

# The Motivations of U.S. Preservice Teaching Graduates Returning to Teach

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Sherie Williams<sup>1</sup> and Anna Abramenka<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Due to increased global access to teacher employment, many first-year teachers from the United States are seeking employment abroad. Giving preservice teachers an initial opportunity to study and/or teach abroad before graduation can create greater opportunities to secure eventual employment abroad, and some graduates choose to return to the site of their preservice experience. This case study examines the motivations of two U.S. students who sought employment at the site of their overseas preservice teaching location in Spain for their first professional teaching placement. In exploring the motivations of these new teachers, the authors identified two major reasons they chose to return: relationships and language. Both study participants talked extensively about the benefits of establishing strong relationships while studying/teaching abroad and how this enabled them to find the elements required to live and work abroad. They also highlighted language acquisition. For both of them, the importance of being fluent in Spanish for their future career was a significant factor in their decision to return to teach abroad.

**Key Words:** Employment abroad, international preservice teaching, international relationships, language acquisition, teacher graduation

## Introduction

The demand for native English-speaking teachers is on the rise and has been increasing exponentially over the past few years as more schools around the world have embraced the idea of having native speakers prepare their students to speak fluent English (Savva, 2015; Sun Hee, Boi Hoang, and Yang (2010). Speaking English is seen by many as the gateway to future global success, both academically and financially. To meet this need for native English-speaking teachers, many schools are finding the answer in newly graduated teachers from the United States who have had previous experience studying/teaching abroad while they were students.

While completing an overseas study/teach experience, many preservice teachers develop a desire to teach and live abroad (Egeland, 2016; Lupi & Turner, 2013). Therefore, giving U.S. students the opportunity to study/teach abroad as preservice teachers has the potential to help fulfill the demand for native English-speaking teachers abroad. However, the reasons behind why preservice teachers choose to return to work abroad after they graduate is not fully understood. Hence, the current study seeks to

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Dr. Sherie Williams, College of Education, Grand Valley State University MI 49504. E-mail: willishe@gvsu.edu, ORCID: 0000-0002-5676-5956

<sup>2</sup> Anna Abramenka, College of Education, Grand Valley State University, ORCID: 0000-0003-2866-6544

find what motivates a new teacher to want to work and live abroad.

## **Literature Review**

### **Global Demand and Supply**

Due to an enormous demand for English language instruction and an increased demand for native English-speaking teachers in different countries, many first-year American graduates are seeking teaching careers abroad. English is, by far, the most common curricular area taught by Americans in their first overseas experience, followed closely by teaching across a range of curricula (Reid & Collins, 2013). This demand for native English-speaking teachers likely remains strong because of the prestige associated with educators recruited directly from Anglophone countries (Savva, 2015). According to Teach Away, a leading international teacher recruitment company, “Overseas teaching job opportunities have increased by 150% in 2016-2017 compared to the previous year” (Merryweather, 2016, p. 1). The international TEFL Academy estimates that 250,000 English speakers work as teachers in more than 40,000 schools and language institutes around the world. Because nearly half of these teachers stay only one year and then return to their home countries, there are approximately 100,000 English teaching positions open each year (International TEFL Academy, n.d.). Consequently, English-speaking teachers from Anglophone countries have become an important part of the global migration of professionals (Reid & Collins, 2013; Widegren & Doherty, 2010).

Participation in the global labor market may require teachers to put aside their intellectual capital in a particular subject area (e.g., chemistry or mathematics) and focus their attention instead on their native English-speaking intellectual capital. While teaching English might not be part of their formal qualifications, their language background and capacity to teach English is much more highly valued than their professional knowledge (Reid & Collins, 2013). Teachers must learn to take advantage of this by identifying developments associated with demands, shortages, and mismatches in skills in the teaching profession in the countries to which they emigrate (Widegren & Doherty, 2010). At the same time, obtaining an overseas teaching placement is not necessarily easy. The U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI) has pointed out that the same requirements and obstacles for landing a position in the United States can be encountered when seeking employment abroad. This is in addition to the usual barriers encountered when obtaining permission to work in a foreign country and mastering its language and culture (USNEI, n.d.).

