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## Enhancing Orientation to Cultural Difference: The Role of Reentry Work for Teacher Candidates Studying Abroad

Michele Back , Douglas Kaufman, and David M. Moss

University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut

### ABSTRACT

In an era when education researchers and policymakers alike are paying increasing attention to the cultivation of global mindedness among teacher candidates, the current push for accelerated teacher preparation programs, combined with increasingly stringent state assessment requirements, has had the unfortunate effect of steering the focus away from purposeful attention to cultural differences and global issues. In this article, the authors discuss the value of reentry experiences following international teaching internship programs for cultivating orientation to cultural difference. Within the overall structure of a Master's year that incorporates a semester of study abroad as well as pre-departure and reentry components, the reentry work at the university under study allows for deep reflection on the study abroad experience, increasing its impact among candidates. Using a mixed-methods design, the authors first demonstrate participants' increased orientation to cultural difference before reentry work, as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). They then present an analysis of student reflections immediately after returning from abroad and discuss elements of the reentry curriculum and an analysis of student reflections from late in the post-return semester. Findings suggest a crucial role of extended reentry work in enhancing orientation to cultural difference among teacher candidates who study abroad.

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As the importance of global competence has become more recognized among education researchers (Quezada, 2010; Zhao, 2010) and school administrations (e.g., Arlington World Languages, n.d.; Mansfield, CT Public Schools, 2017), K-12 teacher preparation programs are often tasked with cultivating this competence among their candidates. Yet, in an era in which teacher education programs are increasingly constrained by funding, state credentialing requirements, and the demands of national assessments, candidates frequently enter the workforce ill-prepared to face the complexities inherent in teaching diverse groups of learners (Mahon, 2010; Poole & Russell, 2015; Zhao, 2010).

Teacher education programs that effectively manage these constraints are potentially well-positioned to foster their candidates' global mindedness through short- or long-term study abroad programs. Although study abroad is often cited as the quintessential experience for developing cultural and linguistic competence (Brecht & Ingold, 2000), it frequently includes episodes of discomfort that can be counterproductive to this development (Santoro & Major, 2012). Because of this, Byram (2006), Santoro and Major (2012), Szkudlarek (2010), and many others argue that a complete study abroad experience must include ample opportunity for reflection, particularly upon reentry, in order to achieve its desired impact. Providing space for reentry reflection appears especially important for teacher candidates; carefully constructed post-experience reflections have been found to lead to greater intercultural growth among teacher candidates as they apply what they have learned abroad to their classrooms at home (e.g., Hauerwas et al., 2017).

While there is a growing body of literature on the study abroad experience on both teacher candidates and postsecondary students in general, little of this research specifically focuses on reentry work (see Hauerwas et al., 2017, for an exception). This is concerning, as the experience of reentry is often ignored in favor of the other priorities described previously, which can be substantially challenging for study abroad returnees, causing affective, cognitive, and behavioral issues (Szkudlarek, 2010). Because of these challenges, as Brubaker (2017) pointed out, current research and programmatic activities focused on reentry tend to frame this stage in negative terms (e.g., by emphasizing reverse culture shock), contributing to further reluctance on the part of study abroad returnees to fully reflect upon and process their study abroad experience. This reluctance also makes it difficult for teacher candidates to further consider the global dimensions of their respective disciplines, an important component of leveraging their study abroad experience to become better global educators.

In this article, we draw on data from our teacher preparation-oriented study abroad program, which provides experiences in diverse areas of the globe (London, UK; Cusco, Peru; and Cape Town, South Africa) to: 1) highlight the importance of reentry in a comprehensive study abroad program; and 2) outline some of the steps we have taken to ensure that our program contains a robust reentry component. Our program model incorporates a yearlong experience of pre-departure, study abroad, and reentry (described further in the Methods section). Using a mixed-methods study design, we first present data from the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer et al., 2003) to show how our teacher candidates exhibited greater orientation to cultural difference immediately following their study abroad experiences, but before participating in reentry work. We then present evidence that suggests the necessity of reentry work to fully maximize the benefits of the study abroad experience through a thematic analysis of global learning assessments and participant observations and through examples of practice in our reentry curriculum. Finally, we demonstrate how this approach calls attention to potential improvement in future iterations of our program, and we discuss implications for teacher preparation programs that currently have or are considering adding a study abroad component.

