

# TEACHER AS TRAVELER



ENHANCING THE INTERCULTURAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS  
SECOND EDITION

KENNETH CUSHNER

## *Chapter 8*

# **Global Learning: How International Student Teachers Grow into World Class Educators**

Martha Lash and Justine DeFrancesco

Travel—leaves you speechless and then turns you into a storyteller.

—Ibn Battuta (1304–1369)

In spite of significant effort in recent decades to diversify the US teaching force, American teachers, teacher educators, and teacher education students continue to be relatively homogeneous and interculturally inexperienced, and this trend is likely to continue well into the future (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2018; Zimpher, 1989). Approximately 85 percent of the US teaching force is European American and middle class, and almost two-thirds, female. These demographics are similar in many other countries of the world as well, with the majority of teachers in such countries as Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, and the Netherlands reflecting the majority culture of the nation—even with the increasing cultural diversity that is found in all of these nations.

Teachers, as well as those who are studying to be teachers, at least in the United States, continue to be relatively cross-culturally inexperienced, having limited knowledge and experience living or working with other cultures. Close to 70 percent of White teacher education students reportedly spend all or most of their free time with people of their own racial or ethnic background. Particularly alarming is the fact that the majority of teachers have limited expectations for the success of all of their students, believing that low-income and minority students are not capable of learning the higher-level concepts in the subjects they are preparing to teach.

Teachers also tend to be linguistically limited, with fewer than 10 percent claiming fluency in any second language and fully three-fifths being monolingual—and that with the United States being the fourth or fifth largest

Spanish-speaking country in the world! The majority of teacher candidates live within 100 miles of where they were born, with most wishing to teach where they grew up or in areas very similar to where they are from. And of all college majors, teacher education students tend to have the least knowledge and interest in international affairs.

Although there may not be much optimism in this information, there are increasing efforts to internationalize teacher education. This chapter explores the experience of those who embark on an international student teaching venture through COST, the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching, an organization directed by Ken Cushner from 1995–2000 and again from 2011–2014. These future teachers are taking the first steps toward becoming more interculturally sensitive and are fast becoming world-class educators as they immerse themselves into a new culture, learning to adjust not only interpersonally but professionally and then working when they return home to integrate an international perspective to the students in their charge.

COST is one small group working hard to give US student teachers a meaningful, professional overseas experience. Since its inception in 1972, hundreds of American students have had the opportunity to teach in national schools in such countries as England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, the Netherlands, and the Bahamas as well as in international English-speaking schools in such countries as Switzerland, Greece, Italy, China, Mexico, Ecuador, Spain, and Costa Rica. For most of these students, teaching abroad for eight to fifteen weeks is a life-changing and career-altering experience (Cushner, 2009; Cushner, 2014; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Cushner & Mahon, 2009).

The focus of this chapter will be on the experiences of six US overseas student teachers: Jacob and Emily teaching in South Africa, Chris teaching in the Netherlands, Carolyn teaching in Mexico, Morgan teaching in Australia, and Justine teaching in New Zealand (and a coauthor of this chapter). We follow a number of their blog posts in response to questions posed by their university coordinator and other coauthor of this chapter, Dr. Lash. As their journeys unfold, students are challenged to dig deeper into their experience, sharing their cultural observations, new educational understandings, and overall reflections on their individual sojourns with one another through this shared blog.

TO: All Overseas Student Teachers

FROM: Dr. Lash

RE: Why student teach nearby when you can Student Teach Overseas?

DATE: September 2

Congratulations, you have safely arrived in your countries, met your homestay families or settled into an apartment, checked in at your schools, met your students, and are starting to answer (or question) the subject line of this group e-mail. You most likely have had initial waves of culture or adjustment shock and are beginning to acclimate. How do these real experiences compare to your preconceptions of your host country and its people?

Although I know you are excited and recovering from jet lag, I do want to check in and remind you that occasional feelings of loneliness or anxiety are not unusual as you travel and immerse yourself within another cultural context. Although we had talked about this before you departed, it can be quite different once you find yourself immersed in the experience. Please know that international travelers frequently experience loneliness, some anxiety, and a range of adjustment challenges. Those feelings don't last throughout the experience, but it is normal to have occasional pangs that you'll need to push through. Working through these struggles can help you clarify your priorities as well as your understanding of the greater world in which we live.

Have you had any similar feelings or struggles? Have you had times of feeling sorry for yourself? What may have brought this on? What did you do to overcome this? I say this to reassure you that if you are having these feelings, they are normal. It might help to blog about these, and of course you can send me a private e-mail or reach out to your fellow student teachers.

Sharing a group overseas student teaching blog will have the advantage of multiple voices from other student teachers worldwide who are having a shared, yet individual, international experience. It will be interesting to share commonalities and differences and to see what different ways of learning, understanding, and knowing we each encounter, struggle to understand, and ultimately practice. It is important to reflect on our experiences because reflection "seals" the learning by challenging us to examine our experiences and conclusions into a higher order of metacognition. By examining our experiences collectively, we can use this reflective process to consolidate and solidify our cultural and teaching experiences.

I'm posing the first blog query as a series of questions to act as provocations for reflection of your new and varied experiences. Don't worry about reflecting on all of these—choose one or two ideas or questions that resonate with you.

What and how are you learning about your new country, culture, school and/or students? How are you acclimating to the local terrain? What sources of information are most helpful and reliable in helping you to make sense of your new surroundings? What sources do you trust and why? How did the advance review of websites, readings, speaking with others, and films help to prepare you? Did you find these strategies accurate or useful? What stereotypes have you dispelled, and which ones might be taking their place? What

cross-cultural and travel advice do you wish you knew before you arrived? Basically, what are your real experiences, and how do they compare to your preconceptions of your host country, people, and schools?

#### BLOG RESPONSES

Student: Chris

Placement: Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Date: September 4

RE: I made it ... and some half-asleep airplane thoughts

I'm not in the classroom yet, but I am sitting at my desk in my new room at my host family's house in the Netherlands! Now, on to my first experience with a person with a very different culture than that of my own ... someone I met in the airport. Before I arrived at JFK, I promised my mother that I would find a glass of wine, some food, and make a friend ... his name ended up being Alfred (he was my waiter), and he was originally from the Philippines.

Before I even had the chance to ask him something, he said with a full smile, "This year has really been my year!" I asked him why, and he replied something like this, "Well, working this job you get to talk to a lot of people. Some are great and have wonderful things to say and others not so much ... but I've realized this year, I've just matured. I know everyone likes to talk but also everyone really likes to listen, and if you let go of worry and just hear what's around you, you can find yourself—at least that's what happened to me this year. Anyways, wanna be Instagram friends?"

As I write now from memory, I think about all of the expectations I have for this student teaching experience. Before leaving the States, my professors and COST coordinator advised me to let go of all expectations, and yet as Alfred searched for my profile on Instagram, I couldn't help but feel all of my expectations flooding back into my mind. This person who I had just met moments ago had the ability to say something so incredible and moving that his words forced one small expectation to resurface. As he walked back to the kitchen, I thought to myself, I hope my mentor teacher is as open minded and thoughtful as he is.