Most of the literature concerning teachers working in various countries around the world focuses on the international school setting. However, although related research is limited, teachers also go abroad to work in national schools that value multilingualism and/or international education (Halicioglu, 2015). Whichever setting they choose, more and more teachers are being enticed into what they might see as doing

the same job, but in a different location (Hayden, 2002). Some teachers choose to work temporarily overseas and then either return to America, or they may move abroad permanently (Widegren & Doherty, 2010). But regardless of their desire to teach internationally or stateside, the experience of having a study abroad experience as part of the teacher preparation process has been shown to produce an advantage in the hiring process (Shiveley & Misco, 2012).

### **Overseas Teachers' Motivations**

A number of recent studies have explored the motives of international educators and the future generation of teachers (Reid & Collins, 2013; Rots, Aelterman, & Devos, 2014; Savva, 2015; Widegren & Doherty, 2010). For example, Rots et al.'s (2014) study concluded that graduates' choices to enter the teaching profession could be understood not only from their initial motivation for teaching or from perceived employment opportunities, but also from their experiences in teacher education. Likewise, decisions that prompt educators to move and teach overseas are often complex and influenced by a combination of factors.

In Savva's (2015) study of international educators' decision-making characteristics, a high value was placed on their experiences with a study/teach abroad opportunity provided through a university program. Multiple educators credited their interest in overseas work and their desire to experience international education as beginning during a study abroad experience. Savva's study was further supported by the benefits reported by teacher education students following international field experiences, such as an increased ability to navigate in cross-cultural contexts and a heightened interest in foreign travel (Cushner, 2009; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007).

While the majority of Anglophone teachers work in international or English-speaking schools, there has been limited research suggesting that foreign language acquisition or immersion is a significant motivator for teaching abroad. But a few studies have indicated that the continued cultural and linguistic learning and exploring that studying/teaching abroad offers is of particular appeal to the newest generation of teachers (Savva, 2015; Widegren & Doherty, 2010). There is also growing empirical evidence that suggests mentor support can promote increased retention of novice teachers (Rots et al., 2014) and may influence graduates' job choices. If this is true, it can be assumed that student teachers with a more extended international professional network might be more inclined to work in a national or international school abroad.

Finally, Savva's (2015) study concluded that while some international educators claimed dissatisfaction with the condition of schools in their home country or better career opportunities available abroad as factors in their decision, these were only secondary conditions and never the primary reason for choosing to teach in another country. In fact, Halicioglu (2015) has suggested that those with such reactive motivations

for teaching abroad may experience more challenges than those who make the move as part of a more definite career plan.

### **Effect of Preservice Studying/Teaching Abroad**

Literature as far back as the 1990s continues to depict what recent literature suggests: there are personal and professional benefits in short-term preservice study/teach abroad experiences (Craigien & Sparkman, 2014; Cushner & Mahon, 2002, 2009; Egeland, 2016; Franklin, 2010; Lupi & Turner, 2013; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Mapp, 2012; Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Rowan-Kenyon & Nichaus, 2011). A number of studies found that the majority of U.S. alumni who had preservice study/teach abroad experiences either taught in cross-cultural settings in the United States, had a strong desire to travel abroad, or went overseas to teach after graduation (Egeland, 2016; Lupi & Turner, 2013). Only a few studies have attempted to determine international educators' motivations for teaching abroad, but the literature suggests a strong connection to previous experience and strong international social networks as motivators for an educator's decision to teach abroad (Reid & Collins, 2013; Savva, 2015). Consequently, the long-term effect of preservice studying/teaching abroad requires additional research.

Culture shock is often cited as a major challenge faced by teachers who choose to work in another country (Cushner & Mahon, 2002, 2009; Halicioglu, 2015; Roskell, 2013). Many teachers have little or no training for their new educational context. Roskell (2013) suggested that satisfaction with the school environment is more important for adjustment to a new location than satisfaction with the host country. Finding the optimal position and type of school in which to work can also be a struggle (Halicioglu, 2015). However, the initial social networks a preservice teacher develops with the local community and school administration appear to influence any decision to teach abroad full time. Host country support can have a positive influence on adjustment to the new culture (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Masgoret, 2006), and the genuine relationships that preservice teachers form with host country nationals can facilitate understanding that goes beyond cultural stereotypes. These professional contacts and international social networks can help a teacher navigate and succeed in the new educational environment.