## Conceptual framework

Our conception of global competence in this article focuses on how orientation to cultural difference relates to an increased desire to become a global citizen and advocate for social justice and equity. Similar to the notions of critical global cosmopolitanism (Byker & Marquardt, 2016) and Critical Interculturality (Dervin, 2017), we discuss aspects of our study abroad program that enhance the following aspects of global mindedness:

- Perceptions of and curiosity about cultural similarities and differences (the “eyes being opened” stage of Freire’s critical consciousness, as described in Byker & Marquardt, 2016)
- The ability to apply these perceptions and curiosity to interactions with individuals from different groups than one’s own (the “synergetic transactions between the person and the environment” described by Dervin, 2017; see also Forum on Education Abroad, 2015)
- A willingness to act by adapting one’s behavior and encouraging others to adapt to culturally complex situations (e.g., Freire’s “rewriting the world,” as discussed in Byker & Marquardt, 2016; see also Bennett, 1993; Cushner, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018).

This conception speaks to a particular skill set that all educators need in order to interact with their peers, students, parents, and other school stakeholders in equitable and socially just manners. Educators with strong orientations to cultural difference demonstrate genuine curiosity, possess knowledge of cultural nuances, can strategically adapt their discourses when communicating in various cultural contexts, and advocate for change. Given these benefits, we believe that examining how these orientations are perceived and performed discursively, as well as measured through

validated instruments such as the IDI (Hammer et al., 2003), allows us a better approximation of the development of global mindedness among our teacher candidates.

Examining the role of orientation to cultural difference on the development of global citizenship and advocacy also relates to Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), particularly more recent interpretations of the model (which we discuss further in the Findings section) that describe a "minimization" stage as a transitional stage within the intercultural development continuum, which can mask a deeper understanding of cultural difference. The model also acknowledges the role of complexity in this development: "As one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relations increases" (International ARLT Foundation, 2017). We argue here that candidates cannot fully obtain a complex, sophisticated orientation to cultural difference – one that leads to taking action – without a strong reentry component that helps them to process the unpredictable events and encounters that surface during their time abroad.

## Methods

### *Program context and description*

The Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut (UConn) has a competitive, five-year Integrated Bachelors'/Masters' (IB/M) teacher certification program. Teacher candidates spend their first two years at the university focusing on general education coursework before applying to the IB/M program. If they are accepted, they complete education-related coursework and partake in clinic placements throughout their junior, senior, and master's years. Throughout their time in the IB/M program, there are multiple opportunities to participate in an education abroad experience, from short term (2-6-week summer and intersession) to long-term (15-week semester) options.

Although the study abroad program we discuss in this article is often advertised as a 15-week fall semester program, it in fact spans an entire calendar year, beginning the summer before departure and extending into the spring semester. The summer prior to departure, candidates take a 3-credit, graduate-level course titled *Seminar in International Education* to prepare them for their semester abroad and begin the process of developing an action research project focused on examining aspects of their abroad experience. During the semester abroad, UConn offers support, services, and coursework, but candidates are also affiliated with a local higher education institution. While abroad, candidates engage in internships at local schools, research centers, and other organizations, while also taking coursework at the local university. Concurrently, they take an online seminar course with a UConn instructor. This seminar provides continued support in the development of their action research project and a space for candidates to make sense of their experiences abroad. The instructor meets online with the candidates once per week and also visits them on site for about a week, around the midpoint of their experience abroad. During this visit, the candidates and instructor tour cultural sites and hold classes in person. The instructor also engages in individual meetings with each candidate.

Upon return to the United States, the candidates take a 3-credit reentry seminar designed to promote further reflection on their experiences and support the continued development of their intercultural understandings. Candidates are provided support and opportunities for reflection before, during, and after their semester abroad, acting upon the idea that pre-departure and reentry experiences are necessary components of an education abroad program (Byram & Feng, 2006). Table 1 provides further details about the overall structure of the program, while our Findings section offers more details on the reentry seminar experience.

The year-long program structure of our study abroad program promotes both preparation for and reflection on the experience abroad. At the same time, this structure also allows for the development of a variety of curricular and programmatic features, each of which lead to similar outcomes in the development of orientation to cultural difference.

