

US elementary preservice teachers' experiences while teaching students in Taiwan

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Abstract: The idea to prepare prospective teachers to teach in increasingly diverse US schools still raises a number of questions about how an international student teaching experience can be important and beneficial to student learning. What do preservice teachers perceive to be the benefits from an international student teaching experience? What do preservice teachers perceive as challenges during an international student teaching experience? This paper shares findings from a phenomenological study of four U.S. elementary preservice teachers' experiences during a five-week international student teaching opportunity in Taiwan. The findings of this study support the scholarship of teaching and learning that is grounded in the quest to understand the connection between students' experiences and learning (Hutchings, 1999). The findings could further provide insights into the implementation process and the support that student teachers need in order to gain a successful experience from an international student teaching opportunity provided by the teacher education program.

Keywords: student teaching, international, preservice teachers, study abroad

It is not by accident that teacher education programs realize the critical need to prepare developing teachers to be more pluralistic in their thought, behavior, and affect. Due to global migration, international trade, and technological advances (Armstrong, 2008; Cushner, 2007), the world has become more interconnected and the need to train developing teachers who will understand and promote global perspectives is necessary for today's diverse classrooms. As a result, short-term international student-teaching programs have increasingly grown in teacher education programs in many universities and colleges around the globe. Some of the goals are to provide preservice teachers the opportunity to improve their pedagogical knowledge and to develop global perspectives and language proficiency by engaging in diverse settings (Bodycott & Crew, 2000; Olmedo & Harbon, 2010).

Kissock and Richardson (2010) state that "educators must move beyond their comfort zone to see their world from a different perspective, discover alternative solutions to problems they face and create new approaches or integrate appropriate ideas into their setting" (p. 92). With this thought in mind, the internationalization of student teaching programs can embrace a larger goal. International educational opportunities can be a journey to transformative learning; learning that permits a world view to emerge in a context that causes one to scrutinize their values and beliefs through continual reflection (Intolubbe-Chmil, Spreen, & Swap, 2012). It is the type of learning that requires students to step out of the normal or traditional mode of classroom learning (Stanton, 2008), and from this perspective, the internationalization of student teaching is experiential-driven (Robertson & Bond, 2005) and is best achieved when students move beyond the confines of classroom walls.

It is our position that an international student teaching program legitimates investigative questions and the subsequent findings can inform practice to improve student learning (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). We subscribe to a model of the scholarship of teaching and learning that

endorses inquiry and investigations for the purpose of understanding the connection between students' experiences and learning (Hutchings, 1999). From this perspective, this research was guided by the following inquiry questions: (1) What do preservice teachers perceive to be the benefits from an international student teaching experience? (2) What do preservice teachers perceive as challenges during an international student teaching experience?

To address these questions, we, the authors of this paper, planned and piloted a five week international student teaching program to promote an intercultural learning experience for four elementary and one middle grade preservice teachers. Our intention in doing so was to offer our preservice teachers the opportunity to develop an appreciation for diversity, develop international perspectives, and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to work effectively with children and their families from diverse backgrounds in US schools.

In fall 2011, the Taiwan Student Teaching Opportunity (TSTO) was piloted with four of the original five preservice teachers aboard for a five-week practicum. The fifth participant (a middle/secondary candidate) dropped out due to personal reasons. Through conventional methods of qualitative data collection and analysis, our four preservice teachers discovered the benefits of an international student teaching experience, as well as the challenges of such an undertaking. Moreover, we learned that international student teaching extends the foundation for learning. From this perspective, we offer our findings for consideration by other programs who are involved in the planning of international field experiences while recognizing the findings of the TSTO pilot program may be professionally limited to our own teacher education program.

Literature Review

Due to a proliferation of immigration, global trade, and communication and technological advancements (Armstrong, 2008; Cushner, 2007), US schools have become increasingly more diverse. As a result, international student teaching programs have increasingly risen in an effort to prepare prospective teachers to create culturally sensitive classrooms (Mahon, 2006) as evidenced by the plethora of literature. Accordingly, the literature review examines the benefits and the challenges of a short term international student teaching program as a foundation for our inquiry.

