



Received: 26 September 2016
Accepted: 21 November 2016
Published: 26 December 2016

*Corresponding author: Matthew Winslade, School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, Allen House, Building 1431, Bathurst, New South Wales 2795, Australia
E-mail: mwinslade@csu.edu.au

Reviewing editor:
Mark Boylan, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

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TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Can an international field experience assist Health and Physical Education pre-service teachers to develop cultural competency?

Matthew Winslade^{1*}

Abstract: An emerging focus of teacher education courses within countries such as Australia centres on the development of cultural competency. An international practicum experience or student mobility programme embedded within pre-service teacher education programmes is one way to provide such an opportunity. In subject areas such as Health and Physical Education (HPE) this is of particular relevance given the nature of teachable subject content relating to the impact of culture on the lives of young people in contemporary societies. This article examines the perceived value of an international sports-based field experience in assisting to develop HPE pre-service teachers' cultural competency. In partnership with the Pacific in Union (PiU) Rugby for Schools initiative, 12 HPE pre-service teachers from an Australian regional university were linked with local schools in Western Samoa and required to facilitate a three-week sports-based, health and physical activity programme. The programme is referred to as the Samoa Sports Outreach Programme (SSOP). This qualitative study utilised the cultural competence model inclusive of knowledge, values and skills to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers in relation to their involvement in the SSOP. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Findings indicated that the international field experience provided positive support towards HPE pre-service teachers' development of cultural competence,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Winslade is a Health and Physical Education (HPE) lecturer in Charles Sturt University. Matthew's doctoral research examined the changing nature of Personal Development, HPE in NSW secondary schools, through a qualitative framework. Matthew's research into inter-cultural competency involves working closely with community groups and sporting organisations at both school and university level in Australia and overseas.

Matthew has previously worked with the Black Dog Institute and the Caner Council to implement and evaluate a school-based health programme evaluations. Matthew has a strong educational background with nearly 20 years classroom experience in HPE prior to moving into the tertiary sector in both the state and Independent school systems. Matthew's industry experience in schools provides a strong link between evaluation-based research teams and school communities.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Recently there has been a growing emphasis within universities to graduate student-teachers who are more culturally competent. One of the ways promoted as a means to achieve this is through the provision of international field experiences. The idea behind these experiences is to take student-teachers outside of their familiar surroundings by immersing them in a school in another culture. This paper examines the perceptions of a group of Australian student-teachers who took part in such an experience in Samoa, based on data gathered through interviews. It was found that the student-teachers perceived that the experience increased their understanding of cultural awareness and assisted them to develop a range of skills in working with people from other cultures. Exploration of ways to work effectively across cultures can help universities to assist future teachers to engage with the development of cultural competency.

increased students' awareness of cultural beliefs and values outside of their individual belief system and assisted students to develop a repertoire of skills needed to work more effectively as professionals in transcultural contexts.

Subjects: Sports and Leisure; Education; Cultural Studies

Keywords: health; physical education; teacher education; qualitative research; cultural competency; student mobility; sport

1. Introduction

Professional standards set by the national governing body the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) requires graduate teachers to be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture and cultural identity on the education of students (AITSL, 2012). This development has led to the elevation of cultural competence as an integral component of exit requirements for pre-service teaching students from Australian universities (MCEECTYA, 2011; Perso, 2012).

At present, Australian teacher education courses do not have a commonly accepted pedagogical framework to develop their pre-service teachers' cultural competence with Universities Australia (2011) noting that a best practice model is yet to emerge. Whilst there are a number of examples of programmes in practice that include provision of standalone foundation units, the integration of cultural competency across a series of course units in a particular course of study and the provision of workshops, Campinha-Bacote (2006) asserts that there is insufficient current evidence to support the effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies for competence training in universities. However, Nakata (2007) argues that programme which provide *cultural interface* allow for greater understandings to be developed. The experience of cultural immersion has been acknowledged as an approach to building cultural competence (Grote, 2008). Whilst it is not a new concept, one method identified as a way of introducing students to cultural immersion is through the embedding of an international field or cross-cultural experience in a pre-service programme (Battersby, 2002; Colling & Wilson, 1998; Ekstrom & Sigurdsson, 2002; Harrison & Malone, 2004; Lee, 2011; Rapoport, 2008; Suttichujit, 2009; Webber, 2005; Willard-Holt, 2001).