**Table 1.** Overall structure of study abroad program.

Component	London	Cusco	Cape Town
Predeparture (summer session at home) <i>3 credits total for pre-departure focused course work</i>	Seminar in International Education (3 credits): Instructors meet with candidates for four full days in May and again for two full days in August. During the time between May and August, candidates work independently on the development of their action research project (research question(s), literature review, and methodology), team building, preparation for school and research internships in the fall, discussions on intercultural understandings and communication, and other assigned readings.		
Abroad housing	Apartments in London	Host families	Off-campus housing
Abroad internship (3 days per week)	High performing urban schools across London; primary, secondary comprehensive, and secondary grammar	Local primary and secondary urban and rural schools (2 days/week); urban community sites (e.g., women's shelter, dog rescue) (1 day/week)	Local primary and secondary schools across Cape Town districts (3 days/week); formal community service component (1 day/week)
Abroad coursework <i>12 credits total for study abroad focused course work</i>	Comparative and International Education (3 credits, hybrid) History of Educational Thought: UK Education System (3 credits, on site) Seminar (3 credits, hybrid with UConn instructor)	Comparative and International Education: Service Learning in Peru (3 credits, on site) History of Educational Thought: Language and Education in Peru (3 credits, on site) Seminar (3 credits, hybrid with UConn instructor)	Comparative and International Education: South African History and Politics (3 credits, on site) History of Educational Thought: South Africa, Pre- and Post-apartheid (3 credits, on site) Seminar (3 credits, hybrid with UConn instructor)
Reentry (spring semester at home) <i>3 credits total for reentry focused course work</i>	Advanced Seminar (3 credits): Each seminar section is taught by the UConn instructor who directs the particular abroad program in which IB/M masters candidates have participated during the fall semester. During this course, candidates finalize their action research project and make sense of their abroad experience.		

## Participants and methods

For this article, we focus on data obtained from 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 cohorts of teacher candidates in our study abroad program, totaling 33 participants. Fourteen of these candidates studied abroad in London (2018–2019), 11 in Cape Town (2017–2018), and 8 in Cusco (2018–2019).<sup>1</sup> The group was composed of 30 females and 3 males between the ages of 21 and 23, most of whom identified as White. Table 2 offers a more detailed breakdown of participant demographics.

We use a mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Our data collection was sequential in nature: The IDI (Hammer et al., 2003) was first used to assess candidates'

**Table 2.** Participant demographics.

Country	Year	N	Gender identity	Racial/ethnic identity*
Cusco, Peru	2018–2019	8	7 female 1 male	6 White 1 Biracial (Asian/Latinx) 1 Indian
Cape Town, South Africa	2017–2018	11	10 female 1 male	10 White 1 Black
London, United Kingdom	2018–2019	14	13 female 1 male	8 White 1 Multiracial 2 Biracial (Latinx/White) 2 Biracial (S. Asian/White) 1 Asian

\*Ethnic and racial identity is according to participant self-identification and student records.

orientation to cultural difference at two points: before their summer seminar and immediately upon their return from study abroad. As previously discussed by McGregor et al. (2019), the IDI has been psychometrically tested and found to possess strong validity and reliability across diverse cultural groups internationally and domestically, including predictive validity within educational sectors.

After analyzing the quantitative results from the pre- and post IDIs, we examined qualitative data from the following sources: participants' written assignments and reflections during different points of our program's reentry component, notes on participant discussions during this reentry period, and examples of our reentry curriculum. Examining these data provided a more detailed picture of our participants' orientation to cultural difference during the reentry semester, while tracking further developments during this critical reentry time frame. Analyzing these assignments and reflections also honors Deardorff's (2006) recommendation to use multiple qualitative assessments in order to better capture the complexity inherent in the work done during each of these time periods.

Our qualitative data underwent a process of thematic coding (Gibbs, 2018). This process included careful reiterative readings of all data sets, with a focus on student writings completed immediately after study abroad and those completed toward the end of the semester. With open and selective coding (Glaser, 2016), we identified key themes relating to participants' changes in orientation to cultural difference. Thematic mapping allowed us to overlay these themes against the phases of intercultural development measured by the IDI in order to track movement in orientation (see Figure 1 in the Findings section), while analytic memo writing organized themes into a cohesive narrative, providing a deeper look at this development during the reentry component of our program. Thus, our quantitative and qualitative data sets informed each other, with the IDI providing an overview of participant intercultural development stages upon which to map the subsequent assignments, reflections, and notes, which enriched and expanded upon our initial quantitative findings.

In the sections that follow, we first provide statistical evidence from the IDI, which showed significant, positive changes in orientation to cultural difference among our teacher candidates immediately following their study abroad. We then discuss reflective writings and events completed shortly upon return from study abroad, which suggest continued deficit thinking (Nieto, 2000) and binary orientations to culture despite the changes represented by the IDI. Finally, we discuss elements of our reentry curriculum and then provide an analysis of candidates' reflective writings created later in the semester, which suggest how the reentry component contributed to further development of orientation to cultural difference.

## Findings

### *Analysis of the pre- and post-IDI scores*

Results from the IDI (Hammer et al., 2003) showed strong, statistically significant shifts in our teacher candidates' orientation to cultural difference from their start in the program during their summer course to their return from their semester abroad. During both of the academic years discussed in this study, candidates gained an average of 14 points between their pre- and post-IDI assessments. A paired t-test was performed to determine whether the increase in the mean IDI score of each group was statistically significant. Table 3 shows the *p*-values of each test well below .01, as well as a strong effect size, suggesting that the program had a significant effect on increasing orientation to cultural difference as measured by the IDI.