Benefits

According to Heyl and McCarthy (2003), students who study abroad bring a higher level of discussion to the classroom that is framed by international knowledge and pedagogy. Research has further shown that student teaching abroad provides a first-hand view of the world at-large and the opportunity to build multiple points-of-view (Younes & Asay, 2003). Additionally, findings suggest that preservice teachers who participate in short term overseas teaching develop greater appreciations for cultural diversity (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). Toncar and Cudmore (2000) posit that students who live and teach in another country return to their home country with "a wealth of knowledge and experiences that causes them to see their world differently" (p. 59).

Studies have shown that opportunities to student teach in international settings have the potential to enrich and expand both professional and personal development (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Heyl & McCarthy, 2003; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; 2001; Younes & Asay, 2003). Roose (2001) posits that international student teaching allows US PTs to increase the necessary

skills and abilities to teach non-English speaking students in schools. Further findings have shown that international student teaching experiences can promote cross-cultural sensitivity (Quezada, 2004). Quezada expounds on this finding by offering that preservice teachers who have taught abroad develop an appreciation of what immigrant students encounter when they come to the US. Because they have experienced language and cultural difficulties first-hand, preservice teachers have a much better understanding of multicultural issues in US classrooms. Additionally, evidence suggests that international student teaching has an enduring effect on classroom practices (Mahon & Cushner, 2002) such that participating individuals develop a broader understanding of their classroom role. From overseas student teaching experiences, research has shown that cultural sensitivity informs all manners of professional practice from classroom management to lesson activities and to student and parent interaction (Mahan, 2006).

On a personal level, classroom teachers who have student taught abroad draw upon their world views and reject negative stereotypes, embrace other cultures, and have a true appreciation for diversity in their classrooms (Deardorff, 2006). Perhaps, Toncar and Cudmore (2000) sum up overseas internships most succinctly when referring to preservice teachers who have experienced this opportunity by simply offering “they are changed” (p. 59). Findings have shown that preservice teachers who have taught abroad have higher levels of self-confidence, are resourceful, patient, and are less prone to judge (Mahon & Cushner, 2002). Having confronted new and unfamiliar circumstances, Roose (2001) posits that overseas student teaching builds classroom teachers who are risk takers and are more creative in their teaching.

Challenges

While the literature is overwhelmingly positive regarding short-term international student teaching experiences, there are reports on some of the difficulties with international student teaching experiences. Quezada (2004) has reported that some student teachers develop a sense of isolation due to communication difficulties. Garii (2008) has echoed this point that some student teachers experience insecurity and harbor feelings of loneliness and frustration. Additionally, the literature shows that some student teachers have difficulty adapting to the curriculum and feel unprepared to deliver instruction (Romano, 2007).

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Central to the theoretical orientation of this pilot study was the interpretive meaning of the participants’ lived experiences as perceived by the participants in the Taiwan classroom social setting and the surrounding environment. Based on this theoretical premise, our study relied primarily upon what educational researchers Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to as phenomenology – an interpretive theory. We adopted a natural inquiry – a hermeneutic phenomenology - that permitted us to search for the meaning of the preservice teachers’ experiences and challenges in the learning context, what the students learned from their experiences, and the communicative tools they used to describe their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In order to attend to the larger social and cultural contexts in which this study was situated and the importance of the interpretive meanings from the participants’ lived experiences, a variety of qualitative methods were utilized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

As part of the interpretive methodology, our study was grounded in the constructivist theory. The constructivist theory acknowledges that meaning making is constructed through exchanges of social processes; knowledge is derived collectively among people (Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivists place significance on communities of learners versus individual learners in regards to the attention of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and thus, the constructivist theory provided the necessary lens to analyze the important shared learning experiences. This sort of collaborative learning is continuously emphasized during study abroad.

