

Preservice Teacher Preparation in International Contexts: A Case-Study Examination of the International Student Teacher Programs

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Abstract

This article examines the teacher preparation experiences of preservice teachers in six international contexts: China, Fiji, Kiribati, Mexico, Samoa, and Tonga. More specifically, it looks at the value-added components in an international teacher education program, with an emphasis on effective teaching and employability. Theoretically the study is based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998a) substantive grounded theory and Patton's (1997) Theory of Action Framework. Verbal and non-verbal forms of feedback were identified as essential aspects of the international preservice training experience. Cultural diversity, teaching English as a second language, collaboration, and exposure to a different educational system were identified among several components as advantages to individuals who conduct their preservice teacher training in international settings.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji pengalaman pelatihan calon guru di enam konteks internasional: Cina, Fiji, Kiribati, Meksiko, Samoa dan Tonga. Penulis secara spesifik menganalisa nilai tambah dari program pendidikan guru internasional, dengan penekanan pada pengajaran dan penerapan yang efektif. Studi ini berbasis pada teori dasar dari Straus dan Corbin (1998a) dan teori Action Framework dari Patton (1997). Feedback atau masukan verbal maupun non-verbal ditengarai menjadi nilai penting dari pelatihan guru internasional ini. Faktor lain yang menguntungkan peserta pelatihan calon guru ini adalah pengalaman mempelajari aneka ragam budaya, pengajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua, kolaborasi, dan sistem pendidikan yang berbeda.

Key Words: Preservice Teacher Training, China, Fiji, Kiribati, Mexico, Samoa, Tonga

Introduction

This study is part of a broader research initiative which involves the evaluation of Brigham Young University's International Student Teaching Programs (ISTP) in six case countries: China, Fiji, Kiribati, Mexico, Samoa, and Tonga. An overarching purpose of this broader study is to provide insights

into foreign student teaching programs emphasizing the value-added components that are only available through this type of a program. A second purpose is to provide a framework for identifying areas to enhance future foreign experiences, strengthen teaching educational curricular areas (i.e., art, biology, etc.) at both the elementary and secondary educational levels, and empower future preservice teachers with enhanced instructional techniques and skills. The literature on international student teaching programs can be categorized into three outcomes or goals: increasing personal and professional growth (Baker and Giacchino-Baker 2000; Clement and Outlaw 2002; Maurer and Halloway 1995; McKay and Montgomery 1995), enhancing global awareness (Clement and Outlaw 2002; Friesen, Kang, and McDougall 1995; Mahon and Cushner 2002; McKay and Montgomery 1995; McKay, Montgomery, and Quinn 1994;

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Quinn, Barr, Jarchow, Powell, and McKay 1995), and developing critical and reflective thinking about teaching (Baker and Gracchino-Baker 2000; Maurer and Halloway 1995; McKay et al. 1994; Quinn et al. 1995). Our literature review also examines issues that relate to the teacher-training process, the hiring process, cross-cultural experiences, and developing cultural sensitivity.

Identified underpinnings of a quality international student teaching experience include several key elements. Such elements include, that preservice teachers receive classroom experience in student management and teaching strategies in curriculum instruction for individual student learning and that preservice teachers develop a cultural awareness and sensitivity beyond a cursory acknowledgement that other cultures are different. Such an awareness translates into respect for cultures and the adaptation of objectives to a culture's focus. Finally, meeting licensure requirements for the United States is a necessary requirement of a quality international student teaching experience (Eilam 2002; Hill and Stairs 2002; Post, Wise, and Henk 2004; Uline, Wilson, and Cordry 2004).

America's schools are becoming increasingly more diverse while its teaching force is becoming increasingly monocultural, white, and middle class (Ukpokodu 2004, p. 19). This "disparity between educators and students is at the heart of why multicultural knowledge should be included in teacher education programs" (Correa, Hudson, and Hayes 2004, 324). Studies conflict regarding the impact of multicultural education and experience on preservice training programs. Some studies show that courses on diversity have little impact on participants' belief systems and practices (Deering 1997, 343; Deering and Stanutz 1995, 392). These studies further report, "a practice-teaching field experience in a multicultural setting has little impact on the cultural sensitivity of American preservice teachers" (Deering 1997, 347; see also Ukpokodu 2004, 26). Researchers cite the slow and difficult process of changing long-held attitudes and behaviors for this lack of success. Other studies, however, report success in both multicultural education courses and field experiences (Correa et al. 2004; Ukpokodu 2004). Davis and Turner (1993) argue, "participation in field-based or clinical experiences is an essential component of promoting cultural sensitivity" (11). While noting the difficulty to produce change through one experience, these studies nevertheless report improvement in empathy, caring, and attitudes about different cultures (Correa et al. 2004, 338; Ukpokodu 2004, 26). These conflicting results on the impact of multicultural education and experience require further study.

