

Reflecting on international educative experiences: Developing cultural competence  
in pre-service early childhood educators

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this literature review was to examine existing literature related to international experiences of early childhood pre-service educators. Given the unique opportunity for study abroad as a potential part of the college or university curriculum, the present discussion focuses on the question: what is the relationship between international experiences and pre-service early childhood educators' cultural competence? More specifically, the following sub-questions were examined: 1) How is cultural competence defined across the literature? 2) What theories are applied to understand the effect of international experiences on the cultural competence of pre-service educators? 3) What pedagogical strategies are most frequently applied to develop cultural competence among pre-service educators? 4) What evidence is provided that pre-service educators changed (if at all) as a consequence of international immersion? A systematic literature search was conducted to locate original published studies that reported on the cultural competence of pre-service early childhood educators after international experiences. Detailed analysis of the articles revealed positive outcomes on pre-service educators who engaged in international educative experiences. Pedagogical strategies such as immersion and critical reflection led to pre-service educators' self-reports of gains in personal and professional growth, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence. These findings warrant consideration by higher education, teacher education programs, and practice and research organizations. Further research examining the longevity of impact of international experiences on early childhood educator cultural competence in the classroom is suggested.

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## Chapter 1 - Background of Current Article

Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East between religious and politically motivated groups have resulted in a significant increase in the number of refugees and migrants seeking asylum in neighboring and European countries (UNICEF, 2016a). In 2016, the United States will welcome up to 10,000 Syrian refugees (White House, 2015), in addition to continued immigration from other countries. According to the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), women and children now make up a majority of those displaced, and many of the children are going without schooling (2016a, 2016b). As governments and international partners work to ensure children affected by the conflict gain access to an education, educators must be prepared to welcome into their classroom children from a different environment and culture. These educators must possess the cultural competency needed to interact with and provide the best quality of care for migrant and refugee children.

The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the United States National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) all define "early childhood" as the period of growth and development from birth to age eight (Irwin, L. G., Siddiqi, A., & Hertzman, C., 2007; UNESCO, 2016; NAEYC, 2009b). High-quality care is necessary during these formative early childhood years in order to lay a solid developmental foundation. According to Allen and Kelly (2015) in their publication *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through 8: A Unifying Foundation*, "early experiences and early learning environments affect all domains of human development" - adults who care for children are responsible for understanding this developmental foundation in order to provide a quality child care learning environment (p. 75). Economists such as Bartik (2014) and Heckman (2009, 2015) have also advocated for high quality early childhood care. Bartik (2014) states "children who participate in high-quality early childhood education will tend to have higher earnings as adults, because these programs help unlock the child's potential for skills development" (p. 1). Heckman (2015), a Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics, suggests that investment in "quality early learning and development programs for disadvantaged children can foster valuable skills, strengthen our workforce, grow our economy and reduce social spending." The Heckman Equation outlines how this can be achieved: *investment* in quality early learning and development programs that foster *development* of cognitive and social skills which are *sustained* throughout adult education systems results in

*gains* in productive citizens who will contribute to the economic well-being of society (Heckman, 2009).

Early childhood professionals and organizations have analyzed extensively the roles culture and diversity play in high quality care. Gonzalez-Mena (2005) addressed service providers' direct practices in relation to diverse program populations, including special needs. Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (2010) wrote about providers/educators' need to examine their own beliefs and values first in order to respectfully work with children and families from diverse cultures. Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, and Nimmo (2014) addressed planning and leading anti-bias programs. All emphasize the necessity of being able to interact appropriately and respectfully with a diverse population.

The professional practice organization NAEYC is also an active agent in the promotion of high-quality learning for young children. At the foundation for all of NAEYC's work is the concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): "an approach to teaching grounded in research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education" (NAEYC, 2009a). Research by developmental theorists such as Lev Vygostky and Urie Bronfenbrenner has informed the foundation of DAP.

DAP is a framework created for early childhood educators to best support children's learning and development. The three core considerations of DAP include: 1) knowing child development and learning, 2) knowing what is individually appropriate, and 3) knowing what is culturally appropriate, and being able to apply that knowledge to best practice. The third consideration was added in a mid-1990s revision of the guidelines in order to reflect "the powerful influence of context on all development and learning" (Goldstein, 2008, p. 254). Early childhood educators, then, must incorporate cultural knowledge into their practice.

