

# **Here is the Place to Begin your Explorations: An Autoethnographical Examination into Student Teaching Abroad**

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The rooster's crow echoes through the streets of Serpong, and at half past five in the morning, the world is as electric as at noon. The streets outside the gates of BINUS International School are in motion. Street vendors push carts laden with durian fruits and steaming rice and *bakso*—the traditional Indonesian meatball. Mothers and sons come from houses and push up their sleeves, wringing out freshly washed laundry and hanging it up to dry. The children dance upon the cobblestones, shoeless, their calloused soles more effective than sandals. Outside the gates of BINUS, the dust is kicked up as the sun begins to climb.

But inside. Inside the gates is a stillness, only momentarily interrupted by the breeze which soars through palm trees, and the slow pacing of guards. A hijab-clad custodian begins her day, pushing a broom across smooth tiled floor outside the glass library. A teacher arrives, arms full of papers, to get a start on the late term exams.

It is quiet within the gates. An orderly quiet. The students will arrive in an hour and a half, and after the rush of traffic subsides, much of the stillness will return. This is a place of order and of prestige, a place that expects much from its inhabitants.

*You will learn much here, the gates whisper. There is much to learn about the world and here is the place to begin your explorations.*

## **Introduction**

Now nearly two decades into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has become apparent that we are living in an age of increasing globalization—where technology is facilitating a flat (or at least flattening) society where we are able to collaborate and engage with individuals across the world in mere moments (Friedman, 2006). The impact of this progressive international mobility is not limited to corporations and executives in suits, but rather it is reaching classrooms and students with mobile devices as well. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2010), "globalization is changing everything about how we work, how we communicate, and, ultimately, how we live" (p. 3). Therefore, it is imperative that teacher candidates—poised to enter the profession—develop skills, competencies, and dispositions that enable them to live, learn, and teach in this era of global interdependence. What can teacher preparation programs do, then, to help ensure that their graduates have developed the intercultural responsiveness and flexibility skills necessary "to interact, communicate, practice, and collaborate across a wide variety of work and life settings" (Coryell, 2017, p. 187)? In order to promote global competence and provide diverse learning experiences, it is essential for teacher preparation programs to actually diversify the learning experiences offered to their teacher candidates. While the programs that offer cross-cultural learning activities (such as texts, visuals, discussions, and volunteer and service-learning prospects) are useful, providing undergraduates opportunities to actually work with students

from diverse backgrounds in pre-service settings are imperative. However, presenting students with the possibility of international mobility by student teaching abroad—where they can participate meaningfully in another culture through their roles as future teachers—provides interns authentic moments to engage in honest, critical reflection of teaching practices while acquiring new perspectives.

## **Purpose**

As new opportunities arose to place our qualified pre-service teachers with international mentor teachers abroad, we wanted to use these valuable new placements as moments to spur reflective observation among candidates as their own philosophies on education were taking shape. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to promote critical reflection among two of our pre-service teachers (and co-authors) through an examination of their international student teaching experiences. This particular exploration required our students to consider their personal assumptions and reflect on those habits of mind as they re-created storied accounts of their experiences, revealed sparks of revelations, and articulated the lessons learned.

## **Research Questions**

Three questions guided this study:

1. What effect do short-term international student teaching experiences have on pre-service teachers' professional growth?
2. How do international practicums prompt critical self-reflection in regards to teaching beliefs and practices among pre-service teachers?
3. How have previous study abroad experiences influenced participants' critical reflections on teaching and learning practices?

## **Description of Program History**

Beginning in the spring semester of 2014, Emporia State University began to establish short-term international student teaching placements. Our Midwest state requires teacher candidates to complete a minimum of twelve weeks in a student teaching capstone internship; however, at Emporia State University students in both the elementary and secondary education programs maintain the traditional sixteen-week semester. These additional four weeks of student teaching offer eligible students several options: teaching in a private or charter school, working under the mentorship of a National Teacher Hall of Fame inductee nation-wide, or student teaching in one of five countries abroad for which the College maintains partnership Memorandums of Understanding (MOU).

In order to familiarize students with the options of student teaching abroad, the Director of Field Placement and Licensure and the Dean of International Education begin visiting education students during their Introduction to Teaching course. They provide undergraduates with student testimonies and informational materials outlining the various teaching locations and estimated price ranges for each of the experiences. Students then complete a postcard indicating their level of interest and preferred location(s) so staff can follow-up with more information as the student

progresses through the program. Once elementary and secondary education students are formally admitted to the program and begin the block of professional courses the semester before student teaching, the Director of Field Placement and Licensure returns to speak to the students and provide them with application instructions.