Another significant component of culture shock experienced by both students and teachers is frustration with the inability to communicate. Learning the host language is an important start in breaking down communication barriers (Masgoret, 2006). Teachers who have experienced preservice studying/teaching abroad are more likely to be aware of the linguistic, cultural, and educational differences associated with international education (Cushner, 2009; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Lupi & Turner, 2013; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). These students are then better positioned to teach those learning English as a second language (ESL) (Blair, 2002; Medina, Hathaway & Pilo-

nietta, 2015; Pilonieta, Medina & Hathaway, 2017; Shiveley & Misco, 2015).

As the need for individuals and teachers willing to work abroad grows, the cultivation of opportunities for preservice studying/teaching abroad is becoming increasingly salient. Understanding teacher motives can help inform us on issues related to supply and demand, and can further inform the development of new programs or interventions aimed at cultivating the necessary values in the home context (Savva, 2015). When student teachers have global experiences before graduation, they are motivated and better prepared to teach abroad as a career. Studying abroad or preservice teaching abroad can be a significant transitional experience in international educators' inclinations toward a longer-term commitment to teach abroad in later years. Following is a description of the study completed to determine what influences motivate students to return to their placement area of studying abroad.

### **Study Purpose**

This case study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the connection between teachers' preservice experiences outside of the United States and their decisions to return to their overseas study/teach locations following graduation. This study contains an unusually small sample due to the rare opportunity presented by more than one teacher returning to the same area—a town in Northern Spain—following their student study abroad experience. This study also was unique because it dealt with teachers who were already teaching abroad and were known to have had positive previous international education experiences. In addition, the teachers in this study were teaching at host-national schools—another unusual opportunity given that the majority of studies are conducted with Anglophone teachers in international schools.

The data collected were used to determine if there were common reasons and explanations for why these participants chose to return to the location where they had participated in a preservice experience. Specifically, two research questions were addressed:

- Which factors influence students to return to study abroad locations to live and work after graduation?
- Which experiences influence students the most while teaching abroad?

### **Methodology**

The sections below including the Research Design, Participants and Data Collection and Analysis describes the study and its design.

### **Research Design**

The current research was designed as a qualitative case study, using data collected through two separate personal interviews. As noted by Rubin and Rubin (1995), "...topical interviews seek out explanations of events and descriptions of processes" (p.

29). Topical interviews deal with more precisely defined subjects and are often conducted as a single interview event. This type of interview also helps conversational partners to relay a story or define a situation.

IRB approval was sought by the author's home institution prior to interviews begin conducted. The response from the author's institution was the study did not need approval as there were less than 3 participants; being the minimum number of subjects needed for an IRB approval.

The six interview questions were designed to prompt the teachers (former students) to talk about their experiences returning to the geographical area where they had completed an undergraduate preservice teaching experience abroad. The following open-ended

questions encouraged the participants to elaborate and tell their stories:

1. Describe your preservice experience studying/teaching abroad.
2. Do you think your experience changed you personally? Professionally? In what ways?
3. What elements of your experience made you want to return to the area you studied/teach in?
4. Compare your experience abroad to your expected experience in the United States.
5. Evaluate your experiences teaching and living abroad to date. What have been the biggest challenges and rewards?
6. Would you encourage other educators to participate in this type of experience?

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were two female teachers currently living and working in Northern Spain. They were both in their mid-20s; this was their first professional job experience. Both participants had formerly studied/taught in this area as U.S. students prior to their completion of college. Both subjects had chosen a study/teach abroad experience through their university during their preservice experiences. Individual explanations for each program follow.

The first participant was a 23 year old student seeking her undergraduate teaching certificate as a music major. Her university had approximately 25,000 students and a mostly homogeneous student body. She was in her fifth year of undergraduate study and would be completing one additional semester at her university after her study abroad experience before graduating with a Bachelor Degree. She identified as White from a small, homogenous mid-west town. She self-defined as having limited travel experience with the study abroad being her first out-of-the-country experiences. The second participant was a 24 year old student seeking her undergraduate teaching certificate in elementary education. She was in her fourth year of undergraduate study, and was completing her undergraduate degree the semester she was studying abroad. She



had received a scholarship for her athletic ability and was a respected hockey player at her university. Her university had approximately 5,000 students on the campus she attended and was part of a larger, state university system with approximately 170,000 students. She identified as a White student from a small, homogenous mid-west town. She reported being exceptionally close to her family, especially her sister, who eventually joined her in Spain.