To date, there is a lack of literature on international preservice training experiences. No evaluation of BYU's ISTP has been

previously conducted,, giving added credence to the timeliness of this study. This study helps to fill this gap in the literature by examining the effectiveness of the training experiences of preservice teachers in six different countries. We examine the following question in this study as a basis for our evaluation of the ISTP: Under what conditions do preservice teachers develop the necessary skills that enable them to become effective teachers and that translate to employability? This research question coincides with our guiding hypothesis that preservice teaching experiences in an international context has a certain value-added component that is not possible to obtain in a domestic setting.

Context and Background

Since the early 1990s, Brigham Young University has established several international locations for preservice teachers to conduct their elementary or secondary student teaching. The ISTP provides the opportunity for both experienced university supervisors and classroom teachers as preservice teachers to be immersed in a foreign teaching experience. Sponsored by Brigham Young University, the ISTP has been in operation for 5 years or more in some countries and as many as 10 years in others. Preservice teachers spend a minimum of three months as a student teacher in a classroom in one of six international contexts: China, Fiji, Kiribati, Mexico, Samoa, and Tonga. The ISTP participants have extensive and diverse opportunities to develop English as a Second Language (ESL) skills; classroom placement inevitably forces preservice teachers to work in a new linguistic and cultural setting. Additionally, teaching in situations with limited or unfamiliar resources compels preservice teachers to collaborate, to be flexible, and to creatively teach academic concepts.

The student teaching experience places preservice teachers in countries throughout the world, providing multiple forms of feedback to assist them in developing knowledge and acquiring daily instructional strategies that will translate to employable skills. Future teachers develop teacher understanding and skills through interactions with their mentor classroom teacher, university supervisors, and collaboration with fellow student teachers with whom they share daily experiences with through program immersion and self-reflection.

The Program's emphasis is on the individual student teacher's ability to explore, develop, and apply instructional skills in spite of the fact that resources generally available in the United States are not available in the international placements. Limitations of this program are the smaller number of participants as compared to those who participate in traditional student teaching experiences in the US and the quality of feedback from the mentor

classroom teacher. However, both student and mentor participants' immersion in the program provides knowledge and development of teaching strategies.

The conduit for feedback to the preservice teacher from the mentor teacher differs in most international settings from the traditional US setting. It is the process of immersion in the application of teaching that provides the basis for a majority of the preservice teacher's evaluation. While the preservice teacher and mentor teacher do not often participate in a summative evaluation of the preservice teacher's instruction, the preservice teacher's formative evaluation largely considers the involvement of the day-to-day aspects of teaching. The immersion in the process of teaching provides the preservice teacher with practical feedback on teaching strategies through demonstrating that they successfully learned identified concepts. Because of the complete immersion in the process of teaching, the ISTP is a prime site for accessing practitioner knowledge about classroom instruction, especially in multicultural settings.

The Program has a four-fold focus: the application of learning, mentored instruction, group collaboration, and self-reflection. To accomplish these ends, the selection of personnel in the program is based on varying criteria. Case-country administrators must have substantial knowledge in educational theory and instructional strategy. Student teacher participants are extensively interviewed to determine whether they possess the qualities that will allow them to access teaching skills through a feedback system rather than classroom instruction course work. BYU student teacher supervisors are chosen by the Teacher Education department. University supervisors hold a minimum of a master's degree in an area of teacher education or a related education discipline. Classroom co-operating teachers are assigned collaboratively by the country's educational administration and university supervisors. Mentor teachers are qualified local teachers, who exhibit proficiency in teaching skills, are willing to model teaching methods, and are willing to work with preservice teachers. Public school administrators are selected because they have interviewed and hired an ISTP trained teacher from among many prospective teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on a substantive grounded theory, which deals with both every-day situations (Merriam 1998) and the continual development of a theory throughout the research process (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Merriam 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1998a). First, this study deals with the everyday world of student teaching training in an international setting and is supported by Merriam's definition of

substantive theory as "referent specific, everyday-world situations Substantive theory has a specificity and hence usefulness to practice" (17). Second, the project uses an emic approach with the theory emerging from the data analysis. The data has been systematically gathered and analyzed. The theory has evolved through a constant interchange between the data and analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998a). Furthermore, with our interest in discovering how effective the ISTP's preservice experiences were in each country, we wished to examine both theory and practice. Instruments were therefore based on Patton's (1997) Theory of Action Framework, including questions on both theory and practice regarding the effectiveness of the training experience in a foreign setting.