Whilst literature exists to support the need for the development of pre-service teachers' cultural competency (Perso, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009) there is little literature available on how to specifically assist pre-service teachers to engage with and develop these competencies and ensure that they align with AITSL requirements. Furthermore, there appears to be little, if any in regards to individual Key Learning Areas (KLAs) in Australia such as Health and Physical Education (HPE).¹ This lack of research and literature in relation to HPE is significant given the importance cultural influences play within the underlying principles supporting the KLA. This is particularly true when examining the New South Wales (NSW) HPE curriculum, referred to as Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE). The need for culturally aware and competent HPE teachers is highlighted through the Rationale supporting the design and delivery of the current NSW years 7–10 syllabus document. The New South Wales Board of Studies (NSWBoS)² (2003) states that “the syllabus reflects the multidimensional nature of health and physical activity in the context of a diverse and changing society” (p. 9) and that “young people are a diverse group and their ability to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle is influenced by the social and cultural contexts within which they live” (p. 10). Furthermore, one of the fundamental outcomes identified in the syllabus document is that HPE provides students with the opportunity to explore the relationship between culture and the formation of identity in order to develop an appreciation of cultural diversity and the rights and dignity of people from different cultural backgrounds (NSW Board of studies, 2003). The document further states that “the PDHPE years 7–10 syllabus incorporates knowledge, understanding, skills and values relating to cultural diversity, social justice, discrimination, racism, prejudice and the health of specific populations. It specifically emphasises the influence of culture on adolescent health” (NSWBoS, 2003).

Given the emphasis on the role and need for awareness of culture as evidenced in the NSW PDHPE syllabus document, the need for HPE pre-service teachers to engage with and begin the process of developing cultural competence at university becomes apparent. Therefore, this paper examines the perceptions of a sample of pre-service HPE teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education course at an Australian regional university (RU) undertaking an international sport-based cultural immersion experience (under the umbrella of the university student mobility programme), referred to as the Samoa Sports Outreach Programme (SSOP). As such, the paper focuses on the perceived impact of the programme in terms of engaging pre-service HPE teachers with the process of developing cultural competency.

1.1. The need for cultural competence in pre-service teacher education

Ranzijn, McConnochie, and Nolan (2009), proffer that the development of cultural competency is essential for professionals to work effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Whilst Campinha-Bacote (2006) believes that the development of cultural competence should be thought of as an ongoing process that develops throughout an individual's professional career. Therefore, the development of cultural competency within pre-service teacher education courses is critical. Universities have a responsibility to assist pre-service teachers in the long-term process of becoming culturally competent in order to enable them to effectively work with students from diverse backgrounds. Investigations into pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding of cultural competence have identified that many pre-service teachers felt that they were inadequately prepared to embed culturally responsible pedagogy into their teaching (Hart, Whatman, McLaughlin, & Sharma-Brymer, 2012; Thomas & Kearney, 2008). Conversely pre-service teachers who had been exposed to or had received any type of training in relation to cultural competence were far more confident than those who had not. Reid and Sriprakash (2012) argue that the inclusion of programmes within teacher education courses focusing on culture and diversity can offer significant value to the professional development of pre-service teachers.

Perso (2012) proffers that in order for graduate teachers to successfully meet the cultural competency requirements as set by AITSL that knowledge alone is insufficient but being able to demonstrate that knowledge through actions and behaviours that are culturally responsive is the key (p. 11). In order to be able to demonstrate knowledge through actions and behaviours, pre-service teachers require experiences integrated within pre-service training that can be considered authentic (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The integration of authenticity both in terms of practical opportunities, and as a means of assessment, provides an opportunity for students to practice and develop a repertoire of skills required to assist in developing cultural competency. Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner (2004) suggest that incorporating authenticity within learning experiences directly engages the student with functioning knowledge in its context. Biggs and Tang (2011) further note that to be considered authentic there needs to be an active demonstration, requiring students to do more than just explain *what* they know and that knowledge must be put into a context that is authentic to real life allowing students to focus on the *how* and *why*. This aligns with Perso's (2012) assertions that in order to meet professional standards, graduate teachers need to be provided with opportunities to allow them to firstly develop and then demonstrate their level of knowledge and understanding of cultural competence.

1.2. The value of international placements in developing cultural competence

As previously identified, cultural immersion in the form of an international (cross cultural) experience has been identified as a way to engage pre-service students with the process of building cultural competence (Colling & Wilson, 1998; Harrison & Malone, 2004; Lee, 2004, 2011; Suttichujit, 2009). A significant benefit for students participating in international experiences is highlighted by Harrison and Malone (2004), who argue that there are enhanced levels of understanding that result from first hand exposure in the field to issues in trans-cultural settings that may not necessarily be gained from theory alone. Whilst Webber (2005) suggests that international placements afford students with the opportunity to learn through experience to be able to work effectively with other cultural groups. The concept of visiting, working and living in another country provides students with

an authentic opportunity to examine their own belief and value systems and to gain new perspectives that they can use to enhance their own practice. Researchers such as Hart and Moore (2005) and Ranzijn, McConnochie, Nolan and Day (2007) believe that through cultural immersion opportunities, the opportunity exists to challenge students established understandings about culture and identity in order to enhance more inclusive alternatives in practice. Whilst Lee (2004) found that international experiences provide students with the opportunity to test out their independence and enhance their self-confidence. Furthering this notion Ekstrom and Sigurdsson (2002) assert that participation in international experiences encourages students to view their profession from a different perspective, which they believe can lead to an exchange of ideas and revision rather than blind acceptance of tradition.