While this increase is indeed significant, we call readers' attention to the average posttest score of participants as still within the Minimization stage of the IDI continuum. As Moss et al. (2018) noted, the minimization orientation is neither ethnocentric/monocultural (as identified in Bennett's original DMIS formulation) nor ethnorelative/intercultural, but rather is a transitional stage indicating movement toward acceptance and adaptation. As The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI, 2020) website states, "Minimization highlights commonalities in both human Similarity (basic needs) and Universalism (universal values and principles) that can mask *a deeper understanding of cultural*

*differences*” (our emphasis). Given that the IDI results show most of our participants in this transitional, minimization orientation, current interpretations of this orientation lend additional weight to our commitment to work with candidates upon reentry in order to uncover the complexities of their current views and further enhance their global mindedness.

As discussed previously, our post-IDI tests were administered immediately after study abroad, but before the reentry component of the program, which took place during the semester following the candidates’ return. In the next section, we discuss our reentry component in more detail, outlining how this work provided space for more careful reflection on what took place during study abroad, as well as the role of this reflection on orientation to cultural difference.

### **Evidence of a need for reentry work**

While a deep attention to the complex nature of the experiences occurring during the immersion phases of our study abroad program appears to have played a significant role in the development of our teacher candidates’ orientation to cultural difference, this work appears insufficient to move participants further along the intercultural continuum. In a recent study, Kaufman et al. (2020) suggested that one reason for this is that the immersion phase brings with it serious challenges to candidates’ ability to make complete sense of their experiences *at that time*. Kaufman et al. described how the group of candidates studying abroad in Cape Town experienced significant cognitive and emotional dissonance as they worked to understand and navigate a new culture, which brought with it new relationships with time and daily routines, different instructional approaches in schools, unfamiliar languages, and stark differences between privileged and marginalized communities (all of which were also experienced by participants in London and Cusco). An analysis of the Cape Town participants’ responses to prompts designed to help them reflect on their growth and challenges to growth indicated that the candidates felt they had spent so much cognitive energy trying to enact basic social formalities and get through the day without embarrassing themselves that they had less time for deeper reflection on the rich cultural phenomena around them. Resultantly, they initially perceived their new environment in terms of binaries – “unambiguous differences between life in Cape Town and life back home, which they recognized led to classic deficit thinking” (Kaufman et al., 2020, p. 86).

This deficit thinking, which we define using Nieto’s (2000) notion of a “perspective that students from nondominant groups are genetically or culturally inferior, or that they bring little of value to their education” (p. 181), is further illustrated with the following vignette drawn from research notes featuring participants from the Cusco program shortly after returning from Peru:

Two of the School of Education’s Literacy course professors had asked four returnees from Cusco to present on the literacy work they had done with their Peruvian students. I (Michele) arrived late to their presentation and stood in the back of the classroom, eager to hear what I assumed would be positive comments on this

**Table 3.** Mean IDI score, *p*-value, and effect size for paired t-test.

Measurement	IDI Score Pre	IDI Score Post
Mean scores	89.6215	104.6115
SD	12.3361	16.0373
SEM	2.1474	2.7917
N	33	33

$t = 6.2661$

$df = 32$

$p < .0001^{**}$

Cohen’s  $D = 1.05$

T-test tools: QuickCalcs T-test. <https://www.graphpad.com/quickcalcs/ttest1.cfm>.

Effect size calculator <https://www.socscistatistics.com/effectsize/default3.aspx>.



transformative experience. Instead, the candidates used much of their time to describe how “badly behaved” and “wild” the children were at the elementary school in Peru. One presenter went so far as to comment disparagingly on her students’ poor hygiene, miming visible disgust and discomfort with the children’s frequent requests for hugs.

Evidence from this vignette and from Kaufman et al. (2020) clearly indicated the need for additional support to process teacher candidate experiences abroad. With respect to the Cusco participants, their characterizations of the students with whom they had worked as “wild” and “dirty” demonstrated the profound difficulties these teacher candidates still had in adapting to local conceptions of classroom norms and hygiene.

Similarly, returnees from the cohort in London exhibited traits of deficit thinking when discussing differences in teaching approaches abroad. One participant wrote, “I found myself noticing the difference in how teachers were much less ‘friendly’ with their students in London in comparison to here in the states.” They also worried about “strict interactions” in classrooms and discipline systems that appeared harsh, without offering further reflection on the possible reasons for the apparent difference in styles or on their own cultural upbringings, which may have caused them to view particular actions and situations in a negative light.