With that, I realized I had never really let go of all expectations but just prepared myself for this trip by saying, don't expect the absolute best from every person you encounter but expect the absolute best from yourself and somehow, someday, happiness and learning will follow. I always try my best to adhere to the advice I receive from mentors and friends, but even with this consideration, I find myself sitting here in my new room in the Netherlands,



waiting for my alarm to go off for my first day teaching at my field placement, and all I can think about is what I expect tomorrow to be like.

I expect the school community within my placement to work collaboratively on common goals for our students while also creating various avenues for each child to take to achieve them. I'm imagining my students enthralled in the work that I plan for them and to be just as inspired by this experience as I am. Finally, I expect my overseas coordinator, professors back home, and colleagues working on finishing their last semester of student teaching to "have my back" and support my endeavors to the best of their abilities.

Writing out my expectations for this trip feels quite odd to me, especially when I consider the expectations I have for myself. My main goal is to make a consistent effort to consciously consider what I expect from myself and then attempt to reach a little bit further, challenging my personal and professional knowledge every day at my field placement. This goal makes me certain that this trip will be all that everyone has told me it will be. No matter the situation or experience I have in this school and in this country, I know I'll be changed by the learning that happens here. And when I'm in my own classroom thinking back to this experience, I will remember the moments of frustration, loneliness, confusion, happiness, understanding, and contentment, and every success tied to these emotions will inspire me to keep going, keep motivating, and continue learning.

All in all, I guess I have to let go of some expectations. I'm not sure what will happen tomorrow when I walk through the doors of my new field placement in this country that is entirely new to me, but I do know one thing for certain. I expect to grow, somehow and in some way, and I will become better because of this experience teaching abroad. I guess I'll have to wait and see, and so will you!

Until next time,  
Chris

Student: Carolyn  
Placement: Guadalajara, Mexico  
Date: September 10  
RE: I'm adjusting

Because I'm still in North America, I wasn't quite sure how international my experience would be. I can already say—it is very international. Signs, street conversation, food, music, and transportation might all be considered the surface-level parts of the culture, but it feels like full immersion to me. I can easily spend the day in Guadalajara without seeing anyone from the

States or hearing English. When I go to the school, it is a relief to hear English and to speak easily with others. I'm thankful that this school uses English as the language of instruction; otherwise I couldn't participate!

I'm at a disadvantage though because everyone else also speaks Spanish fluently. Whenever coteachers take me into the community, they immediately become my link—my translators for language and culture. I'm dependent on them—at least for now. I'm hoping to meet someone to hang out with outside of school; it would be nice to make a friend who might know a little English or is bilingual in Spanish and English.

Before leaving, I was worried I might not make any friends and might not have much to do outside of school-related activities. Everyone here seems very helpful and friendly so far, especially with the language barrier, so I feel less worried about this right now. I haven't really had a moment to feel lonely yet because I'm so busy getting to know my new community and the staff and students at my school.

I think of all the host countries, and Mexico was probably the one that I was most familiar with because it borders the States, we hear about it in the news a lot—trade, resorts, walls, drugs—in other words, I had information but a number of misconceptions as well. First, I feel really safe in the parts of the city where I live and shop, and certainly the school and the children seem relaxed and safe. This doesn't live up to the stereotypic image I or many other Americans have of Mexico—people are busy working and taking care of their families, barbecuing, and going to the park, just like back home.

I wonder if others are experiencing something like this, that once “here,” it really is different from what was expected. I think you referred to this once as disconfirmed expectations! One thing I have discovered is the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables that are really juicy, delicious, and affordable at the markets. And I almost forgot to say, the open-air markets are fabulous and fun—I'm even learning to enjoy bartering. My first weeks here are positive, my stereotypes have been challenged, and I'm excited to teach in a beautiful school where the children wear uniforms and eat lunch outside at picnic tables EVERY DAY—that's their cafeteria! I'm adjusting—and loving it!

Adios, Carolyn

Student: Jacob

Placement: Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Date: September 12

RE: From student to US representative

I've often had to defend American policies and actions since I've arrived in South Africa. There is considerable criticism of how the United States seems to impose itself in many countries overseas and, especially now, on how the United States seems to be pulling its support away from many parts of the world. There is a lot of controversy over the price of prescriptive medications to fight AIDS here, for instance. The whole world says it's concerned about the high incidence of AIDS in Southern Africa, but the drug companies seem to be fighting really hard to keep the prices so high that few Africans can afford them. I don't necessarily agree with these practices, but I've had to explain them more than once.

America's poor record of involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict seems to be a special concern here, especially given the US response to Apartheid a few decades ago. And to many people here, our actions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere are suspect, and I've had to explain our policies and actions even though I don't always agree with them. It's hard at times, and now that I'm living here and experiencing this, I'm realizing nothing really prepared me for this responsibility. It's like whenever anything big happens in the world, people come right over to me and ask for my insights, and oftentimes I can't give them an answer that satisfies them. I never expected to experience something like this, and I wish was better prepared for this before leaving.

I'm going to reiterate what Dr. Lash suggested in our orientation—that others planning to live overseas become more knowledgeable about world affairs as well as what's going on within our own country before leaving for their journey. Read the *New York Times* or *Time* magazine, download news apps on your phone and check these or at least the headlines daily, or watch the news and listen to it on the radio. Do this for weeks before you leave so you can speak, rather intelligently, about things going on in the world.

A representative with a bit of social and political culture shock,

Jacob

TO: All Overseas Student Teachers

FROM: Dr. Lash

RE: He Said, She Said ... I Said, They Said ...

DATE: September 15

I appreciate the optimism, open-mindedness, and willingness to sift through the ambiguity that is emanating from your blogs and e-mails. This mindset is a good one to anchor yourself to as you continue to acclimate, learn, and process things as you settle in to your new country and culture. It



is fairly common to be misunderstood in words, and that is one of the major tasks in learning to communicate in any setting and especially now that you are doing this in international schools, homes, and community settings.

There are a variety of expectations put on each of you by the citizens in your host countries. It sounds as if some of you may have also become more knowledgeable about US policies and practices, or at least the perception of them, from another perspective. Keeping up to date with US policies and political happenings cannot only help you to be more knowledgeable but also can help to facilitate conversation and dialogue with others.

Jacob reminded us about what we talked about in orientation—that many others in the world are much more conversant in global affairs and that if you wanted to be considered one of the ingroup, it was in your best interest to keep abreast of current events. It sounds as if Jacob has been called on to be a US representative on the most emotional, controversial, and current issues of US world involvement in global conflicts as well as HIV/AIDS. Remember, it isn't too late to download an app for various news agencies and to read the headline stories daily—just like the citizens in your host country are doing.

While we are on this topic, let's remember that knowing about your host country's cultural, social, and legal rules can further your relationships and ensure your safety. Remember the university student from our own state of Ohio that we discussed? Otto Warmbier, a University of Virginia undergraduate student, was enrolled in a study abroad program when he opted to take a side trip to North Korea for five days. As Otto was boarding his flight to leave that country, he was detained by the North Korean government who claimed Otto went to a restricted area of his hotel and stole a poster with a photo of North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un. In North Korea, it is a serious offense to harm or steal items with the name or image of the leader, and Otto was subsequently sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor.