To be eligible to participate in the four-week international student teaching experience, students must have earned a minimum grade point average of 3.0 for the two semesters prior to the application. They are also required to provide proof of international teaching liability insurance, present two positive dispositional assessments from faculty, and must have signed approval forms from two lead faculty in their respective departments. Once students have met the basic criteria, they participate in a face-to-face interview comprised of three faculty and staff within the College. After a student has been approved for the education portion, they begin the Office of International Education's normal process of applying for a short-term study abroad experience.

At present, eighteen students have participated in the College's four-week international student teaching opportunities. Financial assistance for the student teaching abroad varies based on the students' past study abroad experiences and their requested student teaching location. Generally, students are eligible to receive a small grant from The Teachers College dean, a travel grant from the Office of International Education, and financial aid. Occasionally students can also receive housing assistance from private donors and international organizations, such as Rotary.

## **Participants**

As authors of this article, we have also each had roles in the program itself. As a secondary education faculty member at Emporia State University, Amanda conducted faculty-led study abroad trips to Jyväskylä, Finland, in consecutive summers in which placement agreements with primary (grades 1-6) and lower secondary (grades 7-9) schools were established. Additionally, she serves as one of the faculty members who assists with applications and interviews for candidates interested in the international experiences. Elementary education major Ashley, a participant in the first Jyväskylä summer study abroad experience where she took courses such as *Education in Finland* and *National Education Systems*, returned the following spring to work with teachers and students at Kortepohja School in the Jyväskylä municipality. Although Josie, a secondary education major with an emphasis in English/language arts, had traveled abroad extensively before (including a full year abroad the 2016-2017 academic term), spring 2018 marked her first venture to Indonesia.

## **Review of the Literature on Study Abroad Experiences**

Participation in study abroad experiences—where an individual travels to another country and earns college credit for their learning—has become more popular among college students over the past three decades. Involvement in these programs has increased steadily since 1989, with 313,415 students studying abroad for credit in the 2014 academic year (Engel, 2017, p. 4). In fact, participation in study abroad programs has seen a 232 percent increase from 1985 to 2002 and has tripled in the past two decades” (Geyer, Putz, & Misra, 2017, p. 1042). Duration and formality of these experiences can vary anywhere from one week to a year, and from independent trips to faculty-led excursions. However, even with these rising numbers, “fewer

than ten percent of US undergraduates participate in a study abroad program” (Engel, 2017, p. 4).

Much of the existing literature focuses on long-term programs (a semester or longer) but as short-term study abroad programs have become more popular, additional studies have emerged. In general, participation in a study abroad experience provides a host of benefits. Some of the personal advantages for students who study abroad include positive academic performance and higher graduation rates (Engel, 2017). Additionally, recent theories suggest that going abroad may “actually lead to improved mental health upon returning as a result of coping skills, confidence, problem solving, and independence gained while abroad” (Bathke & Kim, 2016, p. 15). Individuals in study abroad experiences also have better professional development—they tend to be more flexible and open to change, which helps them adapt easily to new situations. The confidence gained abroad can help study abroad participants perform better in interview settings. In fact, graduates who studied abroad are 22.9 percent “more likely to be in employment three years following graduation relative to their non-mobile peers” (DiPietro, 2015, p. 241).

Recent research on international student teaching experiences has further revealed that “combining a practicum experience with a study abroad program is one potentially powerful source of learning about international educational contexts” (Vandermaas-Peeler, Duncan-Bendix, and Biehl, 2018, p. 119). These unique internships offer pre-service teachers opportunities to grow professionally as well as personally as these young adult professionals navigate unfamiliar places, new customs, and—often times—foreign languages independently while simultaneously engaging in ongoing professional development (Egeland, 2016).

For future educators who study abroad, these positive benefits can transfer into culturally relevant pedagogy (also referred to as culturally responsive teaching), which studies have revealed as an effective means of meeting academic and social needs of culturally diverse students (Howard, 2003, p. 196; González-Carriedo, López de Nava, & Martínez, 2017). According to Gay (2000), culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective [for students]” (p. 29). Therefore, author Tyrone Howard (2003) calls for educators to undergo critical reflection—“a personal and challenging look at one’s identity as an individual person and as an active professional” (p. 201)—in order for teachers to engage in the processes of improving their practice, “rethinking philosophies, and becoming effective teachers for today’s ever-changing student population” (p. 201). As the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds of students in our U.S. classrooms continue to diversify, it is imperative that teachers understand how these concepts shape the learning experiences of their students. So in response to the need for understanding produced by this culture gap, Moss, Barry, and MacCleoud (2018), call upon teacher educators to “challenge pre-service teachers’ ethnocentric/monocultural perspectives and practices as they prepare them to successfully teach within culturally diverse schools” (p. 208). To do so, teacher preparation programs must provide preservice teachers opportunities to analyze important issues and construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students’ social and cultural realities.