The Participants and Settings

The participants involved four elementary preservice teachers who attended a university in the Southeastern region of the US and who had fulfilled the state's requirements for teacher licensure in a ten-week accelerated schedule for the semester. Additionally, all four participants met the required grade point average for international study abroad and received high marks from a faculty interview panel. Of the four participants, one had studied abroad in a summer program, one had participated in international mission trips, one had lived in many different states within the US, and one had never left her home state until time to leave for college. All four participants were eager and motivated to become globally-minded, to experience life from a minority perspective, to be challenged both personally and professionally, and to build an appreciation for language and cultural differences. The preservice teachers received three orientations within half a year working on topics that prepared them for the trip. These topics included introduction of Taiwan history and geography, culturally responsive pedagogy, basic TESOL theory and methods, and travel and life in Taiwan. Additionally, the preservice teachers were required to prepare lessons on American culture and traditions, the geography and important features of their home state, and provide many activities to support learning English as a Second Language (ESL) using technology.

The public schools selected for this opportunity were introduced by our partner university in Taiwan who offered multiple school settings for our selection. Based on the consideration of safety and lodging provision, we chose to work with a Tainan public high school principal who was passionate and supportive about this opportunity. The high school principal became our point person and was instrumental in arranging elementary classroom placements in the district, as well as her own high school. The principal also assigned two Tainan teachers who spoke English to become key contacts with the researchers and participants throughout this opportunity. As a result, the classroom settings were one high school (Grades 7-12) and five small-scale elementary schools (Grades 1-6) that required the four preservice teachers to rotate among the school settings while student teaching in Taiwan. This rotation schedule proved to be challenging and is addressed in the research findings.

Data Collection

Prior to the start of the TSTO pilot program, approval to conduct the research study was obtained from the Institutional Research Board at our home university. Also, each participant signed an informed consent form. Subsequently, a pre-program interview was audio-taped and transcribed to capture personal information (teaching experience and travel experience) and gain insight into the participants' motivations for teaching in Taiwan. During the pilot program, the four preservice teachers were encouraged to reflect and record their experiences in weekly

reflection journals. In addition, a post program survey questionnaire was administered to capture the preservice teachers' overall evaluations of the student teaching experience. We also conducted a post group interview that was audio-taped and transcribed to provide an additional data set. The group interview allowed for a free flowing open discussion in order for the four preservice teachers to share their lived experiences as close as possible. Because our five-week TSTO program was a pilot study, the four preservice teachers provided a group presentation to the faculty and administrators in the College of Education. During the presentation, the four preservice teachers shared what they did, saw, and thought within and beyond the schools. The presentation was captured on video and subsequently supplied a final source of data.

During the planning of and throughout the TSTO pilot program, we created multiple documents that became a source for data collection. The creation of course materials, the syllabus, questions for reflection, and our own reflective journals became a valuable source of data from which to seek alternative perspectives and to check interpretations.

Data Analysis

In agreement with hermeneutic phenomenology, the production of meaning was a process of co-creation between the researchers and participant involvement, whereby the construction of meaning occurred in a cycle of interviews, reflective writing, and interpretations. The use of our own reflective journals allowed us to move back and forth between the data sets and our own reflections. We further subscribed to Hertz's (1997) call for an on-going cycle of self-reflexivity. Because inquiry is a human activity, we rejected the possibility of a value-free, objective human science (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Accordingly, we assumed the responsibility to be reflexive and continually reflect upon research practices, decisions, and personal values (Richlin, 2001).

Ongoing data analysis occurred by means of an inductive data analysis approach to code, categorize, and to search for themes. Using a constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998), all interview transcripts, reflective journals, and survey questionnaires were reviewed in order to validate, clarify, and reframe analyses of the data. The analysis was conducted as a joint effort; however, each investigator sorted and coded data individually to identify initial themes. We met regularly to exchange, read, and sort through all data sources to collectively identify possible themes, independent of previous individual interpretations. This was an important part of data analysis to observe how consistent the emerging themes were when each data set were examined. To begin the final process of data analysis, we met to finalize our individual preliminary findings and a dialogue over commonality and differences of interpretation occurred.

Results

From data analysis, three categories emerged. For purposes of this article, we have used the participants' comments as evidentiary evidence to support each category. All participants' names are pseudonyms.