Taken into custody as a healthy and bright twenty-one-year-old, he was released seventeen months later and returned to his home in Ohio as a weakened twenty-two-year-old man, in a coma and state of unresponsive wakefulness. He died a few days later on home soil. Although this may be an extreme example, it is a current example of the possible perils of not understanding the cultural rules in oppressive regimes. In our country, an apology and return of the poster might be an appropriate response, and the issue would never appear in a courtroom. Otto, in Korean court, made a tearful apology to the Korean government (possibly coerced) but no doubt heartfelt in some sense, then to receive a sentence of fifteen years of hard labor. Again, this is thankfully an extreme case and not common, but it can serve to remind us of the importance of understanding and abiding by cultural norms and legal expectations.

Has anyone had their actions or intentions misunderstood? Intentions are particularly harder concepts to share and explain. What are your experiences with language, actions, and/or intentions? Have you been understood, misunderstood, or perhaps misconstrued? How did you initially respond, and how else might you have responded? Have you had to interpret your own culture to others? In retrospect, what might you do differently in the future?

#### BLOG RESPONSES

Student: Justine

Placement: Auckland, New Zealand

Date: September 17

RE: My first day on the job

Before I get into my first experiences of teaching in a year three classroom (equivalent to that of a second grade classroom in the United States), I need you all to know some important facts I've learned that are in tune with the posed questions. The following list is made up of words, phrases, and general details about the area that I have discovered since my arrival in New Zealand a few weeks ago.

1. The way US citizens pronounce the word *water* is utterly hilarious to my year threes, my teacher, and basically the entire faculty at my school.
2. The pharmacy is referred to as the chemist.
3. The wind is so fierce here I woke up at three in the morning because I was afraid I was experiencing an actual tornado. The entire house shook.
4. Sandals are jandals.
5. Students like huggies, not hugs.
6. Cross country is morning gym class.
7. Peppers are capsicums.
8. Children and adults walk around the city and school barefoot.
9. I have yet to see one shred of litter on the ground.
10. And my personal favorite, snack time is teatime. Teatime is a twenty-minute morning break the entire school takes between arrival and lunch—about 10:20. The teachers come together in the kitchen (lounge) and drink tea or coffee and sometimes eat some biscuits (cookies) or fruit. While we eat, we discuss our plans for the day or week and collaborate on ideas. During this time, students have a snack and play on the school grounds with two teachers supervising the entire school of students. This is one thing I already think US schools should adopt!

Like any first day of student teaching, my morning started with my introduction. Unlike any of my past introductions, today's greeting started out in a very special way. I sat down entirely prepared and believing I would say my name, where I'm from, tell them how excited I was to be learning with them in the next few months, and so on. I sat down, and almost immediately the entire room fell silent. As educators, we know that a room full of twenty-eight students falling silent simultaneously without any warning or suggestion is not the norm.

Luckily within seconds, a boy broke the silence. First, we made eye contact ... I smiled ... he smiled ... he turned red and blurted, "Say water!" Following this, the entire class started buzzing, laughing, and turning to me for a response. With my brows furrowed and squinted, I scanned the students, leaned forward, and said, "Wader." The entire classroom burst into laughter, and after my hello ended, we were on with our day.

As my students started on their morning work, I experienced the following two conversations:

Student A: "Did you know that water in Sweden you say with a v?"

Me: "No, I didn't! So vader?"

Student A: (laughing) "No, like this, vatah. I know because I was born there."

Student B: "I spell color like you!"

Me: "Oh really, how do you spell it?"

Student B: "C-O-L-O-R."

Me: "And how do your classmates spell it?"

Student B: "C-O-L-O-U-R. It's because I'm from China and we spell it like the USA."

Soon enough, the students gathered on the carpet in front of my mentor teacher, and she grabbed a book from behind her whiteboard easel. She took it out and said, "Time for 'The BFG.'" I recognized the novel instantly. "The BFG" is an amazing story that my mother reads every year in her third grade classroom back in the United States. As I listened to my mentor teacher read, I kept an eye on our students' faces. Most were engaged and mesmerized by one of the main characters—Mrs. Clonker and her footsteps through the hall—and a few students were poking at one another and making silly faces, both but moments away from being pulled back into the story.

I took in this moment and felt a sigh of relief. All of these amazing differences and experiences were occurring that I was so enchanted by and

enthralled in that I hadn't even realized that I might miss home. So for those fifteen minutes of reading, I completely immersed myself into the moment, and it was incredible. One-half of my heart was in Ohio in my mother's classroom, and the other half, here in my new home in Auckland, New Zealand, learning alongside my new students. It was a nice reminder of home and a great connection to make in this new place with my very new family. Even here on the other side of the world, you can find people, places, and things that are not only entirely new to you but simultaneously remind you of the amazing people, places, and things that you have known all your life.

Eager to continue learning tomorrow,  
Justine

Student: Chris  
Placement: Amsterdam, the Netherlands  
Date: September 28  
RE: Aboard a ferry

I made a long weekend trip to Britain via the ferry from Holland. As I settled into my seat on the boat, I looked around at my fellow passengers. I sat people watching; some couples were laughing, other adventurers were sleeping, and then I noticed the family seated in front of me. Through the small opening between the back of two older women's heads, I spotted a mother and her two sons. They were sitting in a booth, and after overhearing some of their conversation, I found that the older son was four and the younger son had just turned three.

After a few minutes into our journey, the boys began to explore their new environment. The older boy started playing with his mother, pulling her hat off and putting the oversized play toy on his own head. Through all their laughter, the younger son stood up on his seat, pulling himself up using the windowsill, and stared out into the water.

Suddenly, we hit a wave at just the right angle and splat! The water started hitting the window and continued to do so for a few minutes. The boy's eyes widened, and his jaw dropped and quickly formed into a smile. He turned to face his mother and shouted, "Mama, it's raining! It's raining, look mama!" His mother turned to him with her other son on her lap and said, "No, sweetie, it's the waves." Her son's eyebrows lowered and his nose pinched. "No, mama. It's raining outside, look!" he said as he pointed out the circular window. His mother went on to explain that the water from the North Sea was simply hitting the window in a way that made it look just like rain. It took a few minutes of back-and-forth discussion, but soon the son accepted

his mother's words, and he returned to his original position watching as the sea "rained" down onto his window.

As I watched the son debate with his mother about what he was certain was rain outside his window, I started thinking about the various perceptions my students hold as a result of their own experiences and then how they may change as they further develop. I began thinking about how a child's use of their five senses can affect the way in which that particular child interacts with the world around them. I considered the incredibly varied outcomes and the way in which a child would experience this particular moment differently based on the sense(s) the child chose to focus on.

While imagining the possible outcomes a child could draw from this encounter, either rain or ocean spatter, I began to think about the different ways in which we all perceive the world. This moment reminded me of how I used to understand the concept of culture. I used to focus only on the objective culture. That is, I scratched the surface, knew of some traditions a group of people celebrated, the foods they ate, and some of the music that accompanied their dances. But I never thought to dig deeper into the subjective or deeper culture that belonged to other people. Why did these traditions exist in the first place? What brought these people to celebrate this event, and what did their ancestors learn from this moment in time? What was that particular food tied to, and how and why was the recipe passed on through the generations of their people? Lastly, why were they dancing? What was their motivation, what drove them and inspired this unity—this togetherness?

