

Teacher Candidates Crossing Borders

Calls for international experiences for teacher candidates (TCs) can be dated back as far as 1969, when Taylor (1969) argued that TCs should have the opportunity to experience a different culture through their own experience and through their students. However, 40 years later, Kissock & Richardson (2010) still found a dearth of such opportunities structured into teacher training programs and even today only 26% of faculties of education across Canada offer undergraduate courses with international titles in their course list (University of Manitoba is one of them) and even fewer offer international practicum experiences. This is despite the fact that there are already over 100 Canadian affiliated international schools abroad seeking Canadian educated teachers in addition to local schools, students, and communities which could benefit from the international experiences of TCs.

Although experiences vary based on TCs, programs, and host schools and communities, some general trends regarding TCs crossing borders emerge in the literature.

Key Points From the Literature:

- International practicum experiences during teacher training provide TCs with a competitive advantage which they can use to help them acquire teaching positions after graduation (Willard-Holt, 2001; Kissock & Richardson, 2010).
- TCs carry the benefits of their experiences abroad with them into their professional work upon graduation, benefitting the schools and communities in which they teach (Wong, 2013).
- TCs' professional **knowledge** develops in terms of how students learn and the range of learning styles, their professional **practice** develops in terms of "planning, assessing and reporting, in classroom communication and teaching strategies, in fostering engagement and learning, and in classroom management" (p.65), and their professional **commitment** develops in terms of autonomy, self-reflection and confidence (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013).
- International experiences broaden TCs' abilities to meet the needs of diverse learners and deepen their appreciation for and understanding of the diverse backgrounds students they teach upon return come from (Willard-Holt, 2001; Zhao, Meyers and Meyers, 2009; McGaha and Linder, 2012; Sharma, Rahatzad & Phillion, 2013). Some have even found an increased ability among TCs to "discern between cultural attributes and learning disabilities" (Malewski & Phillion, 2009, p.57) after a practicum abroad.
- TCs report improved knowledge, curriculum use, and pedagogical skills, and a stronger commitment to lifelong learning and personal and professional growth as a result of international practicum placements (Lupi & Turner, 2013; Willard-Holt, 2001; Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Zhao, Meyers and Meyers, 2009)
- When designed effectively, international placements can provide equal or superior learning to domestic ones and foster a "deeper reflective connection" for TCs with regards to pedagogy and their personal and professional selves, encouraging TCs "to question assumptions about curriculum, learning and learners themselves" (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; Willard-Holt, 2001; Chinnappan, McKenzie, & Fitzsimmons, 2013; Hepple, 2012; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009)
- Banks (2001) argues that we need a more international perspective on citizenship among TCs in order to counteract assimilationist tendencies in citizenship education. International experiences help provide

this perspective by making TCs more globally aware and able to pass on this awareness to their own students (Willard-Holt, 2001; Ozek, 2009; McGaha and Linder, 2012).

- Most TCs with an interest in teaching abroad plan to go temporarily rather than permanently and worry about how an extended break from a local teaching job might impact their career path (Widegren & Doherty, 2010). International experiences during teaching training allow TCs to gain the benefits of going abroad without risk to their local careers.

Recommendations:

- Structuring international practicum experiences in a way that matches the practicum experience at home (faculty advisor, classroom observations, performance expectations) (Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009)
- Assigning faculty advisors to provide guidance for TCs **before** through pre-departure seminars, **during** through weekly meetings to deal with issues as they arise, and **after** with follow-up group sessions to help make sense of and reflect on the implications of TCs' experiences (Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009; Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009)
- Providing pre-departure seminars which cover procedural, cultural, structural, and social aspects of the practicum, promote openness to new experiences, and explore culturally responsive pedagogy. These seminars maximize program benefits and provide TCs with an opportunity to get to know and build trust among one another prior to departure. (Chinnappan, McKenzie, & Fitzsimmons, 2013; Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2007; Brindley, Quinn & Morton, 2009; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009).
- Structuring opportunities for reflection pre-, during, and post- international experience which include discussions on integrating old and new knowledge, connecting TCs' experiences with pedagogical learning, and building awareness of their positionality in terms of social, cultural and political contexts (Wong, 2013; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Malewski & Phillion, 2009).
- The positive effects of international experiences are stronger when participants have closer ties with locals so it is important that initiatives which foster international experiences for TCs are structured in a way that allows for such close ties to be formed (McKenzie and Fitzsimmons, 2010; Barkhuizen and Feryok, 2007; Zhao, Meyers and Meyers, 2009).
- Working towards global standards of teacher education in order to account for the increasingly "cosmopolitan, transcultural contexts for teachers' work" and since most teacher education standards are universally applicable, and focusing training on "transportable, transferable professional skills and adaptable knowledge". This can be done in part through increased emphasis on comparative education and linking educational practices to the places in which teachers teach (Widegren & Doherty, 2010, p.20; Chinnappan, McKenzie, & Fitzsimmons, 2013; Kossock and Richardson, 2010).
- Savva (2013) argues that provincial education departments should use some professional development funding to support international teacher experiences because of the tremendous benefits which can be gained from such experiences by the home community.

Some of the international practicum programs for TCs studied include:

University of Wollongong:

<http://socialsciences.uow.edu.au/education/proExperience/overseas/UOW075113.html>

Educators Abroad: <http://www.eltap.org/>

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