As a student, one of the teachers had participated in a faculty-led preservice teaching experience from a U.S. Midwest university. This experience placed her, as one of a cohort of students, with a local family in Spain for six weeks. During those six weeks she was assigned to a school to assist and teach local students. She was not required to speak Spanish, and her duties consisted mostly of teaching English to students whose first language was Spanish. She participated in this overseas experience prior to her domestic student teaching experience, i.e., she completed one additional semester of preservice teaching in the United States before she completed her degree and became state certified as a teacher.

The second teacher in this study had participated, as a student, in a multi-university consortium program designed to place students abroad during their student teaching experience. For this program, she was able to choose a placement in Spain from among four potential countries. The amount of time the students in this program participated was determined by their individual universities; in her case, she came from a different U.S. Midwest university and stayed for 12 weeks. She was placed with a host family and, like the other participant in this study, also was assigned to assist and teach in a local school. This student teaching placement was the final field experience she needed to graduate.

The sample of participants was a design of convenience and opportunity. The rare occurrence of having two currently practicing teachers return to the same region/town of their preservice study/teach abroad experience was a coincidence. The interviews were conducted by chance while the researcher was in Spain, where both students had returned to live and work. Both students had completed a study/teach abroad experience in a small town in Northern Spain where the researcher encountered them. This town was the site of the original placement for each student and is where they chose to return upon completing their undergraduate degrees in the US. In fact, neither of them were aware of the other's return until they happened to meet in the town. The researcher had prior knowledge of one teacher's return to Spain, but only became aware of the second teacher's presence by chance when she was present in the region/town with a new group of preservice teachers teaching/studying abroad.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A qualitative design was chosen for data collection, utilizing a case comparative study design, as described by Yin (2003). Yin further described this type of study as

investigating an issue in a real-life context. In this case, by seeking information from participants after they had returned to their original study abroad placement locale, the information gathered would be related to their real-life experiences. Data were collected via personal, individual interviews with each participant. The interviews were conducted in a public café, which was a convenient location for everyone. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The expectations for data collection were explained as a casual conversation, with honest and thoughtful information shared. Both of the participants appeared relaxed and comfortable sharing personal and professional information.

The researcher collected the data by transcribing the interview notes written during the interviews. These notes were taken with pen and paper so as not to interrupt the relaxed feel of the interview by using electronic equipment to record exact conversations. Thus, the transcripts shown in Appendix A are paraphrases of the exact exchanges.

After transcription, the researcher analyzed the data in detail by identifying common themes, or coding, that recurred in words and phrases. As identified by Creswell (2009), an acceptable method of data analysis is established by generating a description of the setting or people and identify themes from coding. This coding is described as words and phrases interpreted to facilitate comparison and commonalities, but the basic ideas and thoughts are not altered. Using this description by Creswell was the motivation for identifying the themes by finding comparisons and commonalities in both interview responses. Common themes emerged when each interview was transcribed and like phrases and topics were identified in both interviews. The two most common themes were identified as dealing with relationships and language issues. Due to the small nature of the study no formal reliability measures were used as the data pool was not sufficient in size to yield reliable results.

Participants were not required to give written consent to the interviews as IRB protocol stated, “Does not meet the definition of covered human subjects research\* according to current federal regulations. The project, therefore, does not require further review and approval by the HRRC. The nature of the research will be a case study of two former study/teach abroad students from the United States. According to GVSU Guidance document G-10 Policy A: Policy: A “single” case report (three or fewer cases) do not require review by the HRRC” (see Appendix B).

## **Findings**

The findings in this section answers the noted research question of what factors influence students to return to study abroad locations to live and work after graduation. The following sections place the findings into the categories of the identified themes. In analyzing the data provided by the participants, two major themes emerged: relationships and language. Although other minor elements were identified, these two



concepts were noted as the primary reasons both participants returned to Spain to live and work after graduation.

### **Influence of Relationships**

In response to the research question “Which factors influence students to return to study abroad locations to live and work after graduation the following discussion of relationships is offered. Participant 1 summed up the idea of relationships as follows: “People are the most important thing. I wouldn’t have come back to Ourense without the people.” This participant spoke further about her relationships as the number one factor for deciding to return to Ourense. “Relationships. I like the Spanish way of living. I like the relaxed way of life.” She spoke of the “amazing” relationship she formed with her host family and how that was a major contribution to the success of her previous experience. She also spoke about the relationship she fostered with her cooperating teacher during her experience and how that teacher helped her to secure employment when she decided to return to Ourense.