To provide an overview, Table 1 organizes the questions, data sources, and categorical results of the study.

Table 1

Overview of Questions, Methods, and Results

	Inquiry Questions	Data Sources	Findings - Categories
I.	Benefits	- WRs - PPS - PFGI - EP - Survey	1. Professional development 2. Personal growth
II.	Perceived challenges	- WRs - PFGI - EP	3. Challenges and difficulties

WRs=Weekly Reflections; PPS=Post program survey; PFGI=Post group interview; EP=Exit presentation.

Professional Development

Throughout this immersion opportunity, the results from data analysis indicated that the TSTO preservice teachers became more pedagogically prepared to teach ESL students, culturally responsive, professionally assertive, and they became more aware of the educational differences between the US and Taiwan. From analysis of weekly reflections, post group interviews, and the exit presentation, sub-categories and key expressions emerged and are organized in Table 2.

Pedagogically prepared to teach ESL students. During the post group interview, the TSTO preservice teachers came to a collective consensus about being “more equipped to teach ESL students” (Fanny). It was because of “the experience of not being able to use their language and the challenge of learning their language” (Helen). Lillian also described her experience, “A lot of time I turned off my brain when I was there not being able to understand what they are saying. So if your ESL students are not listening, you know why.” Having taught in English speaking classrooms in the US, “[t]his experience made me realize how different it is to be an ESL teacher: Students have different needs and there should be a lot of flexibility in the teaching agenda based on the student’s progression,” Helen stated.

The TSTO preservice teachers perceived they benefitted from developing stronger instructional practices for ESL students. They believed that an ESL teacher should “use different approaches, instead of teaching to everyone in general” (Helen). In this experience, they used varied strategies, materials, and aids, such as slowing down, acting, rephrasing, visual aids, and charades. In addition, they “found that repetition was very important” (Stacy). As Stephanie explained, “We use new techniques, instead of just saying it.” And working in pairs helped, because they were able to “work over each other to make them understand” (Lillian).

Culturally responsive. The TSTO preservice teachers perceived an additional benefit from the experience was that they became “more open to diversity” and “more understanding of diverse needs and to students from different cultures” (Helen, Lillian, Stacy, Fanny). All four participants responded in the survey that they had an expanded world view, were more qualified teacher candidates, and had a greater level of personal ambition. Additionally, they believed the program had prepared them to teach culturally diverse students. On the other hand, they acknowledged that prejudice and bias were challenges they must overcome to teach culturally

and linguistically diverse students. “This trip is very helpful for teachers to teach ESL students and should be required for ESOL class,” suggested Stacy.

Professionally confident. All four of the TSTO preservice teachers agreed that “being the minority just changed you,” as Helen stated. This experience seemed to have ‘boosted their confidence enormously,” as Fanny affirmed. “Once you can do this in a different culture, you can do anything in America,” a statement echoed by Lillian. “You can use the experience in a different culture to a future situation,” said Stacy.

Table 2

Categories and Key Expressions under Professional Development

Category	Key Expression
Pedagogically Prepared to Teach ESL Students	Not teaching to everyone in general Different to be an ESL teacher Repetition is needed Varied instruction is key Use visual aids and acting Slow down when you talk Say things in different ways Chinese needed to check for understanding Some games and chants would fit well in American classrooms Older students do not like games
Culturally Responsive	More open to diversity More understanding to students with diverse needs and from different cultures Know why ESL students are not listening More patient with people
Professionally Confident	Changed being the minority More confident in teaching Most comfortable with elementary students
Increased Awareness of Educational Differences	Different concepts in classroom management Could balance between the two extremes Different schedules Actual school day not longer Students’ creativity and intelligence Brought change to kids

From data analysis, the findings consistently showed the four preservice teachers perceived the experience allowed them to become more professionally committed to elementary students. After teaching wide-ranging grades, all of them were happy to confirm that they felt most comfortable working with elementary students. Helen believed that “teaching kindergarten

in America had prepared for this experience.” She also became, as Helen stated, “more thankful for the things that I often forgot to give thanks for while in America, including students, teachers, and mentors.”