Methods

Case study methods in postpositivist and grounded theories were employed in this study (Phillips and Burbules 2000; Yin 2003). Phillip and Burbules (2000) identify postpositivism as "believing that human knowledge is not based on unchangeable, rock-solid foundations—it is conjectural" (26). Case study methods identify multiple realities based on each individual's reality with an essence to a shared experience. The philosophy of phenomenology, therefore, served as a foundation for the study (Merriam 1998). Phillip and Burbules (2002) support the philosophy of phenomenology and the researcher's connection when they explain the social nature of scientific research, "Researchers belong to a community . . . the inquirer individually constructs complex ideas from his or her stock of simple ideas which have their origin and justification in that particular individual's experience" (24). Our case study approach builds on the individual experiences of each of the ISTP participants and constructs the complex ideas found in a shared experience.

Case study methods are used for theory development. This case study focused on gleaning information from the participants' points of view and their identification of what was important in the development of employable teaching skills for preservice teachers (Merriam 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1998b; Yin 2003; Bogdan and Biklen 2006). Descriptions relayed in the interviews were based on participants' understanding and perceptions of reality concerning the ISTP. Descriptions provided the base for which the participants evaluated the success of the program and the necessary characteristics needed by participants to successfully complete the program goals.

Participants

Participants were selected from four identified participant groups—preservice teachers ($n=20$), case-country administrators ($n=10$), BYU administrators ($n=12$), and public school administrators in the United States, hereafter referred to as public school administrators ($n=10$). Preservice teachers were randomly selected from hundreds of students who have participated in the ISTP since the early 1990s, and stratified by country and year of participation. This geographic stratification of students allowed us to examine preservice training in each of the six case countries. We also stratified students by year to determine what the ISTP was like ten years ago, as well as its composition in more recent years. This helped to control for unnecessary program distortion over time. BYU administrators were identified based on their ISTP participation. Case-country administrators were also stratified by year to ensure an equal representation of key case-country administrators for the ISTP case countries over time. Public school administrators were selected from a convenience, snowball sample with the help of the BYU Placement Office and by contacting school districts in the US who have hired one or more past ISTP preservice teachers.

Instruments

Each interviewee was asked a set of 12 questions, as well as three or four additional questions unique to their ISTP role. During the interview process, interviewers sought to understand the goals, outcomes, and advantages of participation in the ISTP program. Questions addressed issues such as: the objectives of the ISTP program, strengths and weaknesses of the program, advantages or disadvantages of participating in the program, future teaching preparation, personal characteristics necessary for successful participation in the ISTP program, differences in skill acquisition and student teaching programs between ISTP trained teachers and conventionally trained teachers, and ability of ISTP graduates to deal with diversity in a US educational setting. Participants were encouraged to provide additional information not covered in the interview at the end of each interview, which provided for deeper descriptions of the ISTP. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Descriptions of the ISTP experience relied on the recollections of the ISTP participants. The limitation of this study was addressed by comparing the results of an Assay of the year of participation. Assays were also completed to compare inter and intra-group reliability.

IRB Approval Process

This study followed a strict ethical process that obtained institutional approval through BYU and each of the participating organizations and groups of participants. Interviewees were given the opportunity to voluntarily participate and could withdraw from participation at any time during the interview process. Only one student declined the opportunity to participate.

Data Analysis

All in-depth interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed prior to being coded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software. By reviewing the text, tree nodes and free nodes were created, in which several overarching themes were identified. Texts were coded into three major categories that were then defined into 18 sub-categories discussed in the findings section of this article.

Credibility of the results was established through triangulation and peer debriefing. The researchers strove to develop credibility through truthfulness of the findings of the subjects. In other words, findings that speaks for the group from which the study is derived and which also applies back to them. Throughout the analysis process, the researchers strove to accomplish a “compatibility of the constructed reality that exists in the minds of the inquiry’s respondents with those that are attributed to them” (Erlandson et al. 1993, 30). Inter-rater reliability checks were also conducted on the categorization of data and refining of categories. Researchers constructed categories to analyze patterns of responses.