## **Qualitative Methods**

Due to our varied backgrounds and experiences—and in order to achieve methodological triangulation—we employed a mix of qualitative methods among the three authors. Throughout the fieldwork, we conducted observations in hallways, classrooms, faculty meetings, and conferences in order to familiarize ourselves with the policies and practices of students and staff in the schools (Barbour, 2007; O'Reilly, 2005), as well as collected artifacts (Schwandt, 2007) such as photographs and student work samples (See Appendix A & B). Additionally, we participated in “conversation as research” (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013) as a powerful method of understanding the everyday lives and practices of our colleagues and mentors. Each of these methods align with the practice of participant observation (Thomas, 2017). Because our research questions revolved around professional growth and critical self-reflection, serving as participant observers by positioning ourselves as immersed agents in the study was an important method in synthesizing information about the teachers and students, educational processes, and the overall cultures. For Josie, especially, turning to the practice of free writing (Chang, 2008) and poetry through the use of her personal blog (Figure 1) helped process her cultural experiences (Rozell, 2018). Given the overlap in methods, maintaining research journals of our personal experiences (Mulhull, 2003) allowed us to take our various observations and begin maneuvering them into deep reflection. Gathering data using an assortment of methods not only produced a rich data set but also provided a sense of trustworthiness regarding our conclusions (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

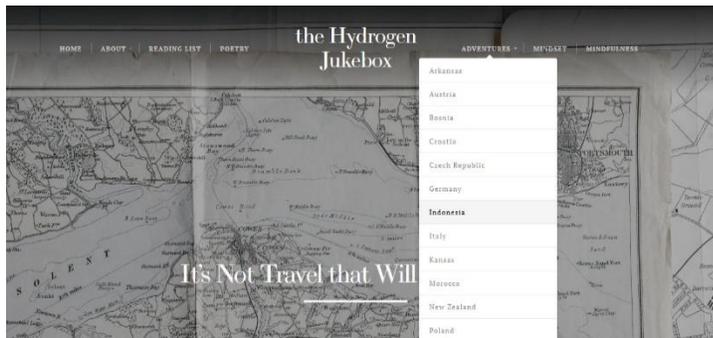


Figure 1. “the Hydrogen Jukebox” blog screenshot.

## Autoethnographic Lens

In terms of research methodology, we employed autoethnography as a way to process our experiences. As a genre of narrative inquiry, autoethnography is a form of research “that seeks to systematically analyze the researcher’s personal experience embedded in a larger social and cultural context” (Kim, 2016, p. 123). Qualitative researchers use autoethnographical methods to extract meaning from critical reflections of an immersive experience (Chang, 2008). For Ashley and Josie, the method of autoethnography provided the reflective space to examine their personal transformative experiences of student teaching abroad. (Sykes, 2014).

Kazuo Ishiguro reflected, in his 2007 Nobel Lecture, that important turning points in an individual’s career are not grand, momentous occasions but rather “small, scruffy moments. They are quiet, private sparks of revelation.” When these crossroads do appear, he says it is

“important to be able to recognise [sic] them for what they are. Or they’ll slip through your hands.” That, truly, was our purpose of applying autoethnography as a methodology; rather than making sweeping generalizations in an attempt to apply our experiences to larger populations, we instead hoped to use the stories of our experiences to magnify these “scruffy” moments and trigger moments of deep reflection among ourselves. Furthermore, using autoethnography as a vehicle to stimulate critical reflection enabled us to examine how our positionality influenced our teaching, and therefore our students (Howard, 2003).

## **Transformative Learning Theory**

For study abroad participants, but perhaps more importantly for preservice teachers, it is essential to engage in the introspective process of reflexivity. According to Ryan (2005), “to be reflexive, participants (teachers) investigate their interactions via introspection as they occur and in the reflective mode participants reflect on various elements (verbal, nonverbal, feelings, and thoughts) following the action” (para. 10). The acts of investigating interactions *as* they occur as well as reflecting *on* instances after they have transpired echoes Donald Schön’s (1983) concepts of *reflecting-in-action* and *reflecting-on-action*. As teachers, having the ability to analyze situations on the spot, reflect, and proceed forward with an appropriate response is essential. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, we utilized transformative learning as our theoretical lens. Within transformative learning, we employed critical reflection to seek understanding of the change that occurred within our own *habits of mind*—our sets “of assumptions—broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). Originated by Jack Mezirow in the 1970s, transformative learning theory describes “how people develop and use critical self-reflecting to consider their beliefs and experiences” and cultivate autonomous thinking (esthermsmith, 2017, para. 1). Mezirow argues, through transformative learning, that each person has a particular view of the world derived from their upbringing. This influences their frame of reference and, ultimately, how they think. These habits of mind become so rooted that it takes what Mezirow refers to as a *disorienting dilemma*—or catalyst—to disrupt these assumptions. The aim, then, of transformative learning is “to help individuals challenge the current assumptions on which they act and, if they find them wanting, then change them” (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015). Study abroad opportunities (particularly international student teaching experiences) have served as catalysts and provided our authors with space to critically reflect on their habits of mind.

