

# **DEVELOPING GLOBALIZED TEACHERS: THE ROLE OF STUDY ABROAD AND TEACHING ABROAD EXPERIENCES**

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The Texas Education Agency (TEA) acknowledges that “becoming more knowledgeable about students overlooked, can assist [educators] with better identification of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse (CLED) students for G/T services” (TEA, 2022, para. 1). This article will discuss literature which suggests that pre-service teachers (PSTs) whose experiences include a component of study or teaching abroad may demonstrate increased cultural competency, and that this increased cultural competency may help to improve the equitable identification and instruction of gifted and talented (GT) students from traditionally-underrepresented groups. These globalized teachers can form an important part of a well-developed educational workforce.

## **The Benefits of Culturally-Competent Educators for GT Students**

Offering PSTs a study or teaching abroad opportunity may help them better prepare for teaching along several critical growth dimensions. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recommend that teachers of GT students “understand how language, culture, economic status, family background, and area of disability can influence the learning of individuals with exceptionalities” (NAGC-CEC, n.d., p.1). Teaching in an international context can prompt a deeper level of reflection about the role of culture, language, and family background, since PSTs will have to grapple with at least one culture which is, definitionally, not their own; this comports with findings from Roberts (2007) on the importance of global awareness in teacher preparation.

Cultural and linguistic sensitivity are especially important for educators of GT students, since teaching GT students requires “differentiate[d] instructional strategies and

general and specialized curricula to challenge individuals with gifts and talents” (NAGC-CEC, n.d., p. 2). It is absolutely essential that teachers of GT students are able to differentiate for and challenge GT students to excel with the kind of cultural and linguistic sensitivity that is most likely to help the student flourish in school and beyond.

A study or teaching abroad experience with students outside of the United States can also help prepare educators for identifying GT students among traditionally underrepresented populations. Siegle et al. (2016) write that “[i]dentification [of underrepresented student populations] requires a holistic approach, as they may not be able to perform on English language tests yet, but may have potential for incredible gifts” (p. 7). A rigorous study or teaching abroad experience can give PSTs an intimate understanding of how to instruct, assess, and identify GT students across linguistic or cultural barriers; this experience may then aid them in the identification of GT students from traditionally-underrepresented populations for placement in American GT programs.

These identification issues are of particular importance for English language learning (ELL) students, who are traditionally underrepresented in GT programs (Harris et al., 2009). When working with this population of as-yet unidentified GT students, it is vital that educators understand that “ELL students’ giftedness may manifest in specific ways that are framed within and that emphasize the students’ linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds” (Harris et al., 2009, p. 371). With this consideration in mind, we can see that PSTs who have experience studying or working in a context where another culture is not just valued but dominant can help provide the perspective necessary to value the many manifestations of giftedness that teachers find in emerging bilinguals. Once identified, experience with teaching in an international context can also help novice teachers with the crucial skill of “[h]onoring cultural voice [which] is an important aspect of incorporating EL students into the gifted classroom” (Siegle et al., 2016, p. 8).

## Positive Effects of Study and Teaching Abroad on PSTs

The practice of sending pre-service teacher candidates abroad to teach has been gaining acceptance as a high-impact international best practice for some time now; this can be characterized as both studying and teaching abroad. In Singapore, the Ministry of Education (n.d.) offers undergraduate students full funding to complete either all or part of their teacher preparation program abroad, as long as the student meets certain program completion requirements (Ministry of Education, Singapore, n.d.). Study and teaching abroad programs have also become more popular in Canada and China, with Chinese PSTs particularly keen to engage in teaching practicum programs in the formerly-autonomous Hong Kong (Larsen, 2016).

In contrast to this global trend, “for the most part, teacher preparation programs in American college and university campuses are among the least internationalized, despite recent attention to internationalization in higher education” and that this reality tends to leave American teachers underprepared to bring global awareness into their classrooms (Quezada, 2010, p. 1).

Study and teaching abroad can have significant benefits for PSTs. Roberts (2007) found that teachers developed a more globally-aware perspective and gained intercultural awareness and competency as a result. Alfaro & Quezada (2010) also noted that teaching abroad experiences improve teachers’ global awareness, culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogical practices, and commitment to “passionate pedagogy” (p. 54). Biraimah & Jotia (2012) highlighted two Fulbright programs, U. S. State Department programs that provide funding for a variety of teaching and research experiences around the world, that are already institutionalized in the United States. For students and educators, these Fulbright programs “have contributed to their professional and personal growth, with some vowing to continue this progress through future programs linked to education and international development” (p. 451). More recently, Moorhouse (2020) also found that, when it comes to the concrete skills of planning and implementing lessons, “participants felt that [their teaching abroad program] went beyond their local teaching-practicum experiences” (765). Cantalini-Williams & Tessaro (2011) found that the PSTs in their study experienced growth in the four areas of

“resourcefulness/resilience; employment opportunities; awareness of various cultures and educational systems; and knowledge of language sensitivities to challenges and barriers of second language learning” (p. 59). Overall, Moorhouse & Harfitt (2019) concluded that “when teaching abroad projects are developed... to specifically compliment and address deficits in the current [EPP] programmes, and involve the [supervising professor] in all aspects... then the projects can be seen to lead to professional learning for all participants” (p. 242). These and other studies comprise a substantial body of research to support the idea that teaching abroad experiences result in better prepared, more confident, and more reflective teachers.

However, this requires careful program design. Moorhouse (2022) notes that “[a] common theme in the literature is the need to involve teacher educators from the home [EPP] institution in every aspect of teaching-abroad projects” (p. 65). It is also worth noting that the study and teaching abroad experience itself can also be challenging and disorienting, especially when PSTs confront language difficulties (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), or when the program is perceived by PSTs as a tourist lark (Santoro, 2014).

This is not an option that is realistically available to all undergraduates or pre-service teachers. Buchanan & Widodo (2016) note that “[i]n the absence of government or university funding, international experiences will be limited, particularly for [globally] ‘southern’ students” (p. 362). Programs like Fulbright (see also Biraimah & Jotia, 2013) can mitigate this issue, but not eliminate it completely. Most issues can be minimized with strong program design. Moorhouse (2022) compiled a list of considerations for program design which can be summarized as a process of clearly conceiving, articulating, and collaboratively planning the learning and objectives for all stakeholders, from PSTs to the home institution to the host communities and the students who are being taught. These processes can help minimize the risks of a poorly-implemented study or teaching abroad program and create fertile ground for PSTs to develop their teaching craft.

## Conclusion

Careful implementation of teaching abroad programs can produce higher-quality, more globally-aware, and globally-competent teachers. These teachers, by virtue of their experience working with international students, will be more sensitive to the different ways that giftedness can manifest across cultures. The Texas Education Agency describes this as a situation where “[e]ducators have knowledge of cultural differences and are more effective in seeing gifted potential” in students across diverse populations (TEA, 2022). This may encourage more equitable identification of GT students across traditionally-underrepresented groups, especially among ELL students. Study and teaching abroad experiences have the potential to increase the kinds of cultural and reflective competencies that form strong, globalized educators. To the extent possible, eligible and able PSTs should be encouraged to develop themselves as globalized educators.

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