Triangulation involved both inter and intra-group comparisons using NVivo matrix intersection searches between nodes. Both the number of documents and passages coded at each node intersection were used to determine credibility. Passages at intersections were categorized by interview group and nodes were reviewed to make an assessment of the different interviewees and to check for consistency in concept application. Additionally, Assay searches of interview groups and matrix searches were run to verify that a minimum of 50 percent of the participants in each group identified the same concepts in the research question. Searches illuminated strong patterns. Axial coding identified relationships between identified categories and emerging patterns. Patterns were identified with categories and then refined to themes until a model was developed to encapsulate all relevant concepts.

Additional techniques were employed to ensure reliability and validity. Triangulation was conducted using document attributes of time (completion of the project) and space (country location of

participation). Also, two forms of checks were employed—peer debriefing and member check. Peer debriefing was conducted by co-researchers analyzing the materials, testing the study’s working hypothesis, and carefully noting emerging designs and dialogue on ideas and concerns. A reflective journal provided insights and reasons for methodological decisions, data analysis, logic of theory development, and a comprehensive understanding of deeper descriptions offered in the recording of emerging patterns and themes through the audit trail. Deeper descriptions described the “interrelationships and intricacies of the context being studied” (Erlandson et al. 1993a, 32). Finally, validity was established through purpose sampling, which sought out both the typical and divergent data that maximized the range of information about the context.

Findings

The primary goal of the ISTP is to assist potential preservice teachers in developing skills to become effective teachers within a global perspective. This case study focuses on the process utilized in the ISTP for preservice teachers’ acquisition and expansion of teaching skills and demonstrates that participation in this program achieves the identified goal. A preservice teacher, summarized the entire process:

As a result the process culminated in realization of the program goal . . . the teachers the program produces, whether they can use the experience they had . . . and whether it enriches their pedagogy and makes them a better teacher in the end. (01-18:28)

The findings verify the development of teaching skills, which translate to employability skills. The data identifies two processes—verbal feedback and non-verbal feedback—that influence the acquisition of teaching skills. The open coding of participants’ interviews reveal that the immersion into the teaching program, with non-traditional forms of mentoring, provided the strongest structure for the preservice teachers’ development of teaching skills. Non-traditional forms of mentoring included collaborative dialogues with other preservice teachers who were participating at the same time in the same international setting, informal dialogues with the country’s assigned BYU supervisor, personal reflections on teaching strategies, personal observations of teaching strategies, and collaborative dialogues with the in-country mentor teachers.

The study suggests successful acquisition of employable skills through participation in the ISTP. The ISTP provided verbal feedback through summative evaluations to the preservice teacher

from their assigned BYU supervisor and in some countries, their co-operating classroom teacher. Non-verbal feedback entailed service within the community and at their assigned school, self-reflection, and a recorded increased ability to view situations and people through a new lens with the appropriate modifications with the preservice teacher’s instructional strategies. The ties between verbal and non-verbal feedback entail a dynamic, evolving process throughout both the teaching and student teaching experience (Lortie 1975; Beadie 1996; Forbes 2003; Hipp and Huffman 2002).

The descriptions were analyzed using NVivo matrix intersection searches to determine whether verbal and non-verbal feedback developed teaching skills in participating preservice teachers and whether they translate to employable skills. Evidence was evaluated to determine the degree of validity within this relationship. Inter and intra-group triangulation was used to establish sufficient support.

Table 1. Attributes of the Teaching Skills Learning Process that Facilitate the Acquisition of Employable Skills

Skills Learning Process Depth	Verbal Feedback Levels	Non-Verbal Feedback Levels
US Employability	Student focus Transferability Cultural adaptation	Student focus Transferability Cultural awareness Insight
Essential components	Interaction Mentoring	Self-discovery
Personal attribute strength	Listener application	Insight Transferability
Perspective	Reciprocal learning	Service Insight