Participant 2 also spoke about the relationships she developed with her host family during her study/teach abroad experience. She spoke of her host family as “a plus” when describing her experience. In addition, she spoke about the relationships she has built with the parents of students she works with on a private tutoring level. The trust and respect was noticeable when she spoke about her relationships with these parents.

As identified in the literature (Reid & Collins, 2013; Savva, 2015), social aspects of studying abroad serve as motivators for students. Additionally, many students maintain the international social networks created during the study abroad experience. This development of social and personal connections was identified by both participants as key motivators in their decision to return to the origin of their study abroad experience. This was coupled with the traditional influence of mentors on preservice teachers as a motivator for choosing the location of their first professional experience upon graduation (Rots et al., 2014).

### **Language as Motivator and Challenge**

The second research question, “Which experiences influence students most while teaching abroad” is analyzed in this discussion of language. Language appeared as both a motivator for return and a major challenge while studying/teaching abroad. Participant 1 described having no knowledge of Spanish prior to her study/teach experience. She noted that acquiring the language to the degree of being able to make a purchase and communicate fluently in Spanish was a great accomplishment. In contrast, Participant 2 was more proficient in Spanish, having chosen Spanish as a minor. However, she noted that the prospect for increased proficiency in Spanish was the main reason she had participated in the study/teach abroad experience.

Both participants spoke about issues encountered by ESL students and how ac-

quiring a second language had helped them better understand the challenges of this population. As explained by Participant 1, “This [the experience abroad] made me sympathize with ELL learners.” Having this experience led her to share, “Will probably get an ESL endorsement. I really want to be able to do dual immersion when I return to the States.” Her major area of study was originally music. Participant 2 also commented, “I want to teach in a Spanish immersion when returning [to U.S.]” Participant 2 also shared she might want to stay an additional year to further improve her language acquisition so she would be even more fluent upon returning to the United States to teach English/Spanish. Thus, being immersed in teaching the English language to ESL students resulted in both participants choosing the teaching of English as their newly defined first choice in career paths.

Ironically, both participants spoke of language as being one of the most challenging aspects of the experience. “Not knowing how to order something. Riding in a car with someone who doesn’t speak English.” These were thoughts shared by Participant 2 when speaking about the difficulties of participating in the experience. Participant 1 shared that her greatest difficulty was “definitely the language.” In addition, Participant 1 spoke about the difficulty of communicating with the parents of her students due to the language barrier. Her perception was that the Spanish people often feel bad if they cannot speak English, even in their own community where Spanish is the first language.

This supports the notion that students who study/teach abroad become more aware of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the host country, as indicated in relevant literature (Cushner, 2009; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Lupi & Turner, 2013; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). Both language in school as the accepted language of teaching.

### **Noteworthy discoveries**

In analyzing the data, two major themes emerged in answering the stated research questions. Additionally, discoveries of self were shared during the interview process the participants shared their concerns with the process of learning a second language and indicated how the experience gave them insight into the difficulties of students who are learning a second language are worth noting. Although relationships and language were the dominant themes, other notable discoveries were made. The most prevalent of these dealt with the benefits both participants described when speaking about their experiences abroad. Participant 1 shared a profound statement: “...this made me more adventurous and confident. It felt empowering. It changed my entire life’s direction. It changed me.” Speaking about a single experience in such a profound manner indicates the influence of her preservice study/teach experience. Participant 2 had a similar comment. “Personally, learned to be independent and live on your own. Have to learn how to get around. Going from uncomfortable to comfortable. Forced to be more easy-going.” Both participants claimed significant life changes

from their participation in this experience.

### **Discussion**

This section delineates findings and a discussion of their impact/importance. It is also a discussion of implications for teacher educators and study abroad supporters. The limitations and conclusions of this study will also be discussed.

Clearly, more research is needed to understand how close intercultural personal relationships affect cultural adjustment. And more research could be done on the experience of teachers moving abroad to work in national, rather than international, schools. However, this study adds a small but important indicator of what underlies the decision making of those teachers who choose to teach English in non-Anglophone countries.

When participating in a study/teach abroad experience, the issue of language can be both a reward and a challenge, as noted by the participants of this study. This discovery is supported in the literature by such well-known researchers as Cushner (2009) and Masgoret (2006). This issue is also supported by such organizations as the Asia Society (2010), a recognized international education advocacy group. While language acquisition is one of the largest potential areas of growth for preservice teachers studying/teaching abroad, it also can be one of the greatest hurdles. Not being able to communicate fluently with students, parents, and colleagues makes the business of teaching more difficult. It also can contribute to the difficulties associated with being away from familiar home settings.