### **Purpose of Current Review of Literature**

Pre-service early childhood educators are at a formative time in their professional career during which they develop and deepen an understanding of the core considerations of DAP. During their preparation to become members of the workforce, they have the opportunity to explore the tenets of child development and learning and discover how to care for and educate each child as an individual. How can these pre-service educators gain an understanding of what is culturally important, especially if their pre-service experiences are conducted in a homogenous population? Is textbook learning enough? Or is first-hand experience of an unfamiliar culture

necessary to develop cultural competence? Is domestic cultural immersion sufficient or do pre-service teachers need to experience a culture in an international setting?

Given the unique opportunity for study abroad as a potential part of the college or university curriculum, the present discussion focuses on the question: what is the relationship between international experiences and pre-service early childhood educators' cultural competence? More specifically, the following sub-questions were examined: 1) How is cultural competence defined across the literature? 2) What theories are applied to understand the effect of international experiences on the cultural competence of pre-service educators? 3) What pedagogical strategies are most frequently applied to develop cultural competence among pre-service educators? 4) What evidence is provided that pre-service educators changed (if at all) as a consequence of international immersion?

## **Chapter 2 - Methods**

### **Search Strategy**

A systematic literature search was conducted to locate original published studies that reported on the cultural competence of pre-service early childhood educators after international experiences. The search was conducted in the following electronic education-focused databases: ERIC, Education Full Text, and Educators Reference Complete. Related-field databases such as PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, and Anthropology Plus were included.

The following search terms were determined appropriate: “early childhood educators,” “early childhood teachers,” “early childhood,” “international experiences,” “international,” “study abroad,” “cultural competence,” “sensitivity,” “awareness,” “preservice/pre-service/pre service.” Articles not found from the search terms but suggested by the databases were added to the review. After an initial search returned a low number of results, the search was expanded to include a broader range of terms (see appendix A for complete search strategy).

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Articles were included in the review if they met the following criteria: published in English between 2002 and 2016; consisted of original research in a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal; sampled pre-service educators/teachers; and investigated international experiences. No limitations were placed on whether articles included qualitative or quantitative measurements.

The purpose of this review was to examine existing evidence regarding whether or not international educative experiences contributed to cultural competency in early childhood pre-service teachers. International experience/study abroad literature has recently begun to explore outcomes of such experiences on Education majors, yet drawing from the results of the search, at present, few focus exclusively on early childhood pre-service teachers. Instead, researchers sample pre-service teachers preparing to teach one or more age groups. In order to analyze a more robust pool of literature, articles examining pre-service teachers of all age groups were reviewed if they met all other inclusion criteria.

Additionally, few research studies concentrate specifically on the development of cultural competence as a main effect of international experience, even within the broader scope of all pre-service teachers (regardless of age/area of focus). Current research addresses cultural outcomes as a subset of some other phenomenon or process such as an overarching discussion of global competence or personal/professional development. Subsequently, articles were included in the



review if there was any discussion on some aspect of cultural competence and met all other inclusion criteria.

Finally, the 2002-2016 publication date restriction was chosen for this review to reflect the change in perspective, thinking, or framing that relevant research may have taken as a result of the September 11, 2001 attacks by international terrorists in the United States. This event may have resulted in a significant impact on researchers' motivation and approach to studying cultural competence in pre-service educators, as well as pre-service educators' views and understanding of interactions with children and families of cultures different from their own.

The current document is a review of existing literature. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was used to provide an organizational framework to the article selection process. The aim of the PRISMA Statement, which includes a checklist and a flow chart, "is to help authors improve the reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses" (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). Although the current review is not a systematic review or a meta-analysis, the PRISMA flow chart was used to track the article selection process (see appendix B and C).

## Chapter 3 - Results

A total of 2291 records were identified from the database search. An additional 48 records were identified from database suggestions. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened, leaving 1209 records. From these, 39 records were identified as potentially meeting the inclusion criteria. After a detailed assessment of full-text articles, 13 met the criteria for inclusion. Reasons for excluding articles included: not original research and/or in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal (n=6), no sampling of pre-service educators (n=6), and no investigation of cultural competence (n=2). The remaining articles not meeting the inclusion criteria were excluded for more than one reason.

The 13 articles that met the inclusion criteria were published between 2009 and 2015. Two of the thirteen studies sampled only early childhood pre-service teachers while the remaining studies included a combination of early childhood pre-service teachers, pre-service teachers of older children, and other majors. The students were predominately female.

Students' home institutions included U.S., Australian, and Canadian universities. Countries where international experiences took place included Luxembourg, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Costa Rica, Ecuador, England, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa, Scotland, Kenya, China, Ireland, and South Korea.