Based on the data, the development of teaching skills directly impacts the ability of the student teacher to demonstrate employable skills for instruction in the US educational system. Three prominent themes were identified in developed teaching attributes: personal characteristics, the development of teaching strategies, and communication with an understanding of cultural diversity. These themes translated to the following employable skills: translation of skills to the US educational system, depth of understanding and insight into the different components of education, foresight and a passion to accommodate educational concepts for individual students, and development of the essential components necessary for the student teacher to instruct in an actual classroom setting (e.g., classroom discipline and content knowledge). A range of 50 to 100 percent of the preservice

teachers, university administrators, and public school administrators documented the crucial development of classroom skills as a function of identified teaching skills and employability skills. Preservice teachers developed key teaching skills and all participant groups except case-country administrators documented their translation to employability skills. For example, the strength of how the preservice teacher’s actions impact the students they taught was only highlighted by the preservice teachers. While such an example has preservice inter-group credibility, it lacks the same degree of credibility with the other interviewed ISTP participants.

The authors identified the importance of understanding the context within which the skills of teaching are nurtured and developed. Based on the analysis, all 50 of the interviewees generated enough qualitative data to support the use of the areas of identified verbal feedback and the non-verbal feedback as instrumental in the development and enhancement of the student teacher’s teaching skills. These teaching skills then translate to employability skills.

Proposition 1: The use of feedback will relate to the acquisition of teaching skills by the preservice teachers participating in the ISTP program.

Verbal Feedback

Verbal feedback was given to the preservice teachers through both the planned clinical structure and the natural teaching interactions over time. Planned clinical structure involved mentoring by the case-country administrator and the assigned co-operating teacher. Natural teaching interactions included networking with peers and exchanging ideas with other teachers and community members.

Skill Acquisition through Reciprocal Learning

The interchange of ideas and reflection between preservice teachers, preservice teachers and supervisors, and preservice teachers and community members (i.e., parents) facilitated the development of teaching skills. Networking was identified as the primary method of verbal feedback in developing teaching strategies, cultural diversity, communication skills personal characteristics of adaptability and creativity, and teaching preparation. Identified support from all of the ISTP interviewed groups ranged from 50 to 100 percent.

Over 80 percent of participants within three of the ISTP groups identified the development and demonstration of communication skills as one aspect of teaching strategies learned through

networking. Inter-group triangulation identified that preservice teachers, ISTP administrators, and public school administrators significantly addressed the belief that the development of communication as a necessary teaching skill is developed through networking. Case-country administrators identified this skill in less than 50 percent of their interviews. However, the majority of case-country administrators indicated a lack of knowledge about the work of preservice teachers within the classroom from their interactions with these teachers, which did not include observation within the classroom. This identified difference of interaction with the preservice teachers might account for the absence of highlighting this teaching skill.

Networking influenced the willingness of preservice teachers to learn from others with more experience or who were learning in a similar process. One preservice teacher said, “We had each other and as a group we were able to support each other. We knew exactly what everybody else was doing. So we had that support for each other” (01-14: 50).

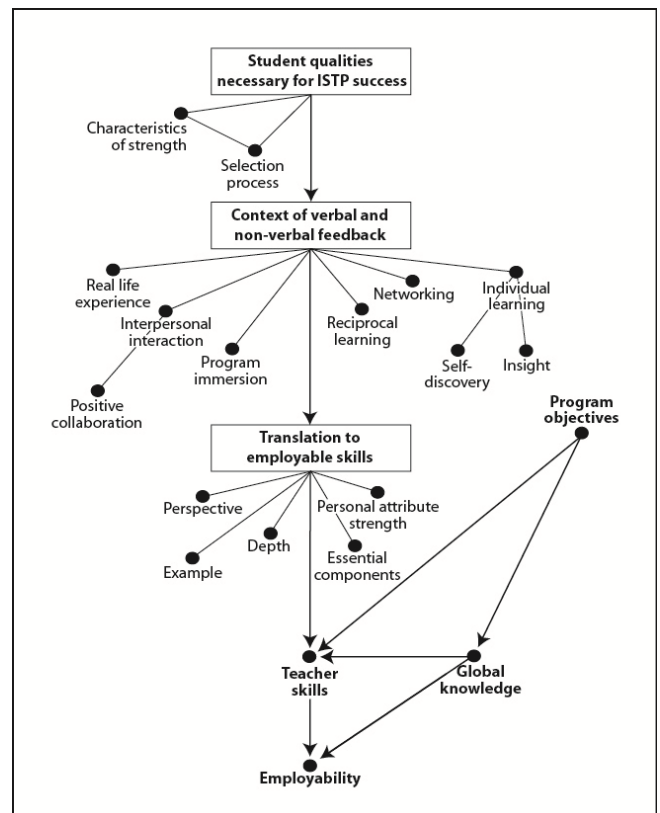


Figure 1. The ISTP Process of Employability through the Development of Teacher Skills and Global Knowledge