As I reflected on this idea, I thought back to the little boy. I imagined how he would perceive this world, how my students perceive the world in different ways because of who they are and the experiences they've had. In this moment, I considered a sixth sense. Of course, there's sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch ... but what about human and cultural connections? We use our senses to help us with everyday interactions; who's to say that we don't apply our culture—something that we carry with us always to assist us in our journey as learners? Our perceptions of the world are based on who we are and how we came to be that person. Who's to say that one sense is more important than another or that a sixth sense can't be accounted for in moments such as these?

Feeling changed and challenged.  
Chris



TO: All Overseas Student Teachers

FROM: Dr. Lash

RE: You're nearly halfway through your experience!

Date: October 9

I've loved keeping up to date with you through your blogs. It seems like you're having an incredible experience in your placements and countries. It's fun to play with language, daily living patterns, and expectations and consider how the newly experienced cultural habits can begin to show you the benefits and limitations of your own as well as your host country's. It's revealing how many of you are experiencing language differences, even in English-speaking countries—clearly, a great way to learn about yourself and the world.

Your blog reflections discussing various perspectives on language and culture especially stood out to me this time and reminded me of one part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organizations' mission statement that may resonate with you—that these programs are designed to encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

Perhaps emanating from those feelings, but more broadly now that you've been living and teaching abroad for half a semester, I have a question I'd like you to consider. Many travelers often share how being an outsider (perhaps a man or woman, a citizen of a particular country, a person of different ethnicity than the majority, etc.) has shaded their experiences. What has the separation from family, friends, school, and a familiar way of life revealed to you about yourself? What do you know about the process of culture learning in view of all you have experienced in student teaching, living, and traveling overseas?

#### BLOG RESPONSES

Student: Carolyn

Placement: Guadalajara, Mexico

Date: October 11

RE: What is culture learning?

Before leaving for this sojourn, I was unsure of what culture learning actually meant. I considered Inhelder and Piaget, two scholars I'd studied in class, as I tried to wrap my brain around this new experience. I considered their ideas and considered culture learning from the perspective of an individual traveler and how I would come to new understandings about culture, life, and myself. These new understandings would lead to personal maturation and

change, which would be possible only if I submitted myself to moments of discontinuity, disjunction, and disequilibrium amidst moments of continuity.

In their 1958 book, *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, they discussed the notion that when individuals are traveling, changes in their environment will cause them to gain new understandings about life, specifically in reference to culture and self-identify. As I peered over the seats in front of me and saw the bobbing heads, I had a physical representation of these theorists' ideas about culture learning as experienced by many. The numerous "students of the world" who I was coinhabiting this bus with represented a potentially different perspective on culture based on their unique life experiences and cultural influences.

With my future classrooms of children in mind, I began considering that our planet and its people continue to evolve and learn as our world progresses. Moments of discontinuity and disjunction, or disequilibrium, occur when a problem arises, but equilibrium takes over when a solution is found internally or a partnership with others is formed. It is our responsibility to move forward once this solution or merger is created. After it takes place, we are able to share what we are learning and then teach those among us who are willing to open their eyes and ears. And as this sharing of knowledge takes place, new thoughts and discoveries are made, and with that a new journey into learning commences. This new disequilibrium marks the beginning of a new discontinuity and disjunction within the minds and lives of people—and thus the process continues in a never-ending manner.

We are all students,  
Carolyn

Student: Justine  
Placement: Auckland, New Zealand  
Date: October 12  
RE: Dinner with a Kiwi Asian

I've recently become great friends with Rose, a teacher at my field site. Rose is in her second year of teaching and working in one of the new experience classrooms (equivalent to that of the kindergarten in the United States). She's this bright, bubbly, and confident person, and after meeting her I began to wonder how she grew into this incredible and inspiring human being at only twenty-four years of age.

A few days ago during a track and field meet, Rose asked if I'd like to get dinner after school, and I happily agreed. Over tea and appetizers, our dinner quickly turned into an interview ... I couldn't help it.

J (me): "Living in the United States, I kind of grew up unaware of the struggles you might have faced. I, for example, never moved to a new home more than two hours away from my previous home. Your being someone who moved from Taiwan to New Zealand at such a young age, I was wondering, what were some of the struggles you faced? Was prejudice or racism ever something that you and your family had to deal with?"

R: "Well, it's kind of always been a challenge for me as a Kiwi Asian."

J: "What exactly is a Kiwi Asian?"

R: "Well, that's kind of hard to explain. When we first arrived in New Zealand, I was four years old, and my mom always said to me and my little sister, Jo-Jo, don't forget to make a range of friends, which really meant, go make non-Asian friends. This was hard at first, but as soon as I picked up some of the Kiwi lingo, it became easier.

"Even with friends, we kind of always faced subtle racism; I especially remember it happening at school. Jo-Jo didn't like to take rice or sushi to school because that was really Asian and kids would say stuff like, 'What is that? That's not a sandwich' or 'Why can't your mom make normal food for you; yours is so funny.' Our parents would just tell us not to worry about it, and so we tried our best to not let it bother us. Jo-Jo still ate next to me whenever mom packed us sushi. After a few years at school, Jo-Jo and I made a lot of friends from different backgrounds, and my mother and father were happy knowing we sort of found ourselves in this new country. But then Jo-Jo and I started to feel like we weren't full Asians anymore."

J: "What's a full Asian?"

R: "Knowing the language and the history of our people, like really knowing it."

J: "When did you guys start feeling like that?"

R: "We didn't realize we were losing our Chinese until we joined a Taiwanese dance group. That's when we realized how Kiwi we really were. We had been isolated from our relatives back in Taiwan for thirteen years, and entering this room full of Asians who were all speaking Chinese, made us really happy at first. But once we realized how much we had forgotten, we started to become really confused about who we were."

J: "So what did you do after that?"

R: "We made a range of friends again, but this time within our dance group. I met two girls, Jenny and Amy, who were both Asian—one originally from Cambodia and the other from Hong Kong. I quickly realized how you can feel a lot more Kiwi when you're hanging out with real Asians."

J: "So what about now? Do you consider yourself Asian, Kiwi, Kiwi Asian ... or what?"

R: “I’m a Kiwi Asian. But that kind of means I’m always stuck in the middle—you’re not really Kiwi but you’re not really Asian either. The Kiwis look at you like you’re foreign, and the full Asians look at you like you’re not really Asian ... but for the most part, I hang out with Kiwi Asians like me. We share the same language whether that be Mandarin with a hint of Kiwi or Kiwi with a hint of Mandarin, we eat like Asians, and we do things Kiwis like to do, like playing rugby. I’m still kind of trying to figure out what I am.”

Our dinner ended up lasting much longer than either of us had planned, but through it I came to a new understanding. The process of culture learning has a lot to do with the popular saying “walk a mile in another person’s shoes.” I left this dinner with new knowledge of Rose’s past. She faced struggles as an immigrant to a new country that I would have never predicted or understood if she hadn’t opened up to me. If not for this dinner and my experience living, student teaching, and traveling overseas, I would have never met this incredible educator, who helped me to understand the perspectives and feelings of another student of this world.