## **International Placements**

**Jyväskylä, Finland.** In early May, Ashley had just completed her fifth- and sixth-grade placement at Kortepohja School in Jyväskylä, Finland. Kortepohja is a grades one through six building, and English-speaking classes are taught either by Finns fluent in English or native English speakers. Students in English-speaking classes are typically children of foreign families or those who began their schooling in English, as the purpose is to maintain their language skills. Teaching and assessments follow the Jyväskylä municipality curriculum and theoretical subjects are taught in English while key concepts are learned both in English and Finnish. Unless students from abroad will reside in Jyväskylä for less than a year, pupils are required to possess English and Finnish language skills at a minimum of level A2 according to the European Language

Framework as “the overall goal of the studies is the student's fluent language proficiency both in English and in Finnish” (Jyväskylä Kaupunki Kortepohjan Koulu, n.d., para. 8).

**Serpong, Indonesia.** Given the option by her host school to participate in a longer internship, Josie completed her extended placement in a middle school English classroom at BINUS International School in Serpong, Indonesia, in late May (after the spring semester at Emporia State University had concluded). The school, which follows the Cambridge International Curriculum—a college preparatory system spanning the ages of five to fourteen—is accredited by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and focuses on a common set of principles. BINUS places emphasis on planning, leadership, and presentation skills, as well as attributes such as self-discipline and moral character. Additionally, the middle school in Serpong focuses on a broad range of subjects that address both regional and international topics as well as the core subjects of English, maths, and science. To be admitted to the middle school, students must pass a written exam in mathematics and English as well as undergo a student interview (Cambridge International, n.d.).

### **Critical Incidents**

Ashley and Josie’s roles as students who had participated in study abroad experiences earlier in their undergraduate programs, and then chose to finish their student teaching abroad, reflect unique perspectives. Although research on studying abroad—and even student teaching abroad—exists, statistics and research on the number of undergraduates in the United States who study abroad multiple times is lacking. However, with the total percentage of students studying abroad in our state at 1.26 percent for the 2015-2016 academic year (with the national average at 1.63 percent) we can infer that the numbers are quite low (NAFSA, n.d.). Remaining true to the essence of autoethnography, we have used multiple voices and preceded our authors’ stories with relevant literature to craft layered accounts that invoke introspection. While these accounts are based on the data collected during our time abroad (observations, conversations, journals, etc.), these instances are generated based on the meaning we made of our cumulative experiences.

**Ashley: Kortepohja School (Jyväskylä, Finland).** As I trudge through the half-melted snow on my ten-minute walk to school from my host family’s home, I ponder the coming day. I have been an observer of the inner workings of the Finnish school system for the past two days in a small international subset of Kortepohja School. The approximately 60 students that participate in the program, which is entirely English speaking, are divided into three classes of two grade levels each. I flip through my mental student roster trying to remember names and faces. Let’s see—Kady and Jeff are here from Georgia; their father is working as an engineer in Jyväskylä. Trey, from Massachusetts, is here because his mother is studying at the university. Jere, Aino, and Tapio, along with many other Finnish students, have grown up in Jyväskylä, but their parents want them to be exposed to the many cultures while bettering their English. I know Aabroo is from Afghanistan, but did her family move here because of political unrest or for work? I’ll have to sit by her at lunch to try to learn more—she seems eager to share about her life.