Increased awareness of educational differences. Comments in Helen’s weekly reflection mirrored she had developed a heightened awareness for differences between the two countries’ educational systems.

The comparison between schools in America and in Taiwan is almost impossible. The setup, teaching techniques, learning styles, content and schedule is so completely different that it is hard to describe to someone who has never seen both situations.

From their time in Taiwan classrooms and working with the students, the TSTO preservice teachers voiced their comparisons between Taiwan classrooms and their own state’s classrooms. They realized that “behavior management in the Taiwan classrooms is not as strict as that in America; at least not in their state. This is a cultural difference,” said Fanny. Lillian believed that, “there would be a good balance to set between the two extremes I have been exposed to.” Additionally, they compared the school routines in the two countries. They noticed that schools in Taiwan appeared to “have a longer day with breaks and an hour long lunch/nap and a good planning period. But the actual school day does not end up being much longer,” said Stacy. When working with kids, they found themselves “impressed with students’ creativity and intelligence” (Stacy) and that “kids enjoy having us because of the change we brought to them” (Fanny).

Personal Growth

The findings from data analysis indicated that this experience provided enormous opportunities for the TSTO preservice teachers to grow personally. Based on the post survey, the exit presentation, and the post group interviews, four categories and key expressions emerged and are shown in Table 3.

Interactions with people. The TSTO preservice teachers were able to interact with numerous people inside and outside of schools. They appreciated that in addition to taking time to help, the Taiwanese people provided “a great amount of hospitality,” as stated Helen. She continued to comment, “We felt welcome and wanted by everyone.” They were invited to multiple social events that included participation in a PTA barbeque, school archery and softball practices, and they visited a salt museum and tree house. Additionally, Lillian described, “They invited us to a Thanksgiving dinner in Tainan City. Many personnel from school were there. We felt just at home surrounded by friends and wonderful food.”

Personal adjustment. The TSTO preservice teachers experienced “many adjustments personally and with schools” (Helen). The four TSTO preservice teachers were far from home in an unfamiliar country with a different language and culture and this setting required them to make personal adjustments, sometimes on a daily basis. The adjustments included trying new foods, relying on others for everything because of language barriers, and navigating around the area, according to Lillian and Stacy. They learned to balance independence and dependence.

Table 3

Categories and Key Expressions under Personal Growth

Category	Key expression
Interactions with People	Great amount of hospitality Friendly and helpful people Participating in school sports activities PTA providing BBQ Taken to a Thanksgiving dinner
Personal Adjustments	Many adjustments personally and with schools Relying on people with everything Trying new foods Navigating through the area Figuring out the bus, train, and transit
Recreational Events	Seeing temples, tree house, and salt museum Exploring Kaohsiung and Taipei city Convenient public transportation people took time to help us
Character Development	More appreciative about things Gained diverse viewpoints on things More risk taking

Recreational events. The four participants visited multiple sightseeing areas during leisure time by themselves and explored metropolitan cities. From these events, they had “the sense of accomplishment,” because they “figured out things” on their own (Lillian, Fanny, Stacy, Helen). “It was good cultural experience because we don’t have it here in Georgia” (Lillian, Fanny, Stacy, Helen). Even when traveling, we got to “meet new friendly people who are willing to help” (Helen). “We never feel scared walking in the street at night,” commented Stacy.

Character development. The international student teaching experience helped the TSTO preservice teachers develop their characters quickly. As Stacy stated, it “pushed you to grow.” Helen stated, “You have more patience dealing with people you might not want to deal with... You become to appreciate things you have. And you gain different outlook on all different things.” Stacy expressed that the experience “made confirmation what you believe.” Helen was glad that “you were separated and not to worry about your phones.” Stacy concluded that “We [referring to the four TSTO preservice teachers] know each other and have become friends.”

For a future adventure like this, all four of them responded without hesitation, “We will do it again.” Stacy further stated, “I like it. I would teach out of America again. I could do not only a month. I could do longer than a month in somewhere else.”