This is especially important to understand in this day and age with so many people all over the world who are in transition—as immigrants or refugees, for instance. Culture learning is a living, breathing thing. And without this trying on of one another’s shoes, shirts, pants, languages, foods, and histories, a great deal of knowledge and potential for growth among people and cultures is lost.

Feeling inspired,  
Justine

TO: All Overseas Student Teachers  
FROM: Dr. Lash  
RE: Intercultural Competence, your new thoughts  
DATE: November 2

My extrapolation from your blogs this time shows me how your international student teaching experiences challenge Steven Covey’s (1989) quote, “Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” Your experiences are begging you to understand the people, teachers, families, and culture in which you are currently immersed. This is hard work—you might be feeling drained and eventually exhilarated during your forages into authentic understandings and connections. Because you are so immersed and working hard, it is now time to reflect on two of the most difficult questions for one of your final blogs.

How do you define international mindedness or a mindset for global learning? And then, how do you attain intercultural competence?

#### BLOG RESPONSES

Student: Chris

Placement: Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Date: November 4

RE: A worldly student with little knowledge about the world

Now that I've been living and teaching in Amsterdam, I'm slowly realizing how very little I actually know about the world. I've formed a lot of relationships with colleagues at my school as well as with people within my community. A lot of our initial conversations these first few weeks focused on similarities and differences I had noticed since I arrived. I was rather embarrassed at first during these interactions, especially about how little I seemed to know, both about the Dutch as well as about most of the rest of the world. Because of these conversations, I've been trying to consciously consider the differences I observe around me.

Since then, I have picked up on issues related to language that I never experienced back in the States. It's really helped me to see just how linguistically limited we are back home. Since I've arrived here, I've been able to travel a bit around the continent. In the United States, you can travel thousands of miles and rarely hear another language. In Holland, it's much different. I guess in the Netherlands, and many other places in the world for that matter, one would be surrounded with different languages growing up as a child. I think we in the United States are at a disadvantage when it comes to this.

This realization helped me to gain a new perspective on the interactions I was initially having with my colleagues and peers. Whenever I'm left not knowing the answer to a question or even not understanding the basis for a topic we were discussing, the Dutch seem to take it in stride after they've poked a bit of fun at me. It was almost as if they expect me to be this way. I often wonder why it is that the people of Holland expect me to be somewhat naïve about the rest of the world. Now that I have traveled a bit around the continent, I understand this better. Americans in general, and many of the teachers I have had past experiences teaching with, know relatively little about the rest of the world. I think that's a shame.

Wondering and searching,  
Chris



Student: Justine

Placement: Auckland, New Zealand

Date: November 8

RE: A run in with a Maori legend

Near the beginning of my journey in New Zealand, a few days after I had unpacked and was feeling settled, I decided to go for a run in the native bush. Why do I blog about this two months later? Because the experience has stuck with me, and as I look back, it still remains the best answer to this question—it was a big growth step on international mindedness.

As I ran that day, I listened to the sounds of the forest—birds singing, water dripping from plants nearby, and the occasional scattered footsteps of small forest animals, all alongside my hurried breathing. I was alone. I could see that my path veered to the right up ahead, and as I made my way to this corner, my heart skipped a beat. I thought I saw a face in the woods, a human face, hiding low on the ground behind a tree. I ran. I was still running full speed when I looked up and saw an opening, a man-made door opening to what seemed like more dense forest. As I ran through the doorway, my pace slowed, and soon I was standing completely still, surveying my surroundings.

I was in a wooden room, with no ceiling, that the forest had taken over. There were bushes, vines, a few daunting unfamiliar insects, and finally—The Tree. It was the largest tree in the wooden room, and right dead in the center of its trunk, eye level with me, was an iron sun with piercing eyes and its tongue sticking out. I have come to know this decoration as a symbol representational of the New Zealand legend “How Maui Slowed the Sun.” The children at my field school study and create artwork in honor of the story connected to it. But at this moment in time, I was unaware of such a legend, and so Maui and his sun only fueled the fire under my feet.

I took off running. Have you ever tried to run away while in an enclosed room with only one doorway? You don’t get very far. I took the only available path, the one leading back to the area where the human face resided and my escape journey initially began. As I ran, I began slowing my pace. I thought to myself, Justine, are you really doing this right now? You’re twenty-two years old, you traveled to New Zealand on your own, you are about to graduate from university and then get a real job where you are responsible for keeping all of your students safe and unafraid, and you are frantically running in circles to avoid a metal sunshine nailed to a tree and what was most likely a weirdly shaped formation of leaves and sticks on the ground.

I quickly calmed myself and decided to continue my exploration of the native bush. I made it back to a fork in the woods, and I had a choice to make, turn left and return home or move forward and explore the track I hadn’t taken before. I felt this jolt of energy, and before my mind knew what my

body was doing, I was hopping over some vines and bumps in the path directly in front of me, onward on my adventure into the unknown.

As I ran, skipped, hopped, tripped, stopped to smile, and continued walking, I began thinking. This is just like the journey my students are taking. They walk into the classroom every day, and they make choices. They decide to read on their own or work with a partner, they choose one book over the other, they decide the answer is six rather than seven, they dribble left with the basketball and pass it to one of their teammates rather than shoot from the three-point line. They make such decisions every day and all because they are inspired and choose to do so.

As I chose to continue down the unknown path rather than go back home, I felt this surge of energy, of excitement, of inquiry and passion. That's the kind of environment I want to create for my students—one in which we take their interests and what they wonder, choose their own path to learning, and discover more about themselves while on this journey. I'll help them in any way that I can, but in the end, it's their adventure into learning and it's what they make of it. Sure, they may encounter a few scary tree face-like moments along the way, but those moments, when you are scared or unsure or even alone, are the moments in which you find your true character, your sense of responsibility, and your dedication to every passion that you hold.

While on this run, I found out how one attains intercultural competence—by making yourself uncomfortable or even afraid. These moments when you are challenged to stand up on your own two feet, to use what your family and professors have taught you and apply what you have learned within past fieldwork experiences, are the moments in which you grow. These are the moments in which you find the passion and strength to become the brave educator you've always dreamed of being for your current and future students.

After realizing this, I thought of a new question for myself. How would this experience help my students grow? How can I help them grow into internationally minded human beings? Now, I knew for certain! It's my turn to make them uncomfortable.

An experienced traveler ... a changed educator,  
Justine

Student: Emily  
Placement: Port Elizabeth, South Africa  
Date: November 17  
RE: We were here

How do I define international mindedness? As I started to consider this question, I began an exploration into the intricately developed tunnels and avenues within my mind, and I came across a moment in time that I had experienced a few weeks ago. A perfect picture appeared in my mind. I saw a pile of pearl white rocks that I noticed down by the entrance to a beach at Table Mountain National Park outside of Cape Town—a park I visited during a two-week bus tour I went on during school break. I remembered how I had walked up to this pile of seemingly regular looking rocks and how in just seconds the purpose of my entire experience in South Africa was made evident to me for the first time through the means of pebbles and dirt.