All studies were qualitative in design. Therefore, data sources for all studies included qualitative measures. These measures included observation and reflection journals and notes, verbal reflections, interviews, e-mail correspondences, web blogs, wiki discussion boards, classroom teaching videotapes, photovoice methodology, collaborative research projects, culminating reflection presentations, reflection papers, researchers' formal and informal classroom observations, researcher journals, and qualitative surveys and questionnaires.

### Cultural Competence Defined

Researchers in these thirteen studies investigated whether any of the following took place during the international experiences:

- change in cross-cultural understanding and perspective consciousness;
- change in sense of identity and perception of other cultural practices and attitudes;
- change in curriculum views/beliefs, worldviews, and sense of personal empowerment;

- and/or increase in cultural or global competence, awareness, or diplomacy.

Regardless of whether or not culture was an explicit focus of the studies, all addressed in some capacity the effect of international experiences on cross-cultural competence, awareness, and understanding.

### **What is Culture?**

Lynch and Hanson (2004) describe culture as “not a rigidly prescribed set of behaviors or characteristics, but rather, a framework through which actions are filtered or checked as individuals go about daily life. These cultural frameworks are constantly evolving and being reworked” (p. 4). Culture frames our daily lives within our overall community and society. Rogoff, Goodman Turkianis, and Bartlett’s (2001) exploration of learning communities finds “community” comprised of relationships based on common endeavors. These relationships are defined by some stability of “cultural practices” (expectations regarding conflict and interpersonal issue management and traditions and celebrations) that go beyond the individual community members. Cultural guidelines within communities are defined as “highly developed internal structure[s] that [are] invisible to the uninitiated, consisting of the philosophy and practices that help participants determine expectations for themselves and others” (Rogoff et al., 2001, p. 49).

Communities span generations. Community members must successfully navigate the transitions between generations in order to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next. The success of these transitions depends on the ability to change while staying true to core values. Therefore, “a community of learners cannot simply involve applying a recipe of techniques to a new collection of people” (Rogoff et al., 2001, p. 10). Individuals within each generation have the responsibility of “inventing and adapting customs and traditions, [and learning] from their efforts to develop the principles and practices for themselves” (Rogoff et al., 2001, p. 10).

Lynch and Hanson (2004) discuss culture in relation to early childhood educators’ direct interaction with children and families. According to the authors, “knowledge and understanding, sensitivity, and respect for [] cultural differences can significantly enhance the effectiveness of service providers in the helping professions” (p. 17). To do this, educators must have cross-cultural competence: “the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and

build on ethnic, [socio-] cultural, and linguistic diversity” (Lynch & Hanson, 1993, as cited in Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 50).

The goals of cross-cultural competency for service providers working with a diverse population are to assist them to 1) feel more comfortable and effective in their interactions and relationships with families whose cultures and life experiences differ from their own, 2) interact in ways that enable families from different cultures and life experiences to feel positive about the interactions and the service providers, and 3) accomplish the goals that each family and service provider establish (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 44). To achieve this, educators must possess cultural sensitivity-recognizing limited knowledge of other cultures, learning the basics of unfamiliar cultures in the educator’s service area, and understanding that cultural differences will affect family involvement and family-educator interactions. Educators must also possess self-awareness – the first step toward cross-cultural competence (Lynch & Hanson, 2004).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

In order to interpret data, authors used theoretical perspectives to frame their research. Authors across all studies consistently drew from transformative learning, reflection, and cultural theories in order to understand the relationship between pre-service educators’ international experiences and personal and professional change, including the development of cultural competence.

#### **Transformative Learning Theories**

Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory was cited as a theoretical framework for four articles. Transformative learning is a process of change through which we create and adapt frames of reference as we make meaning of our experiences (Bonnet, 2015; McCartney & Harris, 2014; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Vatalaro, Szente, & Levin, 2015). Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) describe frames of reference as “structures of assumptions and expectations’ that determine an individual’s perspective and world view; his/her beliefs, values, thinking, and actions” (p. 1142). Two components within frames of reference assist individuals who are faced with a new experience:

Habits of mind comprise a set of abstract codes and values a person gains from their immediate environment. A habit of mind drives a person’s point of view and, thus, their feelings and judgments towards others. Habits of mind tend to remain static, while points of view transform as a person has an experience that does not fit into their previously conceived points of view and is

able to reflect critically on their previous assumptions (Mezirow, 1997, as cited in Vatalaro et al. 2015, p. 44).