I walk through the door of the teacher’s lounge at 7:45 a.m. and am greeted with silence. Not a single teacher has arrived yet. I remind myself that the first class doesn’t begin until 8:15 and teachers won’t begin to arrive until 8:00. I walk to the shoe and coat closet and peel off my

heavy coat and outdoor shoes and exchange them for my comfortable indoor ballet flats. Very few staff members drive to school and, even if they do, the walk from the parking lot to the lounge may result in muddy shoes as a result of the cold and wet weather. So, in an effort to keep the floors clean, teachers never wear the same shoes they wear outside in the building. The staff begins to trickle in a few minutes before 8. Even if they have class at 8:15, there is no sense of urgency—only soft easy chatter as they shed their coats and change into their indoor shoes or slippers. My mentor teacher, Mrs. Koskinen spots me and waves me over to introduce me to the social studies teacher who asks about my time and what differences I have observed in their system. He is genuinely interested in what I have to say and is already quite knowledgeable about the American system. Coffee starts to brew as mailboxes are checked and announcements for the week are pulled up and projected onto the television. The bell rings, signaling the beginning of the first lesson and teachers that have class during the first hour pour a cup of coffee or tea and head to class while others prepare lessons, grade papers, or continue to visit with colleagues. I trail behind Mrs. Koskinen as we walk to her 5th and 6th grade room. Students line the halls, taking off outerwear, placing their shoes on the racks, and talking to friends. Unlike the teachers, student simply leave their outdoor shoes off and, generally, opt for running around the school in warm socks. Mrs. Koskinen opens her door and the students file into the classroom.

As the students settle into their day, there is some groaning and complaining as they open their math textbooks and begin to work. Mrs. Koskinen and I quietly walk from student to student, reminding them to stay on task or answering questions if needed. As in many classrooms in Finland, this one expects students to take responsibility for their learning. Leena, a tall sixth grade Finn with beautiful blonde hair, finishes a page in her workbook. She walks to the front of the room to check her work with the open answer key on the teacher's desk. A triumphant smile spreads across her face as she sees the correct answers match the ones in her book, and she walks back to her desk to get started on the next page. This pattern continues for all students over the next 45 minutes until the teacher announces it is time for break. The students get up, rush to the hall to put coats, hats, and shoes back on and go outside for the 15-minute break that is between each lesson. Mrs. Koskinen also puts on her coat and a bright yellow vest to take her turn on break duty and supervise the students. When the bell rings, students come back in the classroom, ready to begin a new subject. They know that there will be a longer 30-minute mid-morning break after their 45 minute environmental studies lesson on longitude and latitude, so they are motivated to begin the lesson.

After their long break and two more 45 minutes of instruction/15-minute break cycles, Mrs. Koskinen and I walk to the lunch room. I spot Aabroo in the hall and strike up a conversation. "Today we are having liver patties!" She tells me, sounding entirely more thrilled than I would have expected. Mrs. Koskinen overhears and explains, "It is actually one of the students' favorite lunches." I see this is true, as we enter the cafeteria and some students help themselves to five or more of the liver patties. Students serve themselves lunch with the only stipulation being that they must take at least a taste of each item. I think back with a smile to spinach soup day and the contests between students to get the least amount of soup.

With full stomachs, the students walk back to the room for two more classes—woodworking and English. Today is relatively short and this group goes home at 1:30. They gather books and

homework, walk to the shoe rack and pull on their shoes for the last time. Jaakoo pokes his head back in the classroom and I wonder if he has forgotten his books.

“Goodbye, Ashley. Thank you for the lesson!”

“Thank you for letting me be a part of your classroom,” I respond with a smile.

**Josie: BINUS International School (Serpong, Indonesia).** Chairs scrape against white tiled floor as soon as the door to 8J opens. Ms. Tyrine, my mentor teacher, a tiny Filipino ball of warmth, enters first and I am in tow behind her. I try and keep my gaze level, to be cool and suave, but the truth is I’m quite nervous. There are quite a few Western teachers at BINUS International School—Americans, Brits, Australians—but all of them are males. There hasn’t been a *female* Western teacher in years. Until me. I still don’t quite know what to make of that. How does that change my role? *Does* it change my role? Am I some sort of *double* foreigner? I don’t know.

The room is small and the windows are shaded so as to keep out steamy sunlight from humidifying the air. The air conditioner (or “air con”) is spitting out delicious rhythms of cool breeze, and despite my nerves and my insecurities I find myself simply thankful to be out of the heat.

The open door ushers in smells of frying tofu and baking vegetables from the canteen downstairs. The school is fashioned like a motel; the doors of the classroom open to the outdoors and long hallways connect the rooms. Numerous canteens and dining halls dot the campus.

I follow Ms. Tyrine into the small room, and the students stand and recite, “Good-Morn-Ing-Ms-Tyrine-And-Ms—.” They pause, unsure of what to call me and I see all of their eyes upon me. It’s different from being stared at in the streets of Serpong, me being the only Western woman in the entire city (*bule*, they call me, not impolitely). This, having twenty pairs of eyes gazing at me, observing me, curious, seeking, searching, *asking*; this is expectation. And I’m not sure what I should do, really, except smile. Ms. Tyrine calls out,

“Say hello to Ms. Josie.”