The concept of authentic or work-based learning inclusive of such aspects as international and cross-cultural placements has been criticised in the past in relation to its level of effectiveness. This criticism has centred on a number of academic and procedural issues. Issues identified include the lack of appropriate assessment criteria and the ability to provide useful and meaningful feedback, leading to a perceived lack of achievement amongst students and therefore a sense of a squandered opportunity. In order to overcome these issues, Webber (2005) reasons that to conduct an effective programme there needs to be clear guidelines specifying learning outcomes, effective documentation and well-resourced and effective support mechanisms in place. Webber (2005) further argues that an issue for such programmes is a lack of integration between the theory taught at university and what is needed in the workplace setting.

Whilst studies such as Battersby (2002) found that students enhanced their ability in a cross-cultural setting as a result of immersion in a given culture, Webber (2005) proffers that immersion alone does not ensure learning. Further Webber (2005) argues that those programmes such as international placements can be a missed opportunity if effective planning and processes are ignored. A fundamental aim of international placements is to provide students with the opportunity to gain authentic experiences to enhance their ability to work effectively with other cultural groups (McKenzie & Fitzsimmons, 2010; Webber, 2005; Willard-Holt, 2001). Therefore, it is important that students are not merely placed in a foreign country and expected to learn through osmosis (Webber, 2005). RU in recognition of its need to provide students with opportunities to develop cultural competency through such means as the exposure to international experiences created a series of short-term student mobility programmes. In order to address criticism that has been raised in regard to work-placed learning and international placements, RU has undertaken to provide appropriate training and resources for both the students and supervising academic staff undertaking the programme. The aim of this training is to integrate university theory and the realities of authentic work-based requirements.

1.3. Culture, competence and cultural competence

There are numerous definitions of cultural competence, however there is general acceptance of the seminal definition proposed by Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989):

Cultural and linguistic competence is a set of congruent behaviours, knowledge, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. "culture" refers to integrated patterns of human behaviour that include language, thoughts, actions, customs, beliefs, and institutions of racial, ethnic, social, or religious groups. "Competence" implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual or an organization within the contexts of the cultural beliefs, practices, and needs presented by patients and their communities. (p. 1)

Cross et al.'s seminal definition developed to inform the field of health education has led to a number of more contemporary understandings of cultural competence as fields such as teacher education have moved to adopt the concept. Universities Australia (2011) building on Cross et al. define the concept of professional cultural competence with a focus on the knowledge, skills, values and

attributes of the professional. Universities Australia assert that cultural competencies as with other competencies can be considered a measurable human capability that involves knowledge, values and skills which are assembled in work performance. Furthermore, a number of key elements that impact on a professionals effectiveness are identified by Universities Australia including:

- knowledge of other cultures;
- personal qualities of openness, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity and a sense of humour;
- behavioural skills, such as communication competencies, culturally appropriate role behaviour and ability to relate well to others;
- self-awareness, especially with respect to one's own values and beliefs; and
- technical skills, including ability to complete a task in a new cultural setting (p. 43).

The definition of cultural competence as provided by Cross et al. (1989) and the concept of cultural competence as it relates to the professional context adopted by Universities Australia reflective of the elements of knowledge, values and skills as measurable capabilities provide the understanding that informs this study.

1.4. Knowledge, values and skills

Literature suggests that most models of cultural competence align with qualities that lie within the components of knowledge (also referred to as understanding), values (also referred to as attitudes) and skills (Cross et al., 1989; Martin & Vaughn, 2007; Ranzijn et al., 2009; Universities Australia, 2011; Weaver, 1999).

The three critical elements knowledge, values and skills are interactive and all are required for appropriate cultural competence development and practice to occur (Grote, 2008; Perso, 2012; Wells, 2000).

In relation to cultural competence, *knowledge* signifies a “broad or generic understanding of the nature of worldviews and culture, and the implications of culture for understanding human behavior” (Ranzijn et al., 2009, p. 5). In the context of this study, developing knowledge in relation to cultural, historical and contemporary experiences associated with international placements assists pre-service teachers to acquire an understanding and recognition or appreciation of diverse students’ ways of learning and how it is possible to incorporate these perspectives into the learning environment. Knowledge provides a foundation on which pre-service teachers can begin to shape effective culturally competent practice and continuously develop throughout the remainder of their teaching career (Campinha-Bacote, 2006). As such it can be argued that knowledge is essential if pre-service teachers are to identify and cater for culturally diverse student populations. The notion of *values* is one that requires pre-service teachers to engage in critical reflection of their own personal values, attitudes and beliefs. This is important for pre-service teachers in order to understand and respect that their future students may have differing cultural values and therefore recognise that it is important not to use their own values to judge or compare student behaviour (Ranzijn et al., 2009). Building on the concepts of knowledge and values, *skills* enables the practitioner, in this case the pre-service teacher, to successfully develop and implement appropriate pedagogical practices allowing them to engage effectively in a trans-cultural context (Ranzijn et al., 2009).