We should note that these reflections occurred despite evidence of their evolved orientation to cultural difference as measured by the IDI; in fact, the majority of the candidates had shown substantial increases in their IDI scores. Furthermore, these responses are not unique to our program; previous literature has described how study abroad experiences frequently include difficult or uncomfortable episodes (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Without proper scaffolding, these episodes can be counterproductive to developing global mindedness, and may even cause participants to regress in their intercultural growth (Santoro & Major, 2012).

Notwithstanding these events and reflections, candidates did demonstrate important growth in their orientation to cultural difference, particularly in their own acknowledgments that their orientations were far from satisfactory for them. Our analysis of participant reflections completed immediately after study abroad pointed to candidates’ self-awareness of a need for further work on orientation to cultural difference. Several candidates discussed needing to focus on the value of cultural difference rather than looking for commonalities or comparing everything to cultural norms in the United States. One London student, for example, admitted that her initial observations “were geared toward noticing what was *different and or similar in this country*” (her emphasis). Among the Cusco group, when students were asked to outline their goals for orientation to cultural difference, one student stated that her goal was to “focus more on the value of a cultural difference rather than to find a way for that difference to relate to my culture.” In these representative quotes, we note both student awareness of their tendency to overemphasize and even minimize cultural differences and their perceived desire to go beyond this minimization.

Participants discussed several reasons why they might still be in a minimization stage, including their desire to connect with others at the possible cost of not acknowledging difference; a strong, outwardly feminist identity, which, one student believed, might lead to misunderstandings in some countries; and the continued possession of longstanding, ingrained stereotypes. Again, these reflections demonstrated preliminary signs of self-awareness and awareness of the influence of their own cultures upon their perceptions of other cultures. One Cusco participant noted the impact of her own cultural identity on recognizing cultural differences: “The fact that I live in the culture that I identify with means that I am constantly surrounded by cultural familiarity. This may hinder my ability to truly and fundamentally ‘recognize and appreciate’ cultural difference because I am constantly immersed in similarity (a fish can’t see the water it’s swimming in).” Similarly, another student commented, “Before I went to London, I didn’t feel as strong [a] sense of self as an American. Now, I realize that this is central to the culture that I grew up in and live in every day, and my teaching is very much informed by American culture.” These quotes illustrate how many participants had begun to develop awareness of their home culture, which they had previously taken for granted or ignored.



Despite these initial glimpses into their own intercultural limitations, participants' reflections on appreciating and being more open to cultural difference were usually stated in vague, general terms (e.g., discussing the desire to "appreciate cultural difference" without articulating what that might look like, or which differences could be appreciated). A few participants did speak to specific cultural differences upon which they wanted to further reflect, touching on the concepts of time and socio-economic status. However, the fact that most participants framed their desire to appreciate cultural difference in general terms that frequently mimicked the language of the IDI itself also suggested the need for further reentry work. The IDI reports and resulting Intercultural Development Plans (IDPs) afforded participants opportunities to consider notions underpinning intercultural learning and served as a catalyst for such further work during the reentry semester. As the semester progressed and candidates became more competent in navigating the new layers of cultural territories, they were also able to reflect on and analyze their cultural experiences in more complex ways and move away from polarized orientations to see the logic behind, and value in, cultural differences.

### ***Enhancing orientation to cultural and racial difference through reentry work***

Recognizing participant discomfort and its potential impact on their ability to notice and reflect while in the midst of the study abroad experience, instructors carefully attended to creating intensive reflective spaces for the candidates once they had returned from abroad and began the spring semester seminars, when they could discuss and analyze the experience removed from the anxiety and dissonance caused when navigating the unfamiliar. This approach drew heavily on Schön's (1983) classic distinction between "reflection-in-action" – which occurs in the midst of immersion in an experience – and "reflection-on-action" – which occurs after an experience and allows the student retrospective room to reconsider the experience, deliberate, weigh different speculative theories, challenge preconceptions, and plan for personal growth and more effective action in the future. While the immersion phase had clearly led to significant growth in candidates' thinking and awareness, their documented struggles to make full sense of their experiences recalled Schön's (1987) conception of "indeterminate zones of practice," or states of "uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict" (p. 6) that couldn't be reconciled by their previously acquired technical knowledge. Therefore, this post-immersion phase was designed to offer opportunities for even deeper reflection that resulted in more personal, dynamic, and complex conceptions of culture and directly addressed the cognitive and emotional dissonance and moments of deficit thinking that they had recognized in themselves while abroad. Further, it offered greater opportunities to transfer new conceptual understandings to their teaching of the students in their new stateside internships. Their experiences abroad now compelled them to consider the cultural variables that greatly impacted the learning of diverse students – variables that most said they had rarely considered before going abroad.