“Good-Morn-Ing-Ms.-Josie.”

“She is going to be interning with us for the next two months, so expect to see her in some of your classes. She will be observing the teachers and the students and taking notes, so don’t be afraid of her and don’t annoy her. Arlin! Make room in the back!”

Students scramble to rearrange the desks, the horrible scrapings on the floors making me want to laugh and cry at the same time, because the truth is I’m more nervous than I’ve admitted to Ms. Tyrine or even myself. They make a spot for me to tuck in behind a wooden desk. I make myself as comfortable as I can on the red plastic chair amongst all of the pairs of eyes still trained on my movements. For the next forty minutes my task is to sit here at this table, snuggled in the gazes, and take notes.

As soon as I put pen to paper, I become a chameleon. Something about having a task, something to focus on, makes me forget that students can see me. I look at the Cambridge lesson plan that Ms. Tyrine had given me before we walked to 8J. The lesson plans are set for one week at a time, and at the beginning of the plan is a breakdown of objectives—*using Bloom’s Taxonomy*

*objective verbs*, I note—the vocabulary addressed for the week, and previous learning. 8J, a class of level 8 students, have *Post-Reading Activity 1 (continuation) / Writer's Craft* on the docket for today's class. Ms. Tyrine begins with asking for students to take out yesterday's seat work so as to go over answers. She has the students pass their papers to a neighbor and with a red pen mark their neighbor's paper for correct answers. It's a dance with which I am familiar.

Ms. Tyrine calls out an answer, and the students whoop and holler at each other, congratulating each other for correct answers or heaping shame upon each other for wrong ones. Ms. Tyrine signals for quiet, but the roar of energy doesn't cease. When the students are seated and more still, Ms. Tyrine calls out, "*and*, class, why do we need to know about this? Why is it important to understand this concept?"

I hear this and cringe. I know I have said this to a room of 20 American students before, and got nothing but glazed expressions. *We don't actually need to know this*, their faces read. *It's not important, thank you very much.* But almost immediately a girl sitting in front of me calls out, "because we need to know to use shortened expressions of speech. If we want to be understood by native speakers, we must use the common words."

I'm shocked. What kind of response is that?

"Very good," Ms. Tyrine says. Before she can move on to the next question, a boy in the front pops his hand up.

"Excuse me, Miss, I don't understand. Why isn't 'B' correct?"

A hand in the back corner shoots up. Ms. Tyrine calls on him, and he explains the error in "B". She then moves on to the next question. The students whoop and Ms. Tyrine signals for quiet and asks, again, why it all matters.

This time, a boy to my left calls out, "you can't learn how to conjugate properly if you don't understand the mechanics of past perfect."

*What!* I am impressed. *Why do they care about the "why"? That's not typical of the students I've worked with in the past.*

"Miss?" asks a girl with a ponytail. "Who came up with the idea for past perfect?"

"Yeah, why don't we have the past perfect in Bahasa Indonesian?"

"Why can't it be answer 'C', it says 'had been' right here!"

Back here, seated at my little red chair and wooden desk, it's almost palpable how curious the students are. While that translates to insecurity on my part—when *I* am the subject of their curiosity—it also translates to content knowledge and interest on the part of the student. *Is that why they know the answers? Why they care so much about the 'why'? Blanket curiosity?* I hear Ms. Tyrine ask another question. Another hand shoots up.

"The authors use that kind of sound device to signal irony and satire for their readers. If we want to sound ironic and satirical, or show some sort of sarcasm, we need to use that, too."

"Do we have that in Bahasa Indonesian?"

"Who came up with satire?"

"Who is the most famous satirist?"

"Why does it work so well?"

Ms. Tyrine addresses their questions to the best of her ability. The bell resounds throughout the halls—a long, piano melody that I recognize as one of the Samsung ringtones—and the class is over. The students rise to their feet and call,

“Thank-You-Ms.Ty-Rine-And-Ms.-Josie.”

I give them an awkward bow and duck out with Ms. Tyrine, back into the breezy tropical hallways, a little more at ease with their questioning glances.

### **Lessons Learned from Finland**

**Simplicity.** One of the most obvious difference between American and Finnish teachers is that teachers in Finland make breaks a priority. They work hard during the time they set aside to do so, but when the time comes to rest they focus on doing just that. When summer breaks come, everyone adjourns to their summer cottages and teachers leave their school planning and materials at school. Weekends are for spending time with family, not grading or planning the next week's lesson. Finnish teachers prioritize a work-life balance.