Building on the definition of cultural competence as proposed by Cross et al. (1989) and the elements of knowledge, values and skills, Wells (2000) proposed a model that allows for the development of cultural competence to be traced. As an individual moves towards the development of cultural competence towards the process of becoming culturally proficient they progress through the following stages:

- (i) Cultural incompetence;
- (ii) Cultural knowledge;
- (iii) Cultural awareness;
- (iv) Cultural sensitivity;
- (v) Cultural competence; and
- (vi) Cultural proficiency.

1.5. Regional university (RU)

RU is a multi-campus Australian tertiary institution catering predominantly for domestic students. While a significant portion of rural students are enrolled, there are less than four per cent of students identifying as being either Indigenous or from non-English speaking backgrounds. This statistical profile leads to what can be described as a homogenous student population, particularly in courses such as the Bachelor of Education (Health and Physical Education) degree. This homogenous profile highlights the need to develop opportunities for students to experience situations that challenge their individual values and belief systems in order to be effective in working with students with diverse cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, RU identified a need to increase authentic opportunities that assist students to develop cultural competence and help pre-service teachers work with students and communities in a culturally responsible manner through the creation of a number of short-term international field experience programmes referred to as student mobility programmes.

Research questions

- (1) Can an international field experience assist pre-service HPE teachers to engage with the process of developing cultural competence?
- (2) Did the completion of the SSOP enhance HPE pre-service teacher understanding and awareness of cultural competency?

2. Method

The following section provides details about the study setting, participants, an overview of the data collection and conceptual framework utilised for analysis. Ethics approval was obtained through the Charles Sturt University, School of Teacher Education ethics committee to undertake this research and participants provided informed consent to take part.

2.1. Setting

2.1.1. The Samoa Sports Outreach Programme

An important aspect of RU student mobility programmes is the development of partnerships with local stakeholders in the region of the placement. As such, in order to implement the SSOP, a partnership was developed through the Pacific in Union (PiU) Rugby4schools programme, facilitated by the Australian Rugby Union (ARU), the Samoan Rugby Union (SRU) and the Samoan Ministry for Education, Sport and Culture (MESC).

As an international practicum experience, the SSOP was created to provide a supportive environment to assist RU, HPE pre-service teachers to develop competence in a number of areas including cultural competence. As part of the international experience, HPE pre-service teachers were assigned to a local partnership school in Western Samoa and were required to facilitate and teach a short-term sport focused health and physical activity programme. The programme supports the delivery of both classroom-based theory activities aligned with practical workshops aimed at increasing both structured physical activity and understandings of health issues such as the impact of nutrition on the body. Pre-service teachers, were provided with a series of scaffolded outlines designed to be adapted to suit the needs of individual schools. The scaffolds were designed and created in collaboration with various stakeholders involved in the PiU in order to provide both support and direction for pre-service teachers.

The SSOP aligns with the PIU sports partnership developed in conjunction with the ARU and the Australian Sports Commission. Pre-service teachers were hosted in the village of the school they had been assigned to by the SRU with the assistance of the Samoan MESC for the duration of their exchange. This strategy was designed to allow for cultural immersion by living and working in the village environment and associated school. Pre-service teachers undertaking the programme were also required to enrol in and complete the subject *International Culture and Education*. A significant aspect of this integrated subject is the engagement with the concept of critical reflection which has been incorporated into assessment requirements. Accompanying RU academic staff members also receive training in this area and a formal aspect of the supervision process is the facilitation of critical reflection during and post placement. Each programme includes a further support mechanism in terms of a country-specific orientation prior to departure. For the SSOP, this involved an engagement officer from the SRU who visited the student's home campus to deliver a series of cultural awareness activities and workshops. Students also received both practical sport-specific training from ARU development officers and culturally responsive classroom-based lesson preparation from representatives of the PiU.

2.1.2. *The Pacific in Union (PiU) Rugby4schools programme*

The PiU programme is a part of the Pacific Sports Partnership; an Australian Government initiative which uses sport as a vehicle to achieve social development outcomes in Pacific Island countries and is part of a broader joint initiative between AusAID and the Australian Sports Commission. This initiative is badged the *Australian Sports Outreach Programme*.