Both a preservice teacher and a case-country administrator indicated the positive perspective of the network learning. A preservice teacher said, “One of the strengths that I saw was the faculty support that was great. They don’t just send students out on their own” (01-01:40). While the process of collaboration indicated strong informal dialogues and formal training sessions, the concepts of everyday experiences and university theory served as vehicles for reciprocal learning. Effectiveness of these instructional techniques was perceived at varying levels.

Skill Development through Mentoring

Social forces of interaction and learning that occurs through the mentoring process mold the student teacher in the ISTP program. Interaction between mentors and preservice teachers did not increase the perceived development of teaching skills. The positive identification of the process of mentoring was sufficiently limited. While mentoring was provided, it was not always in the format of the formal mentoring that preservice colleagues in the US experience. As a result, preservice teachers did not identify the activity of formal mentoring as instrumental in the development of teaching skills. Some preservice teachers indicated a negative experience with formal mentoring due to either an absence of mentoring or micro management of the student teacher.

Of the preservice teachers who responded negatively, one openly admitted he “Abhorred the traditional educational training system and so found the formal mentoring restrictive” (01-10:28). Other explanations for a negative experience with formal mentoring can be attributed to the desire for more summative observations by a university supervisor who was an expert in their curricular field. While the preservice teachers recognized the instructional strengths of their supervisors, the ISTP program was limited in providing supervisors whose curricular knowledge expertise matched that of each preservice teacher.

In contrast, the absence of mentoring was seen as a positive tie to the development of teaching skills. Another preservice teacher had little supervision and enjoyed the freedom for which the previous preservice teacher sought. She said, “I had a lot of freedom in teaching. I didn’t have my mentor teacher telling me constantly what I had to do. So I think having the opportunity to really teach made a difference” (01-08:18).

Sufficient qualitative data supports skill development as a function of verbal feedback and teaching skills. Preservice teachers identified verbal feedback as strong in developing teaching strategies (90 percent), cultural adaptations (60 percent), communication (75 percent), and teacher preparation (83 percent). Networking was the strongest form of verbal feedback. Public

administrators identified verbal feedback as significant in developing communication (75 percent), cultural adaptation (100 percent), personal characteristics (100 percent), and teaching preparation (70 percent). BYU administrators identified verbal feedback as significant in developing communication (66 percent), cultural adaptation (100 percent), personal characteristics (100 percent), and teaching preparation (70 percent).

Non-Verbal Feedback

Non-verbal feedback processes enabled the tie between preservice teachers’ development of teaching skills and their translation to employable skills. The disparity between the reality of the skills needed to teach and a preservice teacher’s training is central to the importance of the discerning the conditions under which verbal and non-verbal feedback provided effective preparation for future educators. The attributes of non-verbal feedback—program immersion, real life experience, and individual learning—often worked harmoniously to provide application and practice of skills at higher-level learning. The ISTP program identified that participants were able to optimize the use of non-verbal feedback to their advantage in preparation to teach in the educational system.

Skill Learning through Program Immersion

The process of decoding feedback through the non-verbal process of program immersion between teachers and students, and teachers and parents, facilitated the development of teaching skills. Explaining one tie at a time, program immersion increased an individual’s opportunity for individual learning. Opportunities for self-discovery and insight were heightened. Immersion into a teaching experience mirrored the actual experience of the classroom teacher and pushed preservice teachers to look beyond traditional solutions. A public school administrator illuminated an aspect of this tie:

You are learning because you are growing in ways that stretch you beyond your normal bounds. I think when a person is in a situation that is foreign, and I don’t mean by country but I mean sometimes blind to in familiar circumstances. (04-03:46)

Significant support was apparent in both inter and intra-group triangulation.

Skill Learning through Real Life Experience

The non-verbal feedback of a real life experience facilitated the development of teaching skills by propelling preservice teachers into situations in total immersion. They had to learn to adjust because there was no alternative. The participants had to initiate effort to rise to the expectations and to learn from their interactions with students and the culture of the classroom. The process of the real life experience pushed the development of participants to further enhance their personal characteristics or to develop latent ones they previously did not realize they had. Additionally, participants learned to identify that the skills learned through the ISTP experience would transfer to any educational setting. One preservice teacher said, “Having the students who use the ISTP be able to use their experience for the betterment of whatever group they are going to be working with, whether it’s a multi-cultural American school, or like for me, teaching abroad again” (01-08:9).