By immersing preservice teachers in geographical areas where English is not the first language, they may come to appreciate the challenges faced by students who live in those areas. This, in turn, might lead to a more complete understanding of how to effectively teach the ESL and English Language Learners (ELL) students. As ESL and ELL students continue to grow in population, teachers with the appropriate skills and dispositions needed to effectively teach this population of students must be found. Researchers such as Medina, Hathaway, and Pilonieta have found in their recent studies (2015 and 2017) that studying and/or teaching abroad is a means of preparing teachers to work with these students. Preservice teachers' understanding and empathy are expanded as they live and work with students of other cultures, as clearly articulated by the subjects of this study.

If the results of this small study are true, personal relationships are the greatest influence when teachers make the decision to return to a region/city after graduation to teach professionally. Numerous researchers have maintained the importance of relationships in the study abroad experience. The participants in this study added to this body of knowledge by identifying that relationships they made were a critical part of their study abroad experiences and decisions to teach abroad. Relationships made during the study/teach experience give graduated students the confidence to commit

to a permanent move. These relationships also appear to offer the assistance needed when moving to a new area and seeking employment—a more intense experience for U.S. teachers who are considering a move to a place where the customs and language are different than those to which they are accustomed. Rots et al. (2014) supported the notion of mentors being an influence in the decision of first-year teachers and their search for employment. This is reinforced by the data obtained from both participants in this study.

### **Study Limitations**

The most apparent limitation of this study is the number of participants. The number of students who return to the same country, region, or town of their preservice study/teach abroad service is very limited. As previously noted, it was coincidental that both participants had returned to the same region/city at the time the researcher also was there.

It would be difficult to conduct personal interviews with more subjects as the time and expense encountered to visit numerous sites around the world would be a hindrance. A similar study could be conducted with data collected via a method other than personal interviews. However, it would be difficult to know which students return to the region/town where they had their international preservice experience because students leave university systems upon graduation. They then become difficult to find because there is not a common thread, such as a university e-mail address, available.

Finally, as with any personal interview data collection method, researcher bias might have affected the note-taking and transcription process. Personal bias and previous knowledge of the subject and the region/town also might have skewed interpretation of the data.

### **Conclusion**

Although there are numerous professional advantages to preservice experiences, this study demonstrated that personal benefits can be gained from participating in a study/teach abroad experience as well. As these two participants showed, this type of an experience can prove to be life altering, even leading teachers to change their career paths. Students who study/teach abroad become more culturally competent. Culturally competent teachers, in turn, produce more culturally competent students.

Preservice teachers grow in independence and confidence by being forced to survive and thrive outside their comfort zone. These are both characteristics desired in teaching. The discovery made by this research that studying/teaching abroad is seen by students to increase their level of confidence proves to be a positive influence gained by participants. By articulating the study/teach abroad experience during the hiring process, preservice teachers who have had an overseas experience have an advantage over others who have not experienced studying/teaching abroad.

Additional benefit from this study may be found in the implications it holds for teacher educators. By considering the life altering benefits described by study participants, additional focus may be placed on the importance of providing study/teach abroad opportunities for students. Knowing students consider relationships and language challenges the most influential in their study/teach abroad experience, teacher education programs should include preparation for these factors with pre-departure training for those studying/teaching abroad. Discussions with students should also disclose these factors may contribute to their desire to return to a location and should be more of a focus during the study/teach abroad experience. Additionally, those institutions preparing teachers should include these factors in the development of global education, especially for those students not physically going abroad but seeking a level of cultural competence.

Many universities offer study abroad experiences for students; yet there are fewer opportunities for teaching abroad as part of preservice education. Consortiums of universities and partnerships with overseas schools would be required to provide an experience where teaching and evaluation could be presented in a seamless approach. Although this would take much coordination, it would result in a more global approach to teacher education.

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## Appendix A

### Subject Interview Transcripts

#### Participant 1 Interview

##### *1. Describe your preservice experience studying/teaching abroad.*

Overwhelming. Predeparture work was very difficult. Not excited to go by the time it came. Decided to keep a good attitude. Decided to make it a good experience. I had an amazing host family. My family made the difference for me. I had stayed with host families before, so I kind of knew what to expect. The experience can be make or break depending on the family. I came from a divorced family, so I was used to bouncing around so I didn't get homesick.

