were five different languages going on at the same time and that they could speak all of them, except for maybe the Garifuna. That was a little more complicated; but the kids didn't look at each other differently because they would speak in Spanish and at the drop of a hat, someone would start speaking in Creole (Kriol), and they would speak with them and then someone would speak in Q'eqchi (Kekchi), and they would start speaking with them.

Another participant commented about the difference between attitudes about language differences in Kentucky compared with attitudes about language differences in Belize.

They were very accommodating. That's why I was saying that I see such a big difference that even though we might not stop and drop everything if we hear someone speaking in Spanish at the grocery store, we still have a majority language, and I think we still look at other people through the lens of the dominant group or majority group. There [Belize] they were different races and ethnic backgrounds, but I never got the impression that one group felt superior to another or had a more important history than another or...I mean there was such an accommodation, an inclusion...and even you were talking about all the different languages, sometimes you would hear it within one sentence.

Several participants said, "yes" in agreement. The speaker continued with her comment. I mean they would be speaking Creole and then switch to Spanish or they'd switch to English or Q'eqchi maybe because the phrasing was better in a certain language or who knows maybe one language expresses something better than another. I was impressed with the inclusiveness. We talk about inclusion, and we try really hard, but for me, I still see...and maybe because I teach a lot in _____ where there are...there is a greater percentage of diverse groups and they...although they certainly relate well with each other, there's definitely some...some "groups". You walk into high school lunch rooms, and you'll see different racial groups sitting together.

Another participant commented about diversity being treated as a common occurrence in her field placement.

I think one of the things that impressed me the most was how the classroom flowed so smoothly that diversity is part of their everyday life and just like where I'm from we do have...we do have different ethnic groups but in that classroom, especially at X, everything flowed so smoothly. There were lots of diverse children and the language that was spoken...but the teachers made it seem so effortless that you know...how wonderful is it that diversity is part of your everyday life? I wish our children here were that lucky.

School Culture

Participants discussed differences in compulsory education in Kentucky when compared with Belize, and the impact these differences had on student attitudes. One participant remarked, “_____ was saying that because school was compulsory only to age 14, and you have to pass tests in order to go on, there’s an atmosphere in the school of being so fortunate that you are able to be in school. I mean, it’s a privilege...” Another participant broke in, “They do what they...because not all the kids there have the opportunity to be in school.”

The first participant continued with a discussion about the cost of attending school in Belize. “Unless you can afford the uniforms and the books and the stuff, you might not even be going to school. Even though technically, it’s compulsory. It’s compulsory, but you still have to pay something to be able to go.”

Participants were surprised that the teachers they were assigned to work with expected them to begin teaching the first day they were in the classroom. The participants discussed not being prepared for this. One participant described feeling “put on the spot”. Another participant stated, “I kind of wish when we went there we had a little bit...like if we knew what we were going to do...maybe conversed with the teachers by email beforehand, like what are you doing this week or can we bring this...?”

Participants discussed the differences in the structure of the instructional day in Belize as compared to Kentucky. One participant stated, “Well, you know, they get an hour for lunch and when they go home if they don’t want to come back, they don’t come back.” Another participant continued with that thought.

It’s just...it’s more laid back. It’s not as...they’re not...it’s not a forced scheduling. They don’t do the same thing at the same time every day. You know, our kids need that here. They say give them stability. They feed for it. They crave for it...and they don’t do that there. I found that interesting because even though they have a schedule up there, I asked the teacher, “This is what you follow every day?” And, she said, “Noooo...”

Another participant commented on the difference in rules in Belize classrooms and schools as compared with Kentucky classrooms and schools.

Here there’s a lot of set in concrete rules. You don’t leave class. You come back to class. If you skip like six classes, or you miss school six days in a row, you get in serious trouble, even court hearings. When I was talking to my teacher in Belize, they can’t afford to get rid of their kids. Their kids can stay

out of school over half the year, and they can't fail them because they need them for the grants they get from the government. So if their population for the school goes down, they lose that money. And, so the kids know this, and they act differently there.