When a disorienting situation occurs, frames of reference transform through critical reflection. Critical reflection can lead to changes in assumptions, ideas/habits, beliefs, and experiences. However, transformative learning is best supported in interaction with others along with critical reflection. Through conversation and discussion with others, individuals are better able to analyze their experiences and subsequent reflections and therefore make meaning of those experiences (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Vatalaro et al., 2015).

### **Reflection Theories**

Maynes, Allison, and Julien-Schultz (2012) emphasized the importance of reflection through the theoretical framework of Lee's Levels of Reflection: 1) non-reflection / description (mere recall), 2) descriptive reflection / recall level (an attempt at simple explanation), 3) dialogic reflection / rationalization level (involving exploration of alternative explanations from different perspectives), and 4) critical reflection / reflectivity level (involving a critical analysis that situates reasoning within a broader historical, social, cultural or political context, with a view to changing or improving in the future) (p. 71). Maynes et al. (2012) explain, "the distinction between Lee's (2005) lower levels of reflection and the upper level is that the latter includes reflection that is used as a basis for action, particularly so in the classroom. Therein lies the notion of 'reflective practice'" (p. 71).

### **Cultural Theories**

Hanvey's An Attainable Global Perspective discusses cultural understanding within the dimensions of perspective consciousness, cross-cultural awareness, state of the planet awareness, knowledge of global dynamics, and awareness of human choices (Doppen & An, 2014; Misco & Shiveley, 2014). Central to the An Attainable Global Perspective is the recognition that an individual's beliefs or points of view are not universal. As cultural awareness emerges, individuals become better able to understand cultural similarities and differences. However, "mere contact with members of other cultures is not sufficient for achieving this goal. [Individuals] need to develop an awareness of how members of other cultures feel from the insider's perspective, which requires more immersion" (Misco & Shiveley, 2014, p. 44-45). Thus, cross-cultural understanding includes the ability to see things from other perspectives.

Maynes et al. (2012), Misco and Shiveley (2014), Trilokekar and Kukar (2011), and Zhao, Meyers, and Meyers (2009) all cited Wilson's (1982) publication, *Cross-cultural*

*Experiential Learning for Teachers*. Zhao et al. (2009) describe Wilson's (1982) claim that "cross-cultural experiential learning assists in the development of global and cross-cultural perspectives" (p. 297); these immersive learning experiences, when coupled with reflection, lead to the internal and external self-improvement needed for educators of diverse groups.

Batey and Lupi (2012) drew from Holtzman's theory of Surface and Deep Culture. "Surface culture is characterized by easily identified cultural norms...the tangible things that relate to and are unique to a group of people" and "deep culture focuses on cultural norms that are not easily recognized unless one spends an extended amount of time living abroad... the feelings and attitudes that people learn by being members of particular ethnic groups" (Batey & Lupi, 2012, p. 27). A group's tangible, visible surface culture becomes synonymous with its identity while its invisible deep culture reflects the group's engrained values, beliefs, and customs that make up its foundation. Cultural competence includes the recognition of the difference between these two types of culture as well as the understanding that one must be open to learning about the unfamiliar without necessarily knowing everything (Batey & Lupi, 2012).

Finally, cultural competence requires the ability to interact with the cultural "other." Boury, Hineman, Klentzin and Semich (2013) cite Diller and Moule's (2005) definition of cultural competence as:

The ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching and culturally responsive teaching. (p. 2)

Boury et al. (2013) drew on Moule's Five Skill Areas necessary of a culturally competent teacher: 1) awareness and acceptance of differences; 2) self-awareness; 3) dynamics of difference; 4) knowledge of student's culture; and 5) adaptation of skills (p. 66). Possession of these skills aids teachers in forming relationships with children who are the cultural "other".

### **Pedagogical Strategies for Increasing Cultural Competence**

All but one study examined international field placements; Richardson and Munday (2013) evaluated a 3 ½ month semester-long study abroad experience by Australian students in a one of three European universities: UK, Denmark, or Sweden. International field experiences ranged from 2 to 16 weeks. Pre-service educators were housed alone, in pairs, or as a group, in

host-institution provided housing, community housing, or in host-family housing. The overall structure of the experiences varied in preparation, execution, and follow-up (debriefing).