In direct response to these recognized challenges, post-experience spring seminars were carefully crafted to: 1) provide regular opportunities for "reflection-on-action" in regard to the fall immersion experience, 2) discuss how their abroad experiences connected with and influenced their teaching in their new stateside internships, and 3) contemplate the impact of people's cultural views on the establishment of equitable and socially just educational spaces. Seminar sessions included weekly discussions about their abroad experiences and encouraged them to reflect on those experiences in light of new post-return experiences and learning. It also offered them readings and presentations that focused on issues of race, equity, civil rights, and the effects of culturally influenced privilege on opportunities to learn. Spring seminar activities included, but were not limited to:

- The completion of a post-return survey at the beginning of the semester that asked candidates to articulate what they had noticed as significant while abroad; how their perceptions had changed over time; what had made them uncomfortable and why; what had made it difficult to listen, understand, and teach well; what experiences had been satisfying and educative; and how their experiences had changed the way they intended to teach and learn from students in the United States

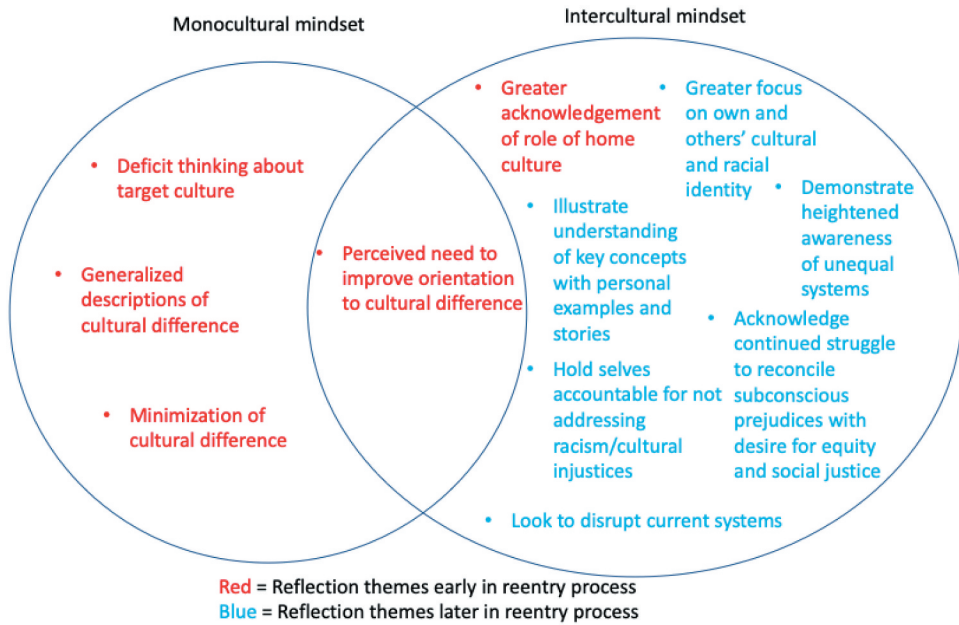


Figure 1. Thematic map of participant responses during reentry seminar.

- A reading of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting in the Cafeteria? and Other Conversations About Race*, a book that defines racism in more complex ways and offers constructs of racial awareness and ways to approach institutionalized racism
- A reading of the Southern Poverty Law Center's report *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery*, which exposes ways in which schools ignore the more traumatic components of the history of slavery in favor of a simplistic narrative that begins and ends with their freeing
- Analyses of contemporary television shows produced by artists of color and marginalized identity representation, such as *black-ish*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, *One Day at a Time*, and *Shrill* in order to uncover how issues of culture, race, sexuality, identity, and equity are being addressed in popular media
- Analyses of podcasts such as *Conversations With People Who Hate Me*, which confronts the challenges of communicating with people who have differing cultural values and political opinions
- The creation of portfolios containing artifacts that presented different aspects of candidates' self-identities
- A compilation, by candidates, of different internet websites, blogs, podcasts, and other electronic resources that represented and supported student populations that have traditionally been marginalized in schools
- A critical analysis of different forms of standardized testing, focusing particularly on their potential to promote inequitable educational practices.

In approaching these experiences week after week, the component of “critical analysis” was ever present. The defining feature of the spring semester was the rigorous, continuous “reflection-on-action” that contemplated the various social and cultural factors influencing successful learning and teaching. The IDP, a customized cultural learning plan generated with the IDI results, calls for:

... gaining insights concerning intercultural challenges students are facing and identifying intercultural competence development goals that are important for you; gaining increased understandings of how your Developmental Orientation impacts how you perceive and respond to cultural differences and commonalities;

and identifying and engaging in targeted, developmental efforts that increase your intercultural competence to bridge across diverse communities. (IDI, 2019)

Leveraging these IDPs and guiding our reentry semester were the questions, “How is your reflection on this issue informed by your experiences abroad?” “How does reflection on this issue help you understand your experiences abroad in new ways?” and “What does this mean for how you learn from and teach your current students?”

