

Scotland: A Service-Learning Study Abroad Trip in Agricultural Education

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Introduction

Study abroad trips are offered to university students to provide opportunities to travel internationally in a semi-controlled environment. In recent years, elementary, primary, and secondary classrooms have become more diverse, with a multitude of cultures and languages represented (Brown, 2007). The current and future generations of university students have grown up in culturally diverse environments, with interconnectedness and globalization; but there is a lack of cultural understanding and the skills to work in an increasing diverse world (Foster, Rice, Foster & Barrick, 2014). International course work and study abroad trip give students an introduction to understanding other cultures and gaining skills to work in an increasingly culturally diverse environment. Although research has shown that courses with international content can increase students' cultural competency, pairing the course with in-country experience achieved more gains in cultural knowledge and global competency (Foster, Rice, Foster & Barrick, 2014). It is critical that there are learning experiences abroad, but also before departure from the host country and arrival back to the students' home country (Navarro & Edwards, 2008; Conner & Roberts, 2015). All of the learning experiences should connect cultural traditions, with the pre-trip experiences preparing students for culture shock and cultural growth. The learning experiences during the trip should spotlight host country's cultural traditions and support students as they make cultural connections with pre-trip learning experiences. With the growing diversity, the question remains, are we preparing culturally competent teachers? To address this question, a service-learning teacher preparation, study abroad trip was created to give pre-service teachers a culturally diverse teaching experience.

Methodology

The Scotland: Youth Engagement in Agriculture study abroad program is a ten-day trip that engages students in cultural activities, opportunities to teach Scottish primary school students about agriculture and the environment, and interact and work with peer pre-service teachers at the University of Glasgow (UoG). Students apply and are selected by course instructors in the Fall semester, each year. Prior to the trip students have opportunities to begin the cultural immersion process. Instructors meet with the students prior to the trip four to five times to provide instruction on current teaching methodologies, how to construct a lesson plan, and cultural differences between the United States and Scotland. In groups, students are responsible for developing hands-on lessons for Scottish primary school students ranging from first to sixth grade. While developing their lesson plans, the students collaborate with pre-service teachers from the UoG. The partnership between both universities' students allows for students from the University of Georgia to develop a lesson in its entirety, and then seek feedback from the UoG students.

Prior to the trip, the University of Georgia and UoG students had the opportunity to develop a working relationship through a private social media page. The cultural awareness process began one month before the trip, next the students backpack through the United Kingdom to continue the cultural immersion process, then the University of Georgia students arrive in Dumfries where the Scottish primary school is located. While backpacking, students see significant landmarks and tourist attractions both as an entire group and in smaller, more intimate groups to gain a more complete understanding of Scottish and British history and culture. After traveling through the United Kingdom, students arrive in Dumfries, Scotland, where they will

stay for one week. During the day, students spend time at the local primary school, where they teach their lessons and interact with Scottish primary students and teachers. The time spent at the primary school affords students the opportunity to learn about the school's teaching philosophy and see their teaching methods first-hand. As pre-service teachers, this opportunity to learn about different teaching methods assists in the development of a well-rounded teacher. Each evening, the University of Georgia students are challenged to reflect on their day, addressing things that challenged their mindset, that excited them about the day, lead to deeper thoughts about their career trajectory, and overall comments about their experiences. The reflections are designed to encourage students to apply their experiences to their future teaching practice and career choices. After reflections, students continued the cultural immersion process by attending events, hosted by the Scottish university pre-service teachers that are unique to Scottish culture.

The University of Georgia students meet once more when they arrive back to their home country. This final meeting is a chance to reflect on how the University of Georgia students' attitudes and ideas about other the Scottish culture have changed, as well as reconnect with individuals they collaborated with over video conference. After the course has ended, students remain in the social media group and can continue to maintain the relationships they cultivated while abroad.

Implications

Exposure to new cultures has had profound impacts on students, both in teaching and other careers. Students' reflection component gives an insight to the increased efficacy that the pre-service teachers have after they have taught in a school and interacted with students with differing cultures from their own. The students' self-efficacy is reflected in their teaching skills, including lesson planning and implementation. Students also return with a better sense of cultural awareness. When the University of Georgia students begin their teaching careers, the University of Georgia students are better equipped to connect and teach culturally diverse students in their classrooms. Not only are they teaching, but they are teaching culturally relevant lessons that their students can relate to. Students' exposure to student-driven, democratic classrooms have provided students with alternative behavior management practices and ideas on how to create less rigid, more effective classrooms.

Future Plans

The program instructors plan on continuing this study abroad trip designed, but not exclusively for, pre-service teachers. The trip focus will remain to provide participants with the opportunity to be exposed to Scottish culture, classrooms, and teaching methods. In the future, additional research is planned to examine the impact of the teaching experience on non-teaching students. While anecdotal evidence has been collected, this would be valuable to determine if immersive experiences can influence students' thoughts about the education profession. Additionally, future research will examine the utilization of a touring experience on the students overall cultural development, previous research examined this without the touring experience.

Costs

Students are responsible for paying a \$1500 program fee, which pays for their meals, hotel accommodations, and transportation while in the United Kingdom. Students are responsible for their airfare to and from the United Kingdom which averages approximately \$900.00.

References

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