Participants identified the separation of church and state as a big difference between schools in Belize and schools in Kentucky. Several students recounted incidents where teachers would correct student behavior or teach appropriate behavior by discussing what Jesus would do. One participant discussed a conversation she had with the teacher to whom she was assigned. "One of my teachers asked me specifically...she said, 'I heard that in the United States that in the schools um...that they don't talk about Jesus.' Those were her exact words, and I told her that in a lot of schools that is the way it is. She had an expression of shock come over her face. She said, 'That must be really hard.' Those were her exact words. That was her response."

Classroom Practice

Participants were asked what changes they had or might make in their classroom based on their field experiences in Belize. One participant shared

Well, I have pictures from Belize on my classroom wall, and we talk about it almost every day, especially at meal times, and they'll say, "Ms. _____, remember when you went to that other classroom?" And they'll say, "Can you tell me about the pictures from the zoo?" I've incorporated that in my everyday classroom because, you know, I really wanted them to see an actual classroom and the children and faces and especially watching the videos of them singing, you know. I think I've just incorporated it in my everyday life.

Another participant discussed the impact of using technology less and hands on activity more.

Obviously they don't have the technology that we do here but when we were in the classroom with the little kids, they were really hands on, and they got every single one of them involved, and they all took chances going to the board. It wasn't like you raise your hand, and they'd pick maybe one or two because they don't have enough time, and they want to move on, and we do Power Points and things. There the kids literally love it. "Ooo, pick me! Pick me!" Because they want to learn. They want to be interactive. Here kids are interactive but not nearly as much because our technology has evolved. They sit there kind of like a drone, and they watch. We're just not as active as we used to be...because I think kids are very tactile. So, the more they're interactive...the more they see it and do it, the easier it is to learn concepts after a while...

Attitudes

Participants reported coming back from the international field experience with changed attitudes and behaviors that were observed by the people with whom they had contact. One participant tried to describe her feelings. "It is hard to put into words the

experience I got from this. It's hard to explain. Even my family has asked me...my friends have asked me. I was like...even the pictures, you don't see...I can't explain it. It's just something...I felt like I did something good. And, I had a great time, and I learned a lot while doing it. It's the best way I can describe it.

Another participant described the changes in her personality resulting from the international field experience.

I've always viewed myself as like a very quiet and not very outgoing person. And, like, it's just really...it's opened me up and like my whole family and my friends...like they came back and they're like, '_____', you're just a totally different person.' And I'm like, 'Belize changed me!' And I'm like, I don't really know how to explain it, but it has...it's just opened my world to just so many different things.

Other participants described recognizing deficits in our actions toward diverse people as a result of her field experiences in Belize, moving toward a "critical consciousness" (Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012). "Like, you see how people treat us over there, and you come back, and you're like, 'Oh my gosh!' because you can't believe that we are not as accommodating as they are.

Another participant discussed the need for future participants in an international field experience to keep an open mind.

I think another thing you should expect is just how happy they are going to be seeing you....that the sheer joy when you walk in there and they want to know your name and sit in my lap and touch my hair...and that was ok because my hair was blonde. And, when they noticed that we were all from America...they thought we were from Canada for a while...and I was like, no we're from Kentucky, and they asked all these questions about the United States. They just were so eager and happy that we were there, so just expect that and go in there with an open mind and don't have any stipulations.

Discussion

The findings of this study added to the professional literature on the use of international field experience, particularly short term and faculty led, with teacher candidates. The first question of this study was what are pre-service teacher impressions about the impact a short term faculty led international field experience in preparing them to work with diverse students and families? Participants who taught in early childhood classrooms for their short term international field experience reported feeling mostly or completely prepared to meet all but two of the KTS/IECE with diversity proficiencies. The only KTS/IECE with diversity proficiency that they felt the international field experience did not prepare them to fulfill had to do with how they implement technology. This was possibly due to a lack of access to technology teachers experienced in these schools in Belize. In both written comments and

focus group comments, participants expressed not seeing technology utilized. DeVilla & Jiang (2012) reported that teacher candidates who completed student teaching abroad reported that the lack of technology and other instructional resources helped them develop creativity and flexibility as teachers and an ability to locate and utilize low cost materials. This was reflected in comments made during the focus group about how active the classrooms were getting every student up to the chalkboard to participate.