Skill Learning through Individual Learning

The process between individual learning, real life learning, and program immersion facilitated the development of the depth of the student teacher’s understanding of necessary skills. The ability of the teacher to identify what they learned and what needs to be learned is a critical element of a successful teacher. A successful teacher is a continual learner, however, one cannot learn if one does not understand what they need to learn (Freire 1998).

The tie of skill learning through individual identification of necessary knowledge assisted the student teacher in identifying their progress along the continuum of acquisition of teaching skills. A new ISTP preservice teacher on her way to begin the experience said about her place in the learning process:

I think that cultural awareness is important to the point that you are willing to be more aware. . . . That goes along with the open mind. An important attitude for preservice teachers. . . . I think as a student teacher it is important that you go expecting to learn from them because that way you can learn from each other and you’re not always trying to be the teacher, but you are also learning. (01-18: 40)

Using NVivo in matrix intersections of the three attribute nodes of non-verbal feedback, the strongest support was identified as the real life experience and program immersion. Additionally, the data sufficiently supports the tie between program immersion and individual learning. Sufficient qualitative data supports the ties between non-verbal feedback and teaching skills. Eighty

percent or more of respondents’ descriptions generated sufficient qualitative data to support the tie between the development of teaching skills through non-verbal feedback. The tie for case-country administrators remained minimal in identified areas. Their support was only 33 percent for the tie between individual learning and teaching strategies, and the development of communication skills through program immersion or identified individual learning/reflection.

In summary, the process of decoding non-verbal feedback is an evolving process of the preservice teachers continuing their learning of teaching skills through the application process of practicing those skills. The data demonstrates that each of the non-verbal feedback attributes is closely tied to the development of key teaching skills. The application nature of non-verbal feedback successfully facilitates the student teacher’s acquisition of employable teaching skills.

Proposition 2: The greater the acquisition of teaching skills: terms of teaching strategies, cultural diversity, communication, personal characteristics, and teaching preparation the more likely it is for the student teacher to develop through the decoding of feedback. This increase in teaching skills, coupled with an international experience, increases participants’ employability skills.

With sufficient supporting qualitative data, the results on the five identified areas of teaching skills indicate that 100 percent of participants identified the development of teaching strategies, cultural diversity and adaptation, and personal characteristics (i.e., adaptability, flexibility, maturity, and open mindedness), and 90 percent identified the enhancement of communication and teacher preparation as teaching skills. Participants (93 percent) identified verbal feedback through networking. Most participants (98 percent) also identified positive results from non-verbal feedback through program immersion, real life experience, and individual learning to develop preservice teachers’ teaching skills. The verbal and non-verbal feedback ties to skill development are supported across all four interviewed groups.

Patterns were observed across document attributes. The absence of representation in an attribute (e.g., country) skews the results for attributes. A slight contrast in findings is affected by the time since completion is attributed to the fact that one participant has not yet experienced all parts of the program. Gender did seem to have an impact on the descriptions. Overall, the continuum of participation years and the consistency with response in the identified concepts lends significant support to the consistency of the emerging theories found by the researchers.

Descriptions showed the strongest ties between all elements of teaching skills and employability skills in the areas of US educational system, depth, and essential components. Ties were also supported strongly between other teaching skills and employability skills and between the element of teaching skills—cultural diversity and the employability skills—for successful employment and perspective. Interview groups generated qualitative data that ranged from 50 to 100 percent in support. A third credible tie was between personal characteristics and personal attribute strength. Consistently throughout the additional ties, the case-country administrators remained somewhat silent with only minimal, insufficient detail to support the concepts.

The convergence of themes and patterns was established both within and across cases through matrix intersections using NVivo (NVivo 2000). The data and emerging theory were revisited to establish the reality of the social phenomena. The repeated data analysis incorporated new themes and constructs as they emerged from coding and analysis. Themes emerged that had changed from the researchers' original focus. Through the process of axial coding, the researchers constantly revisited node definitions and tree structure of concepts. The repeated process of analysis developed more accurate and credible patterns and themes both across and within cases (Huberman and Miles 1998; Yin 2003; Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Analysis included matrix text analysis, numeric table analysis, model development, node definitions and revisions, recording of reasoning through a reflective journal, and development of matrices. The process continued until all elements of student qualities, teacher skills, feedback, and employability skills could be included on the model.