As I approached the rock pile, I bent down to better focus on bright rock that caught my eye, and as I picked it up, I noticed it had writing on it. As soon as my eyes adjusted to the tiny letters on the rock, I stood up, and as my view broadened, I found that nearly every rock had some form of writing on its surface. Some were in English, others Chinese, and a few in languages I didn't recognize. Other rocks were marked with a date, a few with two names and a heart, and I even saw one with the South African flag drawn on the entirety of one flat side. Soon, I happened upon my most favorite memory rock. On it was a list of names followed by a date and after that was the ever-popular statement "We were here."

Later that week, I attended a middle childhood education conference in Cape Town, and while listening to various presentations, I started to recall that "we were here" feeling. As I reminisced, I considered just how many people had left their mark on that place, and I felt this overwhelming feeling of change tickling the backside of my heart. I felt one way to perceive the world around me dwindling downward and becoming the foundation that now lay way for my newly formed international mindedness—supported by pillars made up of new experiences, new people, and memories of the emotions I had felt while on this sojourn.

Shortly after the conference ended, I began to reflect on my journey. I was able to listen to educators from around the world come together to talk about what matters most to them. Some of these people spent their lives working toward bettering education and improving the quality of their students' learning. And now, today, each and every presenter from various parts of this world took the role of student. We sat together in large rooms with attentive eyes, tuned ears, and open minds and listened as the presenters expressed their findings, feelings, and possible solutions. We concluded each speech with a time for discussion and questions because as educators we know our learning never ceases. We learned, we laughed, we were challenged to think outside of our ever-evolving ethnorelative orientations, and we all became better for it.

We live in a very vast world, one in which you can take a plane, hop on a bus, or even walk a few minutes outside of your own neighborhood and find new and engaging people awaiting you with open arms and open minds. So how do I define international mindedness? I choose to believe that this world is full of young people who are becoming more caring human beings each and every day as they walk among the footsteps of their own as well as their ancestors' past. We learn from the journeys that have already been taken and from the ones we all wish to embark upon. We grow as individuals while on these journeys, but I have found that this personal growth is worthless if not shared with those who are willing to listen and understand. We may grow to become greater human beings and more knowledgeable educators as we partake in experiences such as these, but we can become one greater being, one greater world of people, only if we share with others what we have learned and discovered while chasing our passions.

A new thinker—a new learner,  
Emily

Student: Morgan  
Placement: Perth, Australia  
Date: November 23  
RE: Penguin Island

Yesterday I explored Penguin Island with four friends, and the adventure was spectacular! Around 10:00 in the morning, a fellow teacher, her sister, a friend of hers from college (which is what Aussie's call high school), another friend of a friend, and I met on the ferry and departed for our journey. After our hellos and nice to meet yous, we got to talking. Two of my new adventure partners lived their entire lives in Australia, another one was born in Saudi Arabia but raised in England, and the fourth one grew up in South Africa before making her way here. As we climbed over hills and rocks, we talked about our experiences and how these experiences led us to this exploration amid new friends.

As the day progressed, we proceeded on our trek to the top of the summit while continuing to get to know one another. We discussed the different cultural aspects of our hometowns and how they varied in comparison to that of Australia's. We talked about the different forms of respect for women as well as prayer in Saudi Arabia. We discussed vegetarianism as well as veganism and how these personal choices make changes to our economy, to the lives of many animals across the world, and to the planet in general. We talked about

the varying education systems we were all a part of as children and are now implementing and making changes to as educators.

All of these conversations happened throughout the day. We'd partner off and share about ourselves, what brought us to this moment in time and what experiences have shaped us into the human beings we are in this moment. Then, near the harbor where our ferry that was to take us back was waiting, we got back together as a group to move as one being over roots and rocks, and as we ventured toward our destination, our heated debates about vegetarianism and current political events came to a close.

We laughed, we smiled, we tripped, we debated, we held one another's hands when our trek took a turn or became bumpy, and all the while, we made new friends and added a new adventure to our personal histories. I think that's what international mindedness is—placing yourself in situations where you will share a new experience with people who have cultural backgrounds unlike your own and sharing an experience together that leads to discovering more about the people you walk beside and how their personal journey led them here, to this particular moment, learning alongside you.

I believe the act of purposefully placing yourself in situations like this, your own approach to being an internationally minded person, leads to the attainment of intercultural competence, although this attainment occurs only if you take the time to reflect on your shared experience and what you've come to understand about your fellow travelers while walking side by side.

A spectacular day—an inspired educator,  
Morgan

TO: All Overseas Student Teachers  
FROM: Dr. Lash  
RE: Welcome Home—time to acclimate ... again!  
DATE: December 6

Amazing intercultural growth and furthering of your international mindedness worldview are evident in your blogs. I challenge each of you to bring parts of your newly found perspectives and experiences into your relationships, classrooms, and teaching back in the United States or internationally. And, of course, on the practical side, consider how you weave these new learnings from your overseas student teaching experience into your upcoming job interviews—how lucky a principal will feel to know you have all the skills and knowledge of your stateside classmates and worldly experience too.



And, as I officially welcome everyone back to the States, it's time to warn you that you will need to allow some time for readjusting to home. Although you'll be welcomed back home, others have not had your experiences, and you may find that their interest cannot be sustained at the level you need in order to talk and process your travel.

Please consider this blog, your overseas student teaching friends, and me as additional outlets for processing your experiences. And, as we know, those experiences go well beyond your schools and homestays—congratulations, you have become world-class learners and educators. You have met students, citizens, and immigrants as well as world travelers to your host countries; you are pulling those people and experiences as well as your classroom teaching and school philosophies into your worldview. I've so enjoyed your blogs while you student taught and traveled abroad and hope that you'll continue reflecting on your experiences and perceptions as you personally and professionally continue to grow.

I also think that you have seen the value in reflection and writing as a way of solidifying experiences, emotions, and ideas as well as to move yourself forward as educators and human beings. Remember, John Dewey's (1938) philosophy: We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience. Please consider the following questions as your final blog.

A significant amount of research suggests that people who participate in international experiences not only develop on a personal level by increasing their self-confidence and independence but also their tolerance for ambiguity and adaptability to life in general is altered. Would you agree with these ideas? Why or why not? What experiences support or question these assertions?

## BLOG RESPONSES

Student: Chris

Placement: Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Date: December 8

RE: Me ... a representative?

I faced many challenges while abroad in Amsterdam. Most of them were more or less connected to the adjustment period early in my trip when I was getting used to the area, the bus system, and the language barriers and coming to understand some of the commonly used sayings or slang that I had never heard of before. In retrospect, these seem like relatively easy and surface-level differences to which I had to adapt. But the biggest challenge I faced while abroad was the fact that I was from the United States. I hadn't expected

to feel this way, and I was slightly unprepared when I realized I was the “outsider” for the first time in my life. I acquired a new responsibility that I did not anticipate. Unknowingly, I became the representative of the United States in the eyes of the people in my community.

We were overseas during the 2016 presidential election. Everyone I met asked about the cultural norms back home, what I thought about the current state of political affairs, and how I was going to combat any negativity that was going on when I returned. I would walk into a classroom and be met with questions like “Did you know he’s trying to build a wall?” And “What are you going to do if he wins?” But it wasn’t these types of questions that challenged me; it was finding a way to give hope to those friends, parents, and students who shared their worries with me.