Amazing school. Carmelita has great teachers and students. My former CT [co-operating teacher] from Ourense got me the job I have now. Most of the schools get help from the government for auxiliary teachers. Really happy I got to teach music while I was here. I didn't know I was coming back, so I didn't ask enough questions when I was here. I met Alex (boyfriend) and some really good friends. People are the most important thing. I wouldn't have come back to Ourense without the people.

##### *2. Do you think your experience changed you personally? Professionally? In what ways?*

Absolutely. Professionally it gave me a good sense of what it feels like to be a stranger in a strange setting. This made me sympathize with ELL learners. Being somewhere where there are different customs, you make mistakes because you don't understand. It made me acutely aware about being a foreigner, especially if it's not something one chooses. Like students whose families bring them to a new country where they don't speak the language and they had no choice to come or not. I'm definitely more sensitive to ELLs. Will probably get an ESL endorsement. I can use music with ESL learners. I really want to be able to do dual immersion when I return to the States. Most students here are really intelligent; dual languages help kids all the way around. I really want to keep working with language acquisition.

Personally. This all seemed overwhelming before I came. Having to do all the stuff on my own. But this made me more adventurous and confident. It felt empowering. It changed my entire life's direction. It changed me. I broke up with my boyfriend of 3 years when I got home. I saw my life more clearly while I was here in Spain. It took courage to make these life changes. I have no regrets. I am learning to be Spanish. You know, go with the flow.

##### *3. What elements of your experience made you want to return to the area you studied/teach in?*

Relationships. I like the Spanish way of living. I like the relaxed way of life. In a place where I can do this. I have no student loans, not married, no children, so I want to take this opportunity for a new challenge. Spain is beautiful. Plus it's centrally located and I can travel around Europe for cheap. They make traveling easy.

*4. Compare your experience abroad to your expected experience in the United States.*

It's so different here. I'm in an academy, not a school. Schools are set up different here. There is a different culture of discipline. Kids call you by your first name. In the U.S. there is a huge movement to have a discipline plan. There's so much pressure to do that. There are no plans here. Kids and teachers have no knowledge there should be a plan. This makes it hard to explain to students how to have a plan for discipline. So I use an adapted plan. I hate to say it, but I resort to counting. I resort to what they know.

Academic rigor is higher here. They learn more subjects at a higher level of proficiency. In 1st grade they begin foreign language. U.S. kids don't do this. Some schools teach entire classes in English here. Schedules are different too. They pack more classes in. They help students excel. The bad part is some students who fall between the cracks really get further behind. Many students here have private tutors. Parents support getting tutors for their kids so they can test well. Grades are very important here. Economic climate of Spain says you must get good grades to go to college to get a job. The job market here is scary.

*5. Evaluate your experiences teaching and living abroad to date. What have been the biggest challenges and rewards?*

Challenges. Definitely the language. I had no Spanish before last year. I'm a quick learner, but it was still hard to communicate. I want to learn rather than be a tourist. I feel great after buying something and actually knowing what I got and how much I paid. Hard to communicate with parents in Spanish. Parents appreciate [me] trying to speak their language. The Spanish people feel bad they don't speak English in schools. I think the Spanish people often feel not good enough if they can't speak English.

Rewards. Great students. They are really bright. Music is my passion, so I wondered if teaching English would be enough for me. It is. And learning Spanish is awesome. Meeting new people is a big reward. I love working with Spanish people that want to learn English. Life is short – go for it.

*6. Would you encourage other educators to participate in this type of experience?*

Absolutely. This gave me perspective. I got to see how they teach in another country. We should teach some things like they do here. Teaching a second language

to all students is an example. I also see things we could teach them here too. It's a learning process. Learning across countries is even better. Traveling is good for everyone. I have something no one else has in my field. I have taught in Spanish. I have multi-cultural experiences. This will stand out on my resume. All teachers should do this, not just for the language.

## **Participant 2 Interview**

### *1. Describe your preservice experience studying/teaching abroad.*

COST. Playing sports didn't allow her to study abroad. Minor was Spanish so this was a fit. Was skeptical about going alone. Host family was a plus, especially if going alone. 9 weeks.