It seems like common sense to make learning fun, inventive, and hands-on to motivate students. I have seen several examples of this in Finnish classrooms such as using music to teach a phonics skill or shooting off bottle rockets in an optional studies class. The interesting thing though, is that these activities are found online, from workbooks in the classroom, or shared over coffee in the teachers' lounge. They generally involve little to no preparation and, if material are needed that the school does not already have, students are asked to bring them. Teachers do not feel pressured to come up with the latest and greatest on their own. This practice does not make them lazy or incompetent in their planning, it just makes it possible for them to focus more of their attention on the actual instruction—on making sure the students truly grasp the concept.

**Autonomy.** A second grader riding the city bus to and from school alone is something that would make many Americans balk. However, this is a very common practice in Finland. Finns give their children opportunities to be independent from a young age. In addition to day-to-day activities like transportation, Finnish students show this autonomy in how they approach school. Students are, of course, given some instruction, but part of what makes teachers' jobs simple is the fact that students can work independently when asked.

Group work and collaboration is highly valued in Finland schools which may seem to be counterintuitive to autonomy. However, I have observed that the collaboration that is used in Finnish schools is used through the perspective of autonomy - students are encouraged to work together but think for themselves.

I found it interesting how much trust the teachers of Finland place in their students' ability to do what needs to be done. They embody the adage, “you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.” Teachers do all they can to support and assist, but they give students power to take authority of their own learning.

### **Lessons Learned from Indonesia**

**Curiosity.** We understand concepts as they relate to our prior knowledge, and in order to begin the process of understanding, we *have* to be curious. That curiosity must come from within, too, an intrinsic energy source. It cannot be forced upon the students. Fostered, perhaps, but not

forced. This is what I look at as I gaze at the sea of Indonesian students—curiosity. Driven not because they were asked to be curious, or *assigned* curiosity, but because it comes from within.

When a student gets to the level of asking *why*, instead of stopping at the “what” or “how come”, learning takes place tenfold. This curiosity makes them masters of their own learning, masters of their own education. It is inspiring, to put it simply, after I let myself breathe away the insecurities that can arise from such close scrutiny. I have not come to Indonesia to teach the “American way”. I have come to learn from BINUS, learn the Cambridge curriculum, learn the policies and procedures for teachers and students in an Indonesian education system. I can learn from careful observation.

These students show me that it’s not enough to merely be curious about a topic, you must ask the question outright. You must be bold, not fear giving a wrong answer or asking a “less than intelligent” question. The curiosity may be what facilitates learning, but it is the application of curiosity—through questions—that is the process of learning.

**Perspective.** Using my teaching colleagues as a resource, I am beginning to understand BINUS International School as it relates to my prior experience with teaching. The Cambridge system itself is markedly different from our Midwest education system. Cambridge prioritizes assessments, for one, and does not place emphasis on the integration of technology. The school set-up differs as well. The teachers are the ones who roam from classroom to classroom, not the students. When not in the classroom, the teachers are in Teacher Work Rooms, one per each department. The lessons are planned in collaboration; the four grade 7 English teachers work together to create the week for their students. One teacher is in charge of the PowerPoint for the week, one for the seat work, one for the lesson plan itself and then one to align it with the Cambridge standards. In this way, the lesson is the same across the board for all grade 7 English classes, week by week.

*They do things differently, here,* is something I could say about anywhere. Scotland? *Different.* New Zealand? *Different.* India? South Africa? Malaysia? *All different.* When I look and peer and search through those differences in systems, I learn more about the system I am familiar with, too.

One could possibly read a book about the Indonesian education system. Or search, “what is it like to teach with other Indonesian teachers?” But that would not prepare anyone to teach at BINUS International School. First of all, the majority of my teaching colleagues are expats from the Philippines. That was quite a surprise to me, and indeed, the Filipino teacher has different habits and strategies than the Indonesian. Secondly, reading about the Cambridge system is entirely different from seeing it in action. I had qualms about the success of teaching to the test, about the lack of teacher-classroom ownership. Those qualms disappear as I sit in my plastic red chair at the wooden desk and observe learning growing and spreading.

I have learned more about the American education system from observing and asking questions about the Cambridge system than I ever imagined. It mirrors how one tends to learn more about the English language when one studies French. It takes getting out of the box to look at the surface area, to examine it from different angles, to compare its size with the box next to it and

the one across the room and the one across the world. *They do things differently, here*, you tell yourself when you arrive, magnifying glass in one hand and notepad in the other.

