Chapter 8

Study Abroad for Preservice Teachers: Critical Learning and Teaching in a Diverse Context

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ABSTRACT

The research presented in this chapter critically analyzes undergraduate preservice teachers’ perceptions of their study abroad experience in Hong Kong and Macau to better understand the potential as well as the challenges of preparing teachers for a diverse and global society. Drawing on critical analysis of both study abroad and preservice teacher education, we interrogate the potential for study abroad as a means to prepare culturally responsive teachers, and then critically read the preservice teachers’ perceptions of their experience. Results include both beneficial outcomes of study abroad to disrupt the competitive themes dominant in global education, as well as potential limitations of short term study abroad experiences as a method for establishing sustained global networks of educators. Considerations for those developing study abroad are presented and recommendations for study abroad planning are suggested.

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INTRODUCTION

Research finds that current teachers in the US are faced with a complex situation: a lack of requisite cultural awareness, knowledge and skills, which may leave them underprepared when teaching diverse students (Devillar & Jiang, 2012; Menard-Warwick & Palmer, 2012; Merryfield, 2000; Phillion, & Malewsjii, 2011). The majority of preservice teachers entering postsecondary education in the US represent a similar demographic of white, middle class females (Krummel, 2013). However, the student population of US classrooms is characterized by racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural diversity. Teacher preparation programs have taken steps to increase the diversity of teacher candidates and have sought various means to prepare teachers to be culturally responsive (Halbert & Chigeza, 2015; Marx & Moss, 2011; Salmona, Partlo, Kaczynski, & Leonard, 2015), but at the same time, have struggled with a declining number of applicants overall (Pino, Keitges, Witt, 2015).

In addition to these challenges, there is a growing consensus on the importance of internationalizing curricula to prepare teachers and students for a globalized society. In our globally connected world, teachers need an awareness of how local contexts of diversity are tied to global, transnational influences on education. Global economic competition has dominated much of the discourse in the emergent global education policy field (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For example, in the rhetoric that defines and drives a knowledge economy, educational systems are increasingly characterized as a means for nations to produce human capital capable of the kind of productivity that will ensure the global competitiveness of the national economy. In this neoliberal framing, education systems are competitors with rankings on international testing comparing national education systems interpreted as indicators of national economic potential for economic success (Sellar, & Lingard, 2013). In this paradigm, teachers’ performance is competitively measured against other nations, and specifically, other teachers’ performance in other nations. This context sets teachers in a competitive global frame.

Moreover, education standards within schools now come from an amalgam of local ideals, state standards, national education policy, and international benchmarks (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Ochoa, 2010). Widely available international data on education creates an intellectual space where educational policy making is not geographically bounded (Wiseman, 2010). OECD’s PISA and Education at a Glance indicators, along with other measures such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s (IEA) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) are part of a competitive globalizing empiricism (Torrance, 2006). Further, Sassen finds that global comparative measures of performance of national schooling systems are an integral part of a global infrastructure, and central to the operation of this global education policy field (2007). Policy makers within nations and within international organizations operate in global networks of epistemic communities (Kallo, 2009) with influence that extends into state and local levels.

Educators Navigating Global Education

Though much has been written about the neoliberal framing that dominates this emergent global education policy space, what is less clear is to what extent educators themselves are able to navigate this space and harness global networks as a means to work collaboratively within the global education space. Using technology to span distances and time, teachers and administrators can draw expertise from each other and collaborate across cultures like never before. Somewhat ironically, the isomorphic global education policy space results in similar policy pressures on a global scale. Such similarity can be a point of
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