The PiU programme was developed to align with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, inclusive of achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, developing global partnerships for development and combating disease (Australian Rugby Union, 2013). The objectives of the PiU programme aim to develop local partnerships utilising sport as a catalyst to promote and enhance positive social values and healthy lifestyles, through contributing to social development outcomes, increasing participation in physical activity and developing the capacity of locals. A school-based initiative known as *Rugby4schools* forms a significant aspect of the PiU programme in Samoa and consists of sport-themed units of work utilising cross-curricula classroom-based lesson plans that focus on health promotion. In addition, there are practical lesson plans designed to increase physical participation and promote healthy lifestyles for all students. Where possible, the programme culminates in a number of community-based rugby festivals, allowing students to share their learning with the wider community.

RU joined the PiU as an educational partner in order to provide students with the opportunity to undertake international professional experiences. The partnership was established to assist with the initial delivery of the *Rugby4schools* programme throughout Samoa. Third-year HPE pre-service teachers were recruited and provided with training by the ARU to adapt and implement the *Rugby4schools* curriculum resource in schools and provide feedback in regards to the appropriateness of the resource's content and delivery. The pre-service teachers involved in the SSOP worked closely with SRU staff and in partnership with teachers in each of the local schools. A significant aspect of the programme was the requirement that pre-service teachers lived in the village where schools were located, thus immersing themselves in the day-to-day cultural aspects of the community.

2.1.3. *Participants*

The participant sample included 12 male pre-service RU HPE teachers engaged in the SSOP. The sample represented the entire number of pre-service teachers undertaking the SSOP. As such the participants were purposively sampled as having undertaken international placement was central to this study. Participation in the study was offered as a voluntary activity post-completion of the placement and not connected to successful completion of the programme. All 12 students engaged in the programme consented to be interviewed for the study.

2.1.4. Data collection and analysis

A semi-structured interview design was utilised allowing for in-depth investigation of the participant's perceived realities and for further probing of responses as and when needed to explore emergent themes (Berg, 2009; Burns, 2000; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Participants were asked a range of questions to ascertain how the SSOP impacted on their perspectives of and engagement with the development of cultural competence. This method was utilised to determine pre-service teachers' knowledge, values and skills in regard to the use and identification of culturally responsible pedagogies and strategies. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and coded into emergent themes with participants being assigned a pseudonym during the transcription process. Emergent themes were then analysed in relation to perceived understandings and perceptions of impact relating to knowledge, values and skills resulting from engagement in the SSOP international experience. Results were then compared against Wells (2000) model to identify any potential development of or engagement with participant's development of cultural competency.

This study implemented Yin's (2011) thematic approach to analysing qualitative data. Yin's (2011) five-phase approach was applied in a cyclical manner: compiling, disassembly, reassembly and interpretation of data and the drawing of conclusions. This method allowed organisation and coding of the data to identify patterns, themes, similarities and differences evolving from the data. Initially, interview transcripts were individually analysed in order to allow coding to occur by identifying key words, phrases or themes to detect and classify key ideas. These patterns and themes were then checked in an iterative cycle of continually examining the data against emergent categories to ensure consistency and credibility. The disassembly phase involved the identification of individual meaning statements consisting of smaller segments of data such as individual phrases or sentences allowing for further coding and analysis. Again this was an iterative process to ensure consistency with the original responses and to ensure saturation. During reassembly (axial coding), coded groups were reorganised by categories to relate to each other in an analytical way, in the process assisting codes to become provision answers to research questions and as such add to integrity. From the coded data, it became apparent whether assigned themes were appropriate or not and refinement occurred. Final themes were specific enough not to be repetitive and broad enough to encapsulate ideas contained in numerous text segments. A cross-case content analysis was conducted in which connections between different data sources relating to a particular theme were identified.

2.1.5. Conceptual framework: Cultural competence

For the purpose of this research, the conceptual framework used to analyse the SSOP interview data was the conceptual model of cultural competence comprising (i) knowledge, (ii) values/attitudes and (iii) skills (Cross et al., 1989; Universities Australia, 2011; Wells, 2000). For pre-service teachers to develop cultural competence requires the progression through each element of the cultural competence framework from the acquisition of knowledge through to utilisation of skills. As such, Wells's (2000) model of cultural competency provided a framework to indicate potential engagement with and development of cultural competence resulting from involvement in the SSOP. A case study approach was adopted as the methodology for this research (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2011). The research utilises the SSOP as a case to investigate the perceived impact of the international experience on purposively selected pre-service HPE teachers.