Participants who completed their international field experience in P-8 felt the international field experience somewhat prepared them to fulfill all of the KTS diversity proficiencies, including technology. The difference in perceptions between the two groups could be due to P-8 classrooms having greater access to technology, but that was not reported. It also could be because there was a difference in the diversity proficiency connected to the KTS/IECE and the diversity proficiency connected to KTS. The KTS diversity proficiency addressed utilizing technology in instruction and utilizing technology to meet individual student needs. The KTS/IECE diversity proficiency addressed using technology to meet individual student needs only. Perhaps technology was available for whole class instructional purposes but not for individual student use, so those participants who were in P-8 classrooms felt prepared to meet part of that standard. Subtle differences in the diversity proficiencies between KTS/IECE and KTS could have accounted for the differences in perceived level of preparation in means for the two groups.

Focus group data revealed that participants recognized differences in teacher attitudes and classroom practices surrounding diverse students. Lee, Butler, & Tippins (2007) noted that English Language Learners may feel alienated and discussed the need to help children develop more positive attitudes regarding cultural and language diversity in the classroom. Participants expressed beliefs that schools in Belize were more “accommodating” of language and cultural diversity and that it was part of the “daily life” in a classroom. Participants discussed changes in the attitudes and practices working with diverse students as a result of the international field experience. DeVilla & Jiang (2012) called these types of international field experiences that inform teaching and professional character as “value-added” (p. 16).

The second question that this study looked at was to what extent did the international field experience prepare participants to fulfill the KTS/IECE or KTS? Participants who were evaluated based on KTS/IECE upon certification reported that this field experience mostly or completely prepared them to fulfill five of the 10 KTS/IECE. There were two standards that this group reported the international field experience did not prepare them to meet. These

standards dealt with technology and professional development. One reason participants may not have felt prepared for the professional development standard could have been that they [participants] had a limited view of professional development and were only looking at specific programs designated for professional development which were not available during the week that they worked in the schools. Another reason could have been that professional development was not embedded in the regular school day, so participants did not experience it.

Participants who were evaluated based on the KTS upon certification felt that the international field experience somewhat prepared them to fulfill all 10 of the standards. They did not feel mostly or completely prepared for any of the standards. They also did not feel that the experience did not prepare them to fulfill any of the standards. The difference between the level of preparation they reported after the experience for some of the standards compared with their IECE counterparts could have been due to some subtle differences in the language of the standards. For example, the lowest mean, (.6) did not prepare, for IECE participants was standard six “Engages in Professional Development.” For the P-8 participants, standard nine “Evaluates Teaching and Implements Professional Development” was a mean of 2.0, somewhat prepared. The added portion of the standard “evaluates teaching” could have been what the P-8 participants observed in their teaching assignments.

Recommendations

This was the first year of a longitudinal study of the impacts of short term international field experiences in helping pre-service candidate become culturally relevant. Based on our experiences in the field and collecting data, four recommendations for future research are being reported.

1. Facilitating the development of cultural consciousness through international field experiences needs to be more explicit calling for reflection prior to the field experience and throughout the experience (Lastrapes & Negishi, 2012). Discussion of social equity issues in P-12 classrooms in Kentucky and an understanding of utilizing pedagogy that is culturally relevant could provide participants with a framework for processing international field experiences into practice when they return home.
2. Having participants review their respective standards in one of the meetings prior to departure will enable them to more intentionally connect the field experience to teacher evaluation practices. In addition, incorporating time for critical reflection throughout the field experience will also enable the participants to look for examples of the standards being met and may help them verbalize more accurate perceptions while internalizing multicultural competencies (Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011).

3. Completing the survey and focus group in two separate meetings instead of during the same meeting will allow survey data to inform the questions that are asked in the focus group. Participants may be asked for additional clarification of survey responses, and this will allow for deeper analysis.

4. Conducting short term international field experiences in other countries for will provide additional learning opportunities for students and additional research opportunities for comparison purposes.

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