Challenge

In addition to the new learning experiences, this experience presented a few challenges due to some predetermined conditions stemming from communication and school settings. From weekly reflections, the exit presentation, and post group interviews, the following categories emerged in support of the theme of challenges (see Table 4).

Scheduling challenges. The adjusted schedule that was established when the one middle candidate dropped out of the opportunity caused major challenges for the four TSTO preservice teachers who taught in Taiwan. They were required to cover teaching schedules pre-designed for multiple grade levels in both high school and elementary school settings. This mixed schedule brought forth tremendous challenges. As Fanny stated, “Switching schools and students was difficult for us to become adjusted to teaching.” Stacy also complained, “Our schedule changed every day.” Additionally, Lillian stated, “We had too many students from different schools.” Helen added, “The time was too short. We didn’t get to build relationship with the students.”

Language barriers. Communication difficulties became apparent once the school settings were established. This university-school model of communication situated the four preservice teachers in an environment whereby they interacted with people who had a different language and this experience brought about many difficulties. Moreover, the two Tainan teachers who spoke English and were assigned as contacts for our four preservice teachers had their own classrooms and this limited their availability.

As a result, the four preservice teachers perceived that language differences were a barrier and a challenge. For example, they struggled to find translation or guidance when students did not understand them. In addition, they experienced miscommunication with school personnel about weekend activities and found it difficult to get their message across. As Fanny explained, “We wanted to have a say, but they thought it had been cancelled” for a cultural event they would have enjoyed. Finally, while they hoped to rely on an American teacher in the high school, the TSTO preservice teachers felt ignored by the American teacher to the point that Lillian remarked, “She was not helping.” As a result, the four preservice teachers had to “give up independence and rely on someone else for everything.”

Table 4

Categories and Key Expressions under Challenges/Difficulties

Category	Key Expression
Scheduling Challenges	Need better planning Too many students from different schools Different schedule every day
Language Barriers	Giving up independence Miscommunication about weekend activities/expectations Need Chinese to help in a lesson
School Location	Far from city Food within biking areas is not diverse enough

School location. School location became an issue in relation to the distances from the preservice teachers' lodging. Lodging provisions were chosen because of the dormitory layout; however, the schools were in a more remote area and this presented many challenges with daily routines. Each of the TSTO preservice teachers were given a bicycle for daily transportation and therefore, they biked to school, to grocery shop, to do laundry, and to get meals in the neighboring areas. The preservice teachers were thankful for the use of the bikes, but they all agreed that this mode of transportation presented a challenge. As Stacy said, we found we were "getting used to ride a bike." Nonetheless, the problem was that "food within biking areas is not diverse enough" (Lillian), so "eating becomes our daily issue" (Helen). The four teachers all agreed that biking to grocery shopping and laundry was challenging especially in the evening.

Discussion

In response to the first research that inquired what the four preservice teachers perceived as the benefits of an international student teaching experience, the results concluded that they developed professionally and personally in multiple areas. On a professional level, the results are consistent with the literature that opportunities to student teach in international settings permits students to grow in multiple areas (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). Specifically, through this opportunity, the TSTO preservice teachers became more pedagogically prepared to teach ESL students. This finding aligns with research that student teaching in international settings increases the necessary skills and abilities to teach non-English speaking students in US schools (Roose, 2001). The preservice teachers developed a repertoire of key pedagogical practices that are critical in teaching ESL students, such as using repetition, varied instruction, visual aids, acting, slowing down, rewording, games, and chants. All of these are indicators advocated by Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol to help enhance the learning of ESL students (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). Additionally, the four TSTO preservice teachers developed a heightened awareness of diverse learners' needs and became culturally responsive to students from different cultures. Overall, the four preservice teachers benefitted from the experience by developing sensitivity and greater capability in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. This finding is supported by research (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010) that found that international student teaching needs to be a critical programmatic mission of teacher education in the US.

The four preservice teachers became more professionally confident through this experience (Mahon & Cushner, 2002). They gained knowledge of the needs of different aged learners through the experience by teaching multiple grade levels and student groups. Yet, they all confirmed they enjoyed teaching elementary students. They also learned firsthand how educational aspects between both countries could be different. These abovementioned understandings and insights are invaluable and can only be obtained through international immersion in the profession.