3. Results and discussion

Application of Yin's (2011) approach resulted in the identification of four major themes, aligning with the elements of cultural competency (knowledge, values/attitudes and skills) evident in pre-service teacher reflections. These themes were identified as:

- (1) Understanding cultural competence and the awareness of other people and cultures (knowledge);
- (2) Personal and professional growth, (values/attitudes);
- (3) An increased repertoire of culturally responsible teaching practices (skills); and
- (4) The identification of challenges such as culture shock

3.1. Knowledge: Understanding cultural competence and the awareness of other people and cultures

A key focus of engaging pre-service RU HPE pre-service teachers in the SSOP programme was to provide an opportunity to assist with the engagement and development of cultural competence. Building cultural competence requires individuals to develop the capacity to interact effectively with people from a diverse variety of cultural backgrounds (Rapoport, 2008; Wiseman, 2002). After completion of the SSOP, participants were asked to share their understandings of the concept of cultural competence and cultural awareness. Whilst participants described their understanding of cultural competence in a variety of ways, there was a common understanding that diversity was a key concept and that to be able to operate effectively as a teacher they had to not only acknowledge differences within their students but also how this might impact on their practice. For example, Participant 5 recognised a need for the awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity in order to be able to remove differences as a potential barrier to effective practice:

Being aware of other cultures and being able to work, regardless of different religions or skin colour, gender and of not really having the barriers that different cultures can put between people

The above response highlights a link between increased awareness of cultural differences and the ability to enact what Ranzijn, Nolan, and McConnochie (2008) refer to as culturally responsible practice. The ability to recognise the link between awareness and practice provides evidence of both knowledge of and valuing the place of cultural competence in order to function effectively as a professional (Bennet, 2007; Wiseman, 2002). Building on this, participants also made reference to changes in their perception of culture resulting from being involved in the immersion experience. The majority of participants (10 of 12) expressed an increased awareness of culture, diversity and the need to consider the significance of the impact this has on practice and the ability to interact effectively as teachers. For example Participant 7 highlighted that:

Going over to Samoa; it opens up your eyes. Understanding the different cultures that are out there, before I went away I'd done practicums in country (NSW) areas and there was not a lot of cultural diversity, but after going away I have got more of a grasp on the fact that throughout my career I'm going to be teaching people from all different walks of life ... It's how you perceive culture and community and what their norms and values within society are and how that changes from your own background.

The above quote highlights a recognition that different communities experience different social norms and values and that the participants own background is just one version providing evidence the SSOP had effectively engaged pre-service teachers with the development of cultural competence through the recognition of the impact that culture can have on behaviour (Bennet, 2007; Wells, 2000).

Additionally Participant 9 provided evidence that the way they as an individual perceived cultural competence changed as a result of the SSOP. Their response indicated they had shifted to a more in-depth understanding of how they as a teacher need to consider the cultural diversity of their students in order to increase effectiveness:

I think it changed a bit as we were there. I remember the first day and I just thought it might be being competent, basically what it says, being competent in the culture and being able to you know, teach, and live and work in that culture. As it went on, I think I developed a better understanding of it. The whole thing of teaching students that are from a different background and understanding that they don't come from the same background as me. Their whole life, it's different ... So we had to work together.

Participant 9's understanding provides evidence of a shift towards the concept of cultural awareness according to Well's continuum. Participants' quotes reveal that for pre-service teachers who took part in the SSOP there is evidence of an increased awareness of culture as it relates to their idea of professional practice and the impact that culture can have on behaviour (Martin & Vaughn, 2007). The quotes also provide evidence of participants being able to critically reflect and express an increased awareness other people and cultures outside of the own personal circumstances (Ranzijn et al., 2009). This increased awareness amongst the HPE pre-service teachers engaged in the programme aligns with both Battersby (2002) notion that immersion programmes have the ability to enhance understanding and Harrison and Malone's (2004) belief that short-term international programmes can successfully provide the opportunity for students to examine their own belief and value systems in order to gain new perspectives.

3.2. Values/attitudes: Personal and professional growth

A key element to the SSOP was to provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to experience cultural immersion through teaching in an authentic trans-cultural setting. By experiencing what it is like to live and work in another culture, the SSOP afforded participants the chance to examine their own belief and value systems (Battersby, 2002, Colling & Wilson, 1998; Harrison & Malone, 2004; Suttichujit, 2009; Webber, 2005). In line with Ekstrom and Sigurdsson's (2002), assertions regarding the way students view their profession and the ability of international experiences to challenge perceptions, pre-service teachers provided positive responses in terms of both personal and professional growth as a result of the experience:

Growing up in a town in far west New South Wales, I haven't seen a lot of this at all ... broadened my view on pretty much the world. I didn't know, I'd never dealt with anything, any other different cultures ... It's really enhanced my knowledge and my outlook on life on who I am going to deal with. Not just as a teacher but a person individually (Participant 10).

I'm more tolerant, (like) I understand things a lot better (Participant 11).

I'd say this has been a massive eye opener, to really take yourself out of your comfort zone and putting yourself in someone else's life and experiencing really something completely different that you'd never expect to experience before and it's the most rewarding thing you'd ever do (Participant 4).