On the day the election results were broadcast, five of my students offered for me to move in with their families. I was asked nearly every hour if I was now making my move permanent. And during class, one of my students, Omar, calmly brushed my hand and asked me if I was scared to go home. Later on during the day, my mentor teacher’s daughter, an eleven-year-old girl with the wit and intelligence of a much older student, found me during lunch. “I’m worried about Trump’s son,” she said. “Why’s that?” I responded. “Well, during the speech, he just didn’t look happy. I feel like kids won’t want to be friends with him at school anymore because his dad is mean, and then he’ll just be sad and alone. Nobody likes that feeling.”

Nearing the end of the day, one of Omar’s parents approached me and said, “This morning Omar asked me, ‘Mom, will we ever be able to go to the United States to see where my student teacher lives?’ And I had to respond to him, ‘I don’t know.’ We’re Muslim, and trying to explain this situation to him was very difficult—he just couldn’t wrap his head around it.”

This particular day was quite odd and challenged me in a way I had never predicted. At that moment in time, I was overwhelmed by the responsibilities I had attained as the “outsider” and “US representative” in this country. It was as if I was responsible for all that was going on in my home country and my students and their families were looking to me for answers and solutions.

But as I reflect on this moment, I now realize how courageous it was of my students, their families, and me to be hopeful, optimistic, supportive of one another, and brave enough to discuss the political events that were going on during this time. I felt as if the cross-cultural connections I had made over these past few months were undervalued by some of the people currently representing our country, and the possibility that these types of intercultural experiences could be restricted in the future scared me.

But everyone I was with helped to give me hope. The fact that we were able to confide in one another about these political and social issues and our overall trust in each other allowed for these moments that on some levels

were characterized by hate, segregation, and disconnect to become an opportunity for us to come together.

As I continue to look back on this day, I realize that in moments when parents, teachers, and most people were going slightly crazy, my students reminded me of what was important. Nobody likes that feeling of being sad, alone, or scared. Now that I have traveled abroad and had this experience alongside the people of Amsterdam, I can confidently say that our best approach in dealing with major changes occurring around the world that affect us all is to take a moment to think about such events from the perspective of a child. It may just help us to open our eyes and remind us of what really matters. This shift in perspective may help us to see how to respectfully fight for those things we hold dear to our hearts in a way the children of our world would be proud of.

Changed,  
Chris

Student: Morgan  
Placement: Perth, Australia  
Date: December 10  
RE: Reflecting

Many people asked me why, as an African American, I wanted to go to Australia in the first place. I had read about the struggles of the Aborigines, and I was interested in their experience and in learning about their culture. At the same time, however, I was a bit nervous that I might suffer some of the same discrimination they had encountered.

When I arrived in Australia, I quickly noted that I was the only Black person in my school and community, and at first, I was scared and a bit nervous about traveling around Australia as an outsider. But soon I found I felt more welcomed as an African American in Australia than I typically did back home. Most people were really welcoming and interested in me as a person as well as in my African American heritage. Many doors opened up for me, both in the school and in the community, especially through my host family. Although it may have been stressful at the beginning, I found I was able to adapt in this environment.

From this experience, I have been able to look back upon the United States and view it from a different perspective. I learned that other countries are not as openly racist as people are in the United States and that other cultures seem to be more open to minorities. Now, I know that, as a result of this experience, I can do just about anything I put my mind to. I've become much

more independent and self-sufficient than I ever thought I could become. And I've learned to take chances in my life, something that I really never did before. I've also learned a lot about a couple of other cultures, both Australian Aborigines and White Australians, and for that I'm really grateful.

From outsider to community member,  
Morgan

Student: Emily  
Placement: Port Elizabeth, South Africa  
Date: December 16  
RE: Discomfort leads to new understandings

Now that I have returned to the States, I've started to reflect on my experience abroad. I like to believe that because of my experiences teaching and living in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, that I have become an educator who is now more attuned to my students' community influences and their family histories. I have learned how to empathize with others and to be sensitive to the needs of children at a much higher level. Being in a new and different situation has given me the opportunity to experience what it feels like to be away from one's familiar surroundings and to be the odd person out. This feeling of being the outsider for once in my life helped me come to realize that I didn't understand what others around me take for granted, cherish, and value.

I think I understand privilege better now as well as the responsibilities I have for all learners. I'm also beginning to understand how these concerns may be completely different from my own and something that I wouldn't understand if I didn't make a conscious effort to get to know the histories tied to my students. I also learned to be much less suspicious of people and to trust people much more than I ever had before. I met some incredibly nice, giving people. Most of the time, people are good and can be much more helpful and kind than I had ever thought.

This is extremely helpful to me as I think about teaching children from different backgrounds back home. I learned how to be accepting of differences. Even people completely different from you have something in common. I learned to listen to what others are interested in and in what they believe. It can be very scary and lonely at times, but you do get over it. This is one way I have become more sensitive. This will definitely help me if I ever get a student who is from another country, or even another state, in my classroom. I learned so much, especially about myself. I also learned that teaching is a passion of mine that I cannot wait to pursue.

I'm ready to teach,  
Emily

Student: Justine  
Placement: Auckland, New Zealand  
Date: December 17  
RE: Becoming independent

Being totally responsible for finding a place to live in a large foreign city was one of the most difficult things about my experience. Now that I'm back in the States, I realize this major challenge abroad actually allowed for me to become more independent. At first, I thought it strange that no one had arranged any housing for me. But my supervisor said that he couldn't predict the kind of living arrangement I would like, so he asked me to find my own housing. I guess it saves problems for him later if people are unhappy with a host family or an apartment he chose. It took me a few days, but eventually I found a room to rent that was close to the school in which I was teaching. And I met some pretty nice people as a result of this that I get together with now on a regular basis.

The experience made me more independent, and I feel that I can do anything now. In fact, I was offered a teaching position in maths, that's how they refer to math in New Zealand, at the school in which I student taught. Now that I'm back in the States, my plan is to attend graduation, visit family and friends as much as I can, and four weeks later, return to Auckland. What I first viewed as an obstacle quickly became an opportunity for new friendships to form, and my ability to function on my own in a foreign country was challenged. Now, as I decorate my cap for graduation and repack my bags for Auckland, I do so with a weight lifted off my shoulders. After this experience, I know that I can make it through anything no matter what it is.

Back to the airport and onto my next adventure,  
Justine

Student: Jacob  
Placement: Port Elizabeth, South Africa  
Date: December 19  
RE: My final thoughts

My experience in South Africa helped me to become more independent, that's for sure. I had a wonderful experience, but I was very lonely. And I had a difficult adjustment in the beginning. My host family was wonderful though. I stayed with one of the teachers from the school I taught at in Port

Elizabeth. He was very helpful and gracious to me. But when I went out into the community, now that was a different story. It's still a pretty stressful life in South Africa for most Blacks, even more than 20 years since the transition from Apartheid to a free and democratic society. But both Whites and Blacks have undergone a significant change, and it's not been easy for either side.

And the economic situation in the country is quite different from anything I have ever experienced. So many people are out of work and have little hope for their future. Yet many people are still optimistic that things will improve. After all, most of the world thought South Africa would explode in a civil war more than a few times after Apartheid, but that didn't happen. That was a positive sign for the rest of the world, I think. The people are hopeful, and they have so much to overcome. I was glad to be a small part of that effort.