Discussion

Preservice training in an international setting is often viewed as an attractive alternative to student teaching in a domestic school. Exposure to new cultures, teaching styles, and education systems gives preservice teachers an opportunity to broaden their teaching horizons, while honing fundamental teaching skills. The authors identified the development of skills in fundamental areas through verbal and non-verbal feedback in an international setting. Additionally, in the international setting, preservice teachers must learn to develop adequate *culture literacy* skills in order to interpret various, and often non-traditional, forms of feedback so frequently given in an international preservice training environment (Soetaert, Mottart, and Verdoodt 2004).

The examination of the value-added benefits of an international preservice teaching experience is the primary objective of this study. Based on preservice teaching experiences in six countries, respondents mentioned that while an international

experience provides teachers with many additional preservice teaching opportunities, it is probably not the right fit for all preservice teachers. The four interviewee groups identified self-motivation, cultural sensitivity, and flexibility as essential personal characteristics for a successful international preservice teaching experience. While these characteristics were necessary for a theoretically successful experience, not all preservice teachers possessed these characteristics. Several case-country administrators commented that while most of the student teachers were well prepared for their international experience, some were not. These findings coincide with Patton's (1997) Theory of Action Framework, which highlights the differences that can exist between theory and actual practice.

Effective international preservice teachers were generally those who demonstrated versatility in the classroom, with the ability to adapt to the needs of students who, for the most part, spoke English as a second or foreign language. Local university administrators often reported teaming and collaborative teaching skills as necessary for preservice teacher success. Like Shultz and Mandzuk (2005) and Anderson and Herr (1999), our findings identified differences that existed between what preservice teachers learned in the university classroom and what they experienced in the international preservice schools.

In addition to acquired skills in the preservice teaching process, university and case-country administrators said that a minimal level of fundamental teaching and social skills were also viewed as necessary precursors to participating in an international preservice teaching experience. University and case-country administrators spoke frequently about the importance of screening applicants based on their teacher education preparation and what administrators said was a good fit with the host country program. The only case-country where language fluency was deemed a prerequisite was Mexico; preservice teachers had to speak Spanish in order to qualify for the program. While all of the other foreign preservice settings involved teaching students who spoke English as a second language, none of them required fluency in the host country language.

While an international preservice teaching experience brings many opportunities to participating student teachers, it also brings its own challenges. Several public school administrators said that one drawback of the international experience is that local hiring administrators do not have the opportunity to see preservice teachers during their student teaching experience. Another drawback is that the case-country educational systems often have differing education timelines that do not coincide with US educational timelines. Aside from these drawbacks, cultural and diversity immersion opportunities are rarely surpassed in a US preservice teaching experience.

Conclusion

The ISTP program was established to train preservice teachers to become effective classroom teachers with a global perspective. The program places perspective teachers in a cultural setting different from the one in which they learned and removes many of the support systems that guide preservice teachers here in the US. However, the circumstances for the ISTP teacher provides experiences that Lortie (1995) indicates are missing in the traditional student teaching setting.

Understanding the possible limitations of traditional methods of coaching and guiding the training of the student teacher, the ISTP program identified the salient components in the preservice teacher trainer process. It was then found that preservice teachers worked through a series of either verbal or non-verbal feedback to learn the necessary teaching skills and apply them to the actual process of classroom instruction. Preservice teachers in the ISTP program experience a continual emergence of their own increased knowledge and understanding both in content areas and in teaching strategies as a result of what they learn from the teaching process and their social interactions. Additionally, it was found that the non-verbal feedback attributes of immersion, real life learning, and individual learning were closely tied.

The process and model paths explain how the preservice teacher is influenced through the development of their teaching skills. This study contributes to the educational discussion on effective methods to train preservice teachers to be valuable, successful teachers. The research also raises the critical implication concerning the effectiveness of verbal feedback verses non-verbal feedback and the success of each type of feedback. It also raises questions about the effectiveness of training student teachers in an international setting for employment in the US. Theoretical propositions suggest that preservice teacher screening and effective decoding of feedback for teaching skill expansion allow preservice teachers to increase employable skills, which ultimately translate to the educational system.

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