Pre-service teachers' responses in regards to growth support Lee's (2004) research findings that international experiences provide students with the opportunity to test out their independence and enhance their self-confidence. The findings of this study align with Lee's assertions and demonstrate that a level of personal growth complementing and contributing to professional growth occurred as a result of participating in the SSOP. The ability to demonstrate growth as evidenced through participants increased confidence and engagement with culturally responsible teaching practices is a key measure of the perceived success of the SSOP. The findings of this study are significant given that researchers such as Byram, Nichols, and Davis (2001) assert that attitude is an integral component of cultural and intercultural competence. This study aligns with previous studies such as Wilson (1986) and Hahn (2001) who found that experiences that promoted increased interaction of educators with other cultures led to higher levels of respect of other cultures and increased levels of productivity in terms of developing effective communication in teaching practices.

3.3. Skills: Increased repertoire of culturally responsible teaching practices

Ranzijn et al. (2009) contend that increased cultural knowledge and awareness, is closely linked with the notion of culturally responsible pedagogy and is essential in the development of cultural competency. A significant aspect of international practicums is the opportunity to experience new perspectives and to enhance practice and understanding in the process of developing culturally responsible pedagogy and skills. For example, a trans-cultural setting provides students with the opportunity to gain proficiency in a second language or as it pertains to this study to develop strategies to successfully overcome barriers such as language (Harrison & Malone, 2004; Lee, 2011; Rapoport, 2008). The

ability to develop effective strategies to overcome potential barriers was an area identified by participants as central to their perceived success as a participant in the SSOP. Participant responses indicated recognition of potential barriers related to cultural differences such as language and perceived understandings. Participants provided evidence of how this recognition can be incorporated into the development of teaching strategies to provide them with a more informed culturally responsible approach towards their teaching practice:

In the classroom, teaching kids that don't speak English or could barely understand me, we had to work together, sometimes it was with another teacher, sometimes it was students. You can't just talk to them or instruct them like you would here. You have to understand their culture and adapt your way of thinking (Participant 2).

Teaching in a whole new culture, I have had to think on my feet and develop different strategies. I think I have enhanced my ability to be able to teach different cultures in the classroom using the strategies I used in Samoa (Participant 3).

My communication skills with younger students have improved so much from the trip, understanding differences (cultures) I got more of an understanding for what's going on and treat them accordingly (Participant 6).

Pre-service teachers' indicated that despite issues and barriers such as language there was a perceived improvement in their level of communication skills. This improvement was closely linked to an increase in confidence and the perceived ability to be able to successfully implement alternative methods of communication. This finding is important as researchers such as Rapoport (2008) and Zsiray, Parsegova, and Eltseva (2001) proffer that the development of successful intercultural communication is an important aspect in the perceived success or failure of any international programme.

Participants indicated that an important aspect of the programme was their increased awareness of the needs and learning styles of their students and the significance these aspects held in regards to the success of their teaching strategies. The findings of this study align with both Harrison and Malone (2004) and Lee (2011) who reported similar results with pre-service nursing students participating in international programmes. As with this study they found that despite perceived barriers resulting from issues such as language constraints, students responded positively and noted improvements with regards to skills, in particular effective communication strategies.

The findings of this study are significant in light of the exit requirements for Australian pre-service teachers in regards to cultural competence. There is an expectation that in order to become graduate teachers individuals need to be able to articulate their understanding of cultural competence through the demonstration of culturally responsible skills. Programmes such as the SSOP provide opportunities for these skills to be successfully developed and refined (MCEECTYA, 2011; Perso, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009).

3.4. Challenge—the concept of culture shock

A substantial challenge identified by the pre-service teachers involved in the SSOP relates to the concept of culture shock. Culture shock results when an individual is immersed in another culture and is confronted with differences to their personal routine and living conditions such as food, climate, language and social etiquette, religious and ethical belief systems (Colling & Wilson, 1998). As such, culture shock can lead to levels of discomfort experienced by participants in international programmes and impact on the perceived effectiveness of the placement. Participants in the SSOP indicated this to be true, particularly in the initial stages of the programme. However, once participants experienced culture shock adjustment, the participants began to develop positive attitudes towards their placement and engaged with the process of building cultural competence. This can be seen in the statement made by Participant 8 in regards to the initial stage of their international placement:

At the time, you thought this is hell; I don't know what I'm doing. To work through that really helped; it was a positive in the end.

Without appropriate support in place to assist students to transition through the initial stages of an international placement, it can be seen how criticism towards workplace learning can be validated. The early phase of cultural immersion can be potentially confronting. If a student does not successfully transition or perceives this time as an overwhelming negative experience there is the possibility of non-engagement with cultural competence development (Webber, 2005).