### *2. Do you think your experience changed you personally? Professionally? In what ways?*

Both ways. Personally, I became more accepting and patient. More patient with students. Appreciation of diversity. Learned a little before about ESL, but this experience helped me understand that. Didn't expect to be teaching in English/Spanish. Personally, learned to be independent and live on your own. Have to learn how to get around. Going from uncomfortable to comfortable. Forced to be more easy-going.

### *3. What elements of your experience made you want to return to the area you studied/teach in?*

Mainly the language made me want to be fluent. I want to teach in a Spanish immersion when returning. The placement was a random. Found out about the Auxiliary North American cultural language assistant and found out about it when doing the program last year.

Wanted to get better with the language. Saw a lot of kids in need of ESL and thought it would be useful. Did not know what region or school you would be in. They pay to be in [the] program. Work part time and have student visa. Do private classes too. Young students are hard in private sessions, but worth the effort. It's amazing how parents treat you when you tutor their student. It's like you become part of their family and they treat you with great respect. You have something valuable to give their kids.

### **4. Compare your experience abroad to your expected experience in the United States.**

Language was the main factor. Have to think more of how you have to say something, rather [than] at home you think more about how to understand something. Words become important. Slang is huge. Huge difference in classroom management. Order

is much different. Cultural difference is to let kids go crazy. Even younger kids are allowed to be going crazy. Was able to teach teachers here a few strategies to maintain order. Here we are teaching assistants; we don't plan anything. Teach lessons that are predetermined. Not true planned lessons. Kids talk a lot in class. Want to encourage students to talk with each other more.

5. *Evaluate your experiences teaching and living abroad to date. What have been the biggest challenges and rewards?*

Rewards are learning another language. Patience and working with students of more diversity. My class has lots of diversity. More diverse schools. Much more flexible and thinking on your feet. Culturally they do not prepare as we do.

Challenge is not being able to speak Spanish to students. Schools don't want me to speak Spanish with students. Lack of organization. Getting used to feeling uncomfortable. Not knowing how to order something. Riding in a car with someone who doesn't speak English. Learning to accept silence. Not saying please and thank you. Cultural difference. Had a lot of help from others in the program to help with apartment, etc.

Facebook is great for figuring out how to help you based on the Auxiliary in the area. The Auxiliary is 8 months. Can renew each year. You can make enough money to support yourself with private classes. The private classes pay for a lot. Very trusting. Highly respected as English speaker. Parents will leave you with kids with no background checks. Getting close to families we give lessons to.

6. *Would you encourage other educators to participate in this type of experience?*

Yes absolutely. Puts you out of your comfort zone. Taught me to be more relaxed in a class. It's going to be ok no matter what. It taught me much patience. It's different here; you thought you were patient, but it's a new level here. Cool to see different perspectives. Kids have zero negative perceptions. Kids see me as a teacher, not a foreigner. Appreciate diversity.

Kids want to be like me (older). They try to protect you. They help you out. Younger kids like that you can switch to Spanish. Younger kids just see you as teacher. All students are called by first name.

May want to do another year to improve language.

## Appendix B IRB Decision



DATE: September 25, 2017

TO: Sherie Williams, Ph.D.  
FROM: Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee  
STUDY TITLE: [1094460-1] Evaluation of teaching abroad experiences: What are the critical lessons students are learning  
REFERENCE #: 18-038-H  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: EXEMPT  
EFFECTIVE DATE: September 25, 2017  
REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for your planned research study. Upon review of the aims and description of your study, it has been determined that this project *IS COVERED* human subjects research\* according to current federal regulations and MEETS eligibility for exempt determination under category 2, 45 CFR 46.101. No research involving prisoners may be exempt.

Exempt protocols do not require formal approval, renewal or closure by the HRRRC. Any revision to exempt research that alters the risk/benefit ratio or affects eligibility for exempt review must be submitted to the HRRRC using the *Change in Approved Protocol* form before changes are implemented.

Any research-related problem or event resulting in a fatality or hospitalization requires immediate notification to the Human Research Review Committee Chair, Dr. Steve Glass, (616)331-8563 **AND** Human Research Protections Administrator, Dr. Jeffrey Potteiger, Office of Graduate Studies (616)331-7207. See *HRRRC policy 1020, Unanticipated problems and adverse events*.

Exempt research studies are eligible for audits.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (616) 331-3197 or [rci@gvsu.edu](mailto:rci@gvsu.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with our office.

\*Research is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (45 CFR 46.102 (d)).

*Human subject* means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or identifiable private information (45 CFR 46.102 (f)).