FOSTERING CULTURAL HUMILITY THROUGH SHORT-TERM STUDIES ABROAD

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Abstract

It is widely recognized that many pre- and in-service teachers are unprepared to work with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While teacher preparation and professional development programs attempt to increase practitioners’ sensitivity to and competency with diverse students, these efforts often fall short; there is evidence, for example, that brief forays into immigrant communities result in a solidification of stereotypes rather than enhanced understanding. One potential strategy for expanding the cultural competence of teachers is through traditional semester- or year-long studies abroad, as it is assumed that extended contact with another culture is required for attitudinal change. Unfortunately, very few pre-service teachers take advantage of these opportunities, and in-service teachers are constricted by academic schedules and family and economic considerations. How, then, can teacher preparation and development programs provide the types of experiences likely to affect significant change? In this presentation, we will discuss the results of a study of 14 pre- and in-service teachers who participated in short-term (12-16 days) studies abroad that were designed to remove participants from their comfort zones and develop a sense of cultural humility. With data from 6 study abroad experiences in 3 countries over 11 years, the researchers examined how participants’ attitudes and beliefs changed when they were "othered" in international contexts. Through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and Transformative Learning Theory, the researchers found that participants indicated an increase in empathy for their students from diverse backgrounds, a better understanding of the importance of cultural capital in teaching and learning, and, perhaps most importantly, a change in instructional planning and practice. Suggestions for designing short-term experiences fostering cultural humility will be provided.

Keywords: Study Abroad, Othering, Cultural Humility, Cultural Competence, Teacher Education, Diversity.