An example of positively engaging with culture shock is described by Participant 5 who indicated that the experience required him to step outside of an established environment (*comfort zone*) built on an existing set of values and beliefs to experience growth. This is an important process in the development of becoming culturally aware and being able to critically reflect on personal values, attitudes and beliefs in order to engage in appropriate cultural competence development (McConnochie, Egege, & McDermott, 2008; Ranzijn et al., 2009; Wells, 2000).

You get put out of your comfort zone but it's in a good way. You're out amongst it; you're really experiencing a different culture and you're in a village, you learn so much and contributing so much, you can really tell kind of after you've finished that you've made a difference with the community and you've learnt so much.

Participant 5 highlights the connection between interacting effectively (as a result of making a perceived contribution) with the community and the concept of professional learning and subsequently individual personal growth (Martin & Vaughn, 2007). Accordingly, it can be argued that for any international placement to assist students to successfully engage with a challenge such as culture shock there needs to be an appropriately scaffolded model in place. The model needs to be integrated in nature so that it provides not only an opportunity to teach or coach in a trans-cultural setting but to also actively engage in learning. This philosophy underpins the design of the SSOP.

4. Conclusion and scope for further research

The research findings indicated that the SSOP generally provided positive support for participant development in terms of cultural competence and the role it plays in practice for HPE pre-service teachers. The findings support previous (Colling & Wilson, 1998; Lee, 2011; Rapoport, 2008) assertions that international experiences can provide a number of benefits for university students. This is of particular relevance to pre-service teaching students such as those preparing for a career in HPE. The findings support the notion that the embedding of an international cultural immersion experience in a pre-service teacher education programme can be a beneficial starting point in regards to developing cultural competence and actively engages students in the process. Aligning with Universities Australia (2011) definition of cultural competence and Wells (2000) model, in a professional context the programme was shown to have led to increased pre-service teacher cultural awareness and respect of cultural beliefs and values outside of their individual belief system. The programme was also shown to have assisted pre-service teachers in terms of confidence and the perceived ability to develop a repertoire of skills needed to work more effectively as a professional in trans-cultural contexts (Hart et al., 2012).

The SSOP provided pre-service RU HPE pre-service teachers with authentic opportunities to experience teaching in a trans-cultural setting and practice designed to facilitate and support the development of cultural competency. Given that there is no commonly accepted framework available to teacher education courses in Australia, the inclusion of such a programme has shown to be an effective catalyst for the process of engaging with and developing cultural competency amongst participants.

The opportunity for students to develop and refine appropriate strategies and skills as they relate to issues of cultural competency appears to be a key focus in terms of student perception in regards to successful participation.

The SSOP as part of the RU student mobility programme was shown to have had a positive impact on pre-service teacher's capacity to engage in critical reflection. This was evidenced through a change in perspective by participants in terms of ability to critically evaluate and adapt practice to include more culturally responsible pedagogy experiencing cultural differences in authentic everyday living situations, participants demonstrated a heightened awareness of people from other cultures and evidence of transition towards what Wells' would classify as cultural sensitivity as a result of their exposure to a trans-cultural setting. Further, participants demonstrated an increased awareness for the need to develop a repertoire of appropriate skills and the capacity to integrate these skills in what they perceived to be a meaningful way.

Whilst there were challenges identified and experienced by the participants, notably culture shock in the initial stages of the program, this has been shown to be an incidental part of an international practicum experience where cultural diversity is present. Participant responses indicated that by negotiating their way through such a challenge the positive outcomes associated with the programme were of benefit to their professional practice. The findings of this research have implications for all pre-service teacher educators and not only those in the HPE field such as the participants in this study. The results confirm that the provision of an immersion experience with noticeable cultural differences that requires pre-service teachers to operate outside of their own familiar surroundings and value systems assists the participants to engage with and develop a better understanding of how cultural competence will impact on their future professional practice.

Importantly, this was a pilot programme and therefore the first for both RU and the respective sporting bodies and educational stakeholders of the SSOP initiative. Considering its perceived level of success in assisting participants to engage with the development of cultural competence, it is envisaged that the programme will continue in the future providing further opportunities for study. Future programmes will include more specific objectives such as the participation of female students and continued development of more refined assessment and reflective activities. Future programmes will also look to engage pre-service teachers from a variety of discipline areas, such as generalist Primary studies.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

Author details

Matthew Winslade¹

E-mail: mwinslade@csu.edu.au

¹ School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, Allen House, Building 1431, Bathurst, New South Wales 2795, Australia.

Citation information

Cite this article as: Can an international field experience assist Health and Physical Education pre-service teachers to develop cultural competency?, Matthew Winslade, *Cogent Education* (2016), 3: 1264172.

Notes

1. Since 1991, the National Key learning Area (KLA) in Australia is referred to as Health and Physical Education (HPE), whilst in the state of New South Wales the KLA is referred to as Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE). Prior to 1991, both KLAs were referred to as Physical Education (PE).
2. In 2014, the NSWBOS was replaced by the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES).

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