On a personal level, the international opportunity allowed the TSTO preservice teachers to grow and mature in varied ways. They learned to interact with total strangers inside and outside of schools in varied activities, and they learned to be flexible and appreciative of others' traditions, foods, and way of life. Additionally, they became resilient and developed survival techniques while trying new things, navigating neighboring areas, and figuring out transportation means and routes. The overall experience helped them build personal character and more self-

confidence. In addition, they developed more diverse viewpoints (Mahon & Cushner, 2002) and at times, they grew to be risk takers (Roose, 2001).

In response to the second inquiry question regarding what the four TSTO preservice teachers perceived to be challenges, the findings consistently showed the four preservice teachers believed the schedule arrangement, the language barrier, and the schools' locations were all challenges. These findings are consistent with other studies that found international experiences are not always positive. For example, researchers find that communication difficulties (Garii, 2008) and instructional challenges (Romano, 2007) can leave participants feeling frustrated and insecure.

Implications for Practice

The results from this study imply that teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse setting brings forth benefits and challenges for US preservice teachers. The overall benefit, and to a degree a challenge, is that practicing teachers get to experience the cultural and linguistic difficulties themselves as a teacher and learner simultaneously. This in turn gives them a glimpse into how their future ESL students might feel as minority students whose language and culture are different from the mainstream norm; the experience enables them to become more culturally and linguistically understanding and empathetic. As a result, the findings from our TSTO program further imply that international student teaching extends the foundation for learning (Richlin, 2001). Just as the icing is to the cake, so is the international student teaching opportunity to the student teaching experience. After completing the licensure requirements, this opportunity allowed the four preservice teachers the ability to build awareness and increase the capacity to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students in a relatively short period of time. The experience promoted the opportunity for the preservice teachers to practice what they had learned about culturally responsive pedagogy in our teacher education program. The need to become culturally responsive became real and for the first time teaching was no longer about content and pedagogy, but more about the connection between culture, and language, and students. All four preservice teachers gained confidence and believed in their ability to teach linguistically diverse students. This implication is supported by research that has shown that when practicing teachers have been placed in contexts that caused them to be the minority, those prospective teachers became committed to disallowing their students to feel isolated and insecure (Roose, 2001).

Implications may be made in relation to the challenges our TSTO preservice teachers faced; challenges that could have been avoided with some modification in the platform of communication. The communication to establish and international student teaching program first began between our US university and our partner university in Taiwan. However, once the city of Tainan was selected for school settings, the communication platform shifted to the principal of the participating high school and the principals of the elementary schools in Tainan. This communication platform created problems (Lu & Soares, 2012) for several reasons, such as corresponding with very limited English speakers with whom to negotiate school locations, teaching expectations, and scheduling confusion. According to Glickman (2004), it can be very difficult to get the language and culture communicated and understood at two different levels of institutions, especially when it happens in two different countries. Therefore, these challenges present one final implication for future international student teaching opportunities in our teacher education program. In other words as we move forward, our future efforts will communicate

directly with a partner university to maximize the effect of an international student teaching experience (Authors, 2012).

A Final Word

The 21st century schooling in the US requires alternative perspectives to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in today's classrooms (Asia Society, 2008). Reflecting on the four preservice student teachers' international experience in a non-English speaking country, we are in a better position to understand the benefits and challenges that yield learning for preservice teachers during practice abroad (Martin, Benjamin, Prosser, & Trigwell, 1999). The study is significant in multiple aspects. First, the results from this study have provided a fresh and invigorated lens from which to improve student learning. The experience altogether has laid the groundwork from which to internationalize our courses that focus on conceptual frameworks and instructional methodologies to build cultural learning and global awareness. Moreover, the findings from the TSTO research study allow our College of Education to reevaluate and restructure future endeavors with international student teaching opportunities. Because our university is interested in internationalization, this experience has provided precious insights into future collaboration with international institutions. Finally, the results of the study are professionally informative for a larger learning community, including teacher education programs, as well as those who are involved in planning international field experiences.

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