The discussions that ensued were rich, personal, and often emotional as the candidates began to confront deeply the ramifications of their own relative privileges on their work with children. By directly facing their discomfort – now within an arena of comparative “cognitive assuance” – they were able to extend their conceptions of their roles beyond those simply of classroom teacher teaching content and into the roles of social justice advocates (Kaufman et al., 2020). The analyses of the conversations and documents generated toward the end of post-return seminars suggested even further complexity in their orientation to cultural difference. End-of-semester responses were more detailed, sophisticated, and supported with more specific examples than those that they had provided through their beginning-of-semester surveys and discussions. Specificity better illustrated their intercultural development in more complex and nuanced ways, while detailed stories about their upbringings and about recent incidents in their private and professional lives suggested a new awareness of their cultural and racial identities and the impact of social structures that promoted inequity. [Figure 1](#) illustrates this difference in responses, suggesting a more complex, advocacy-related orientation to cultural difference through a thematic map of participant reflection responses both immediately upon return and toward the end of the reentry seminar.

Whereas earlier commentary showed candidates focusing on the commonalities among people of different cultures and races – pointing toward continued minimization perspectives – later responses showed them more often focusing on and celebrating differences. Candidates now focused more frequently and more directly on cultural and racial identity – their own and others’. They recognized times when they had failed to acknowledge differences in ways that dismissed those of different cultures. One candidate discussed the historical reticence of people she knew to recognize cultural and racial attributes, writing, “While no one verbalized it, I think there was an unspoken philosophy that if we didn’t acknowledge the differences, they would fade into the background.”

For several candidates, the experience of reading *Why Are All the Black Students Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* and then reflecting on it in light of their experiences abroad led to unique, yet similarly complex connections between their study abroad experiences and local experiences with race and culture. A London student discussed how the book’s central theme of choosing social groups based on race made “a lot of sense to me. When we lived in England, although we were not in the racial minority, we were in a cultural minority, and I found nothing more comforting than having a group of peers who understood my confusions or blunders and could relate to me in that unique way.” A Cape Town student, connecting the book to Cape Town’s apartheid and post-apartheid histories, demonstrated how the reading had strengthened her own desire to be an advocate for her students:

I want to be an ally to those continuously affected by institutionalized racism and be a teacher that not only listens well, but takes action to provoke change. Without the experiences of Cape Town, I do not think I would care so much about human rights and social justice in the United States. I want to take our history into account and break the cycle of White normalization and partiality. (Kaufman et al., 2020, p. 94)

At the same time, white candidates had begun to discuss their whiteness more often and more readily. They acknowledged the acute discomfort that many white people feel when trying to discuss – or even recognize – their cultural and racial identities. However, they now showed greater willingness to confront their own reluctance to do so, revealing a deeper understanding of the role their whiteness played in preserving social systems and perpetuating racial inequity. These candidates, some of whom had grown up in relatively affluent and racially homogenous towns, began reflecting on their upbringings and attempting to imagine the experiences of those in non-dominant cultures and races. One student wrote, “I try to imagine being one of only 4 Black students in my grade, in

a school that's (approximately) 95% white. The sad part though is that only in the past couple of years have I realized that [my town] is such a homogenous bubble."

Finally, additional analyses showed an increased ability to connect local cultural differences to candidates' study abroad experiences. One student, for example, stated that the coursework had enabled her to "contextualize the information that I observed and understand the underlying explanation between the differences in culture." Another student linked her readings with a debate on affirmative action that she had with her partner: "I expressed to him that we had only abolished slavery and had advocated for women's rights within two centuries [and] that unless companies hired underrepresented populations, there would never be a strong enough influx of diversity to stimulate different types of growth." Similar to the previous quote from the Cape Town participant, this student's further exploration of the nuances of cultural difference in the reentry seminar gave her greater confidence to advocate for diverse cultures. Another student, a person of color, summed up her growth over the course of the year as follows:

I have never thought so deeply about culture and acceptance. I am even now comfortable admitting that once I took the perspective that since I am [a] minority I know everything about culture. How little I really knew! . . . I learned that acceptance is not some finite ending, and once you've reached it you're perfect. I always need to consciously be aware of what's around me and find my best approach for reaching acceptance and adaptation in many situations.

In sum, while the IDIs that participants took directly after returning from abroad showed significant development in orientation to cultural difference, the reentry work described and reflected upon in this section revealed an extension of their identities as educators into the realm of advocacy and social justice. This also suggested much clearer conceptions of cultural difference and potential movement into the IDI-defined Acceptance and Adaptation orientations, which only developed after they engaged in the continuous cycles of reflection and comparative study provided by the reentry seminar.