Going into this I felt I was prepared for certain things. I knew to expect culture or adjustment shock, for instance, but I also remember thinking that it wouldn't happen to me. But it did—on many occasions. I naïvely thought that because I was Black my visit to the African continent would be easy, but there were many times when I just didn't understand what was going on. When that happened, I remembered some of the things that we had talked about in our orientation sessions, such as the adjustment cycle, so I knew I wasn't alone in my feelings.

But I wasn't prepared for the racial tensions that existed. And I'm not sure there is any way I could have been prepared for them because the way they are dealt with is much different from the way we approach these kinds of issues in the United States. I read a bit about the situation before I left, so I knew a few of the current issues. But until you really begin to meet people and learn about their experience firsthand, it is hard to understand the situation.

That is why I'm now a firm believer in the educational value of travel. Now, I can begin to understand the plight of others around the world because I have experienced it myself. This is so much better than reading about it in a book or in the newspaper. I think more teachers should have such experiences; it would make school a much more real and alive place. I hope to be able to offer similar experiences, although probably on a smaller scale, to my students once I begin teaching.

Transformed,  
Jacob

Student: Carolyn  
Placement: Guadalajara, Mexico  
Date: December 20  
RE: Go ahead and do it!



If you're considering student teaching abroad, go ahead and do it! I know it's scary ... to think about living somewhere else for so long where you will be working alongside new people and in an unfamiliar environment. But isn't that what we ask of our students at the beginning of each new school year? If we expect our students to come into our classroom and form new relationships and build a community—like a family—how can we not take the leap and attempt to do so ourselves?

While abroad, I learned so much and grew into a different human being who has a new understanding of the world we share—a new understanding and respect for people, their culture, and the personal histories belonging to each new friend, student, and colleague. This change in me—this new acceptance and understanding of people—would never have taken place or at least not as quickly if I hadn't departed for this new learning experience.

When I first arrived in Guadalajara, I was overwhelmed by every experience. One of my first challenges was that I had to get over my fear of sounding stupid using the Spanish language. Although I'd studied Spanish in high school, I really couldn't speak it to anyone else. But using it daily with my host family and with the kids in the school, even though they all spoke English, was the only way that I was ever going to be able to speak the language. Because of this experience, I have a new respect for and understanding of people different from me who come to America and have to learn English. It is very difficult when you are older and can be a bit depressing and scary when you can't communicate what you want to be known.

Every day there was something new to discover, a new challenge to face. But with every challenge I grew, I became a little more confident and willing to step out of my comfort zone. I've always been a soft-spoken person and tried my best to avoid conflict. And when it did find me, I usually was the first to apologize, the first to conform, the first to give in, although I was never this way with my education—I always fought for what I wanted, needed, or thought was right for myself as well as my students. With this trip in mind, I was hoping that my confidence as an educator would expand and take root in the part of my brain that gave me the power and strength to be confident as a person.

Now that I'm back in the States, I can happily say that with each new challenge I faced in Mexico, that confidence factor within my mind traveled to whatever place inside me that used to say stop, be silent, be content. It now says grow, let your voice be heard, and be passionate! With this newfound confidence, I find I'm able to assist others in ways I never could before.

Remember at our "transition home" dinner meeting with Dr. Lash a week or so ago? It's amazing to think I was at this meeting one semester ago as I prepared to embark on student teaching. Now, one semester later, I serve as

the “expert” or mentor to the next cohort of overseas student teachers who are about to leave.

While there, I sat next to two students who are planning to travel to Guadalajara to student teach. They asked me a few questions about the school, the city, what to pack, and how best to prepare. After the dinner, I gave them my e-mail address and phone number, and within a few days, general questions turned to more specific inquiries and conversations about culture shock, advice about homestays and teaching, learning stories from the classroom, and so much more. In my own small way, I was the expert, and I could confidently speak about travel and adjusting—my inner voice was becoming my spoken voice.

At the dinner, I also spoke with a student who knew of a position opening up in the spring at a private Muslim school in the area. I had never heard of it before, but I figured why not take a chance? I was able to get an interview and went into it with the general nervousness I think any new teacher would feel going into their first real interview. As I sat down in front of the principal and one teacher from the school, I felt this wave of contentment wash over me. I traveled, lived, and taught abroad in another country for an entire semester—I could do this and I could get this job. Soon enough, the interview began. All of my nervousness suddenly washed away. With every question, I had a story or insight from my experience in Mexico that helped to support my claims. I continued on about my growth, my students’ growth, and soon we came to the final interview question.

The principal asked: Why do you want this job?

I responded: I just returned from this incredible experience where I grew so much as an educator and as a human being by fully immersing myself in the culture of different people in a different country. Now, I’m back in the States, and I can’t help but want to learn more. I’m passionate about discovering more about people, their customs, and what they find important or special in this life.

My goal as an educator, especially now, is to reweave my perceptions of this world as well as inspire my students to do so, and I think I can do this best here, in your center for learning where I can work to enhance my understanding of your culture, your beliefs, and continue growing. I was offered the job two days later. I took the leap, I traveled abroad, and I became better for it. I accomplished more than the goals I set for myself. I am a more confident educator, learner, and communicator. If there is one thing I learned from teaching abroad, it’s that one child’s learning experience is not the same as another’s.

The same goes for us as future teachers, so embark upon your own adventure into learning filled with endless opportunities to make new discoveries about teaching, learning, and living in this ever-changing and beautiful world. I can't tell you exactly what you'll learn, who you'll meet, or how those people and your students will change you, but I can say without a doubt that you will leave this experience feeling empowered and more confident as an educator and that feeling is something you can pass on to your future students.

It's your turn now,  
Carolyn

TO: Overseas Student Teachers  
FROM: Dr. Lash  
RE: Final Reflection  
DATE: December 21

Your final blogs show me that although student teaching is a capstone experience for your university education, being a learner in an international student teaching experience accelerated your global thinking, learning, and perspective taking as well as teaching abilities. As a full participant in experiential international learning, your lived experiences have proven invaluable to you in so many ways. I believe your experiences, questioning, and interest in exploring other countries and cultures will remain with you for many months and years.

You've also become more reflective and perhaps more critical in a constructive way of your own culture and what it means to be a US American. I wonder how this might impact your teaching in the future. How many of you will encourage your students to become more analytical, more reflective, more critical because now, you yourself, have these skills? Here are some final questions for you to consider as you all embark on this next sojourn as lifelong learners:

- What does it feel like to be an American in a foreign country? How does it feel to be perceived as the representative for 325 million Americans?
- Were you expecting to meet people/travelers from other parts of the world, not just your host country? Do you feel you are connected to a world of globetrotters that you may not have even known existed? How does that change you as a future teacher, as a lifelong learner, as a human being?
- How do you think your teaching will be changed in the short term? In the longer term? How do you think your perspective taking, analytic and problem-solving skills, questioning, risk taking, and world knowledge will

be realized in your future classrooms? Do you foresee that you will hold different expectations and standards for your future students?

And you know I enjoy quotes, so I'll leave you with one that surely captures your overseas student teaching experience. This quote comes from American storyteller and riverboat pilot, Mark Twain:

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.