

Using Immersive Study Abroad Experiences to Strengthen Preservice Teachers' Critical Reflection Skills on Future Classroom Practices

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Abstract : Study abroad experiences create unique learning opportunities for preservice teachers to strengthen their reflective thinking practices through applied learning experiences. Not only do study abroad experiences provide opportunities for students to expand their cultural sensitivity, but incorporating applied learning experiences in study abroad trips creates unique opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in critical reflection on their teaching skills. Applied learning experiences are designed to nurture learning and growth through a reflective, experiential process outside the traditional classroom setting. As students participate in applied learning experiences, they engage in critical reflection independently, with their peers, and with university faculty. Critical reflection within applied learning contexts generates, deepens, and documents learning but must be intentionally designed to be effective. Grounded in Dewey's model of reflection, this qualitative study examines longitudinal data from various study abroad cohorts from a particular university. Reflective data was collected during the study abroad trip, and follow up data on critical reflection of teaching practices were collected six months and a year after the trip. Dewey's model of reflection requires preservice teachers to make sense of their experiences by reflecting on theoretical knowledge, experiences, and pedagogical knowledge. Guided reflection provides preservice teachers with a framework to respond to questions and ideas critical to the applied learning outcomes. Prompts are used to engage preservice teachers in reflecting on situations they have experienced and how they can be transferred to their teaching. Findings from this study noted that students with previous field experiences, or work in the field, engaged in more critical reflection on pedagogical knowledge throughout their applied learning experience. Preservice teachers with limited experiences in the field benefited from engaging in critical reflection prompted by university faculty during the applied learning experience. However, they were able to independently engage in critical reflection once they began work in the field through university field placements, internships, or student teaching. Finally, students who participated in study abroad applied learning experiences reported their critical reflection on their teaching practices, and cultural sensitivity enhanced their teaching and relationships with children once they formally entered the teaching profession.

Keywords : applied learning experiences, critical reflection, cultural sensitivity, preservice teachers, teacher education

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