## Discussion and future work on reentry

The reentry work described in this study contributed to an enhancement of perspectives on cultural difference that built upon and enriched initial movements toward this orientation during participants' time abroad. During study abroad, teacher candidates' eyes were opened to cultural similarities and difference, which was demonstrated by their movement along the intercultural continuum as measured by the IDI. Nevertheless, immediately upon return, participant orientation to cultural difference was still discussed in binary terms and with some degree of negativity. However, the reentry work that drew heavily on Schön's (1987) conception of "Reflection-on-Action" resulted in these orientations becoming more synergetic, complex, and context-sensitive. At the same time, reentry work allowed participants to adapt their own behaviors and take a role in "rewriting the world" by becoming advocates for social justice and equity in culturally complex situations.

As we looked across our program during our analysis, we noted the different webs of complexity within each experience and at each point along the reentry continuum, leading to our desire to explore our programs under a lens of complex systems theory in the future. This theory deals with the multidimensional, interrelated systems of a particular phenomenon (in our case, a study abroad program or set of programs), which are analyzed as non-linear and unpredictable (Goerner, 1994). Their analysis as complex systems stands in stark contrast to positivist emphases on sequentialism, reductionism, control, and predictability. We note that the unique aspects and complexities inherent in each program site, course, and even individual could play a crucial role in the growth witnessed among our participants. Programmatically, one size does not fit all from either conceptual or logistical perspectives, which encourages the travel along numerous pathways through the complex work of evolving orientations to cultural difference among teacher candidates. Taking a complex systems approach to our participants' experiences of and orientation to cultural difference will enable us to reflect upon and analyze these changes in orientation in ways that are both holistic and dynamic, as

well as hold space for the often-unpredictable nature of experiences abroad. Relatedly, poststructural theories of identity work, such as Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) tactics of intersubjectivity, could work in tandem with a complex systems approach to participants' changes in orientation.

The documented changes in orientation to cultural difference, as evidenced by IDI scores and post-return written reflections, also suggest a need to administer a third IDI assessment at the end of the final semester in order to gather evidence of further development of candidates' orientations. This may provide more evidence that a robust reentry program is an indispensable component of truly meaningful study abroad programs. Program developers could then feel encouraged to assemble distinct curriculum and program design options under a general framework of pre-departure, abroad, and reentry components.

Additional future plans for our program include implementing a peer-led, professional learning community that focuses further on the complexities surrounding reentry that are being addressed (or not being addressed) in our program design. This professional learning community will integrate information on global education topics such as signature pedagogies, global learning plans, and intercultural communication strategies in order to provide even more effective approaches and curricular maps for maximizing study abroad experiences post-return. With this project, we plan to provide evidence-based, structured curricular and instructional support for teacher candidates upon reentry, as well as articulate a formal model of reentry support that could be used by other teacher education programs.

### **Conclusion: Deepening the work of global teacher education**

The urgency of cultivating global mindedness among our future teachers has closely correlated with an uptick in study abroad programs. While several of these programs have demonstrated positive growth in global competence among their participants (Hauerwas et al., 2017), others appear to present an incomplete experience for candidates, one that results in a rapid scan of other cultures and peoples rather than the deep, complex engagement that is essential for intercultural development (Barros, 2016; Çiftçi & Karaman, 2018). Previous research on study abroad has demonstrated that reentry experiences are essential for processing the episodes of discomfort that frequently surface during participants' time abroad (Santoro & Major, 2012; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). In this article, we have outlined how this reentry work can foster more profound orientations to cultural difference. Allowing the time and space during reentry to explore the complex facets of identity – both one's own and others – empowers our teacher candidates to progress toward more critical and reflective orientation to cultural difference, as well as engage in advocacy for their students.

We acknowledge there are numerous challenges to the intensive reentry model that we are proposing. Teacher candidates enrolled in accelerated certification programs may not have the time to engage in this work, while issues of equity and resources may restrict candidates from even studying abroad, much less engaging in a year-long program of this nature. At the same time, all study abroad programs have been complicated by the coronavirus pandemic and other global events. Yet these complications must be worked through so that teacher candidates have the opportunity to be exposed to, reflect upon, and process cultural difference in critical and transformative ways. Safe and equitable alternatives, such as virtual study abroad, domestic study "abroad" opportunities, and service learning, must still hold space for some type of reentry component if teacher candidates are to fully benefit from these experiences. We look forward to further conversations on these possibilities.

### **Note**

1. Our program in Cape Town was unable to take place in 2018-2019 due to a severe drought in the region; for this reason, we use data from the last available iteration of this program.

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The authors are employees of the University of Connecticut, where this research was conducted.

## ORCID

Michele Back  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9558-8908>

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