## **Implications**

Ashley and Josie's participation in international student teaching placements were transformative experiences in which they were able to reflect on their habits of mind. The aim of applying transformative learning theory was to help our participants and co-authors critically reflect on their current assumptions and—if they found them lacking—act upon those opportunities for change. The collective experiences and perceptions presented here affirm and expand upon previous studies exploring how study abroad experiences among pre-service teachers promote an enriched global perspective and shape culturally responsive teachers (Lupi & Batey, 2009; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008).

When considering what effect short-term international student teaching experiences have on pre-service teachers' professional growth, we ultimately discovered that even brief exposure to additional techniques presented our co-authors with an expanded repertoire of strategies and methods from which to draw in their own classrooms. While reiterating the value of engaging, interactive lessons, Ashley learned that all children enjoy being involved in their own learning. Similarly, Josie soaked in new techniques, habits, and strategies and discovered that each teacher may have a different way of going about the same task but fostering student curiosity piques authentic engagement and learning opportunities. Additionally, these brief experiences not only cultivated professional growth in the moment but have facilitated ongoing growth as well; now in her first year of teaching, Ashley is continuing to collaborate with her Finnish mentor teacher to set up pen pals and Skype sessions between the two classrooms.

Another benefit of international practicums is that pre-service participants engage in critical reflections on their teaching beliefs and practices. For Ashley, it was recognizing that she did not need to reinvent the wheel with every lesson just to engage her students. Rather, adopting vetted online and print resources, utilizing materials that were already on-hand, and relying on collaboration with colleagues were valuable practices that at times ran counter-intuitive to what she felt the U.S. education system conveyed. Josie's experience also provided opportunities to witness the effectiveness of collaboration among teachers. And while the Filipino and Indonesian teachers with whom she worked exhibited a wide range of strategies and techniques, Josie recognized it was ultimately her choice whether or not to implement these new approaches.

Perhaps the most limited amount of current research regarding study abroad experiences involves repeat study abroad participants. Both Ashley and Josie had studied abroad before as undergraduates, so their student teaching placements offered a unique opportunity to explore how those previous experiences had influenced their critical reflections. Upon analysis of the participants' field notes, free writing, and stories, we observed that more time was dedicated to immersion into the experience because the acclimation to a location outside of their cultural norm did not dominate the first days and weeks of their internship. As Josie remarked, *they do things differently here*. Truly understanding that differences existed from the onset allowed both pre-service teachers to become active, involved participants more quickly from the onset of their arrival in their host country.

## **Discussion**

I was raised in the Midwest, attended a Midwest high school and a Midwest university. I could not have asked for a better home base, and I am thankful. But one cannot become what one does not see. I experienced this through my first study-abroad experience. I observed other ways to learn, communicate, travel, live—ways that I had never seen, and was therefore not able to consider before. Based on that, I had the vague intuition that in Indonesia, they do “things” differently, too. Unless I knew what that was, saw what it was like, I did not have the choice of adopting new techniques.

By observing what practices and techniques my colleagues had that differed from my own, and my own education, I now have the choice to implement them or not. I have simply seen more options. I have a slightly wider pool from which to select. There are some notions I might adopt in my own future educational career—for instance, the close collaboration between grade level English teachers. They were able to rely upon each other for perspective, advice, and lesson planning. No man is an island, and no teacher is an island. On the other hand, I observed practices which I would not put into effect. Ultimately, the wider the net is cast, the more my future students will benefit.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

While Ashley and Josie’s international student teaching placements occurred in different countries, both experiences served as catalysts for reflection and examination into their habits of mind. According to transformative learning theory, these habits of mind become so rooted in who we are as individuals, that it takes a catalyst of some sort to disrupt these ingrained beliefs. Student teaching abroad situates interns in a practicum that provides a multitude of “scruffy moments”—circumstances for pre-service teachers to thoughtfully consider how their positionality influences their teaching and the students in their classrooms. While the benefits of short and long-term study abroad opportunities are vast and long-lasting, student teaching abroad provides future elementary and secondary teachers the additional benefit of improving their pedagogy through a better understanding of how concepts like cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds shape their students’ learning experiences. Participating as guest teachers in international classrooms requires students to confront their own identity, examine new perspectives, and respond in culturally-appropriate ways. Therefore, developing international practicum options for our student teachers is one way that Emporia State University strives to promote global competence and diversify learning experiences among its elementary and secondary teacher candidates in this “flattening” age of international mobility. We hope more pre-service teacher candidates will come to hear the call of our international placements as a personal invitation to grow as globally aware educators. After all, *there is much to learn about the world and here is the place to begin your explorations.*

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## Appendix A: Artifacts from Elementary Placement in Finland



## Appendix B: Artifacts from Secondary Placement in Indonesia



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