### **Preparation Phase**

Preparation activities varied across studies. Boury et al. (2013) and Doppen and An (2014) did not describe any preparatory activities (coursework or research measures). The study abroad experience required no structured preparation activities, although it was reported that during the weeks leading up to the beginning of the semester some students chose to travel within the country of international study as a way to acclimate to the foreign culture and environment. The remaining studies described preparatory activities as including any of the following: student teaching, field placement, or internship in a home placement; required course work; online readings; or a series of trip-preparation meetings or instructional seminars. Prior to departure, pre-service educators also completed various research measures such as questionnaires, journals, and interviews. In McCartney and Harris' (2014) study, pre-service educators received training on how to effectively use the selected photovoice methodology: "photograph[ing] different teaching and living contexts and people that were significant to them...[and sharing] their images and the stories the images evoked to further explore the contexts, people, and experiences that were personally significant" (p. 269).

### **Execution Phase**

During the period during which the international experiences actually took place researchers in all studies specifically stated or alluded that students visited, observed, or taught in community schools and child care and cultural centers. Students also took part in supplemental experiences such as lectures, panels, organized field trips, and free time. In addition to active learning, pre-service educators across the studies completed required assignments during their international experience, including: journaling (free or prompted), blogging, and/or emailing. Research measures such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups were also conducted during this phase.

### **Follow-up Phase**

All but two studies (Boury et al., 2013; Doppen & An, 2014) described follow-up activities to the international experience. These activities included: student research papers; presentations to peers, faculty, and administrators; final reflective writing assignments; follow-up

seminars; and/or debriefing sessions. Research measures during this phase included questionnaires, directed reflective journals, and interviews.

### **Evidence of Change Within Educators**

Each study found that pre-service educators returned from their international experiences changed or transformed in some way. Although the literature regarding the impact of international experiences on students is broad, only a limited number of authors explore the impact specifically on early childhood pre-service educators. Of that research, few directly investigate the impact that international experiences have on cultural competence. Instead the more comprehensive global or multicultural competence or awareness is examined, with cultural outcomes falling within the scope of these larger effects. For example, common cited outcomes of international experiences include enhanced cultural awareness, personal development, professional role, international perspectives, personal development, and intellectual development (Black & Duhon, 2006; Sandell, 2007); academic impact, career development, overseas employment, intercultural development, and personal and professional growth (Dwyer, 2004; Fenech, Fenech, & Birt, 2013); and cross-cultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006).

### **Critical Reflection**

A common theme across the studies was the conclusion that whatever change occurred was due to critical reflection. The reviewed studies' explanations of critical reflection were consistent with Maynes et al.'s (2012) description of Lee's fourth level of reflection: the "critical reflection / reflectivity level (involving a critical analysis that situates reasoning within a broader historical, social, cultural or political context, with a view to changing or improving in the future)" (p. 71). The various reflection activities required of pre-service educators during their international experiences, most notably reflective writing and reflective discussions, facilitated this in-depth reflection. Many of the reviewed studies included journaling and other reflective writing in the structure of this experience. Pre-service educators noted that this activity was beneficial to help them organize their thoughts, and several indicated they would have kept a journal regardless of any assigned writing. These same pre-service educators indicated that discussion with advisors and others students engaging in the same international experience assisted in their dissection of their lived experiences (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Richardson and Munday (2013) found that the reflective practice of these pre-service educators during and



after their international experience was so powerful as to cause changes in views, on which the students commented during interviews. “Academically driven” critical reflections during international immersion experiences “has the capacity to move the experience of being on student exchange beyond the notion of mere translocation and educational tourism and toward a deeper, more intellectually valuable opportunity for professional growth” (Richardson & Munday, 2013, p. 244). Batey’s (2014) concluding remarks underscored this finding of the impact of critical reflection: “Awareness must occur before change can take place” (p. 79).

### **Immersion**

Boury, Hineman, Klentzin, and Semich, (2013) noted in their study of online technology’s usefulness in facilitating pre-service teacher’s development of cultural competency, “the participants’ posts to the wiki evolved from an ethnocentric point of view to a more ethnorelativistic point of view as they became more immersed within the culture of the Austrian school community” (p. 76).

Hanvey’s An Attainable Global Perspective theory holds that simply coming into contact with a member of another culture does not result in the ability to view one’s own society from a different perspective. Instead, immersion is necessary in order to understand how other cultures “feel from an insider’s perspective” (Misco & Shiveley, 2014, p. 45). According to these authors, participation in international experiences not only helps individuals better understand another culture, but also encourages examination of their own culture and assumptions as well. Once an individual has experienced another culture, he or she can reflect on his or her own culture and possibly reevaluate existing assumptions.

## Chapter 4 - Discussion

The present analysis examines the question: what is the relationship between international experiences and pre-service early childhood educators' cultural competence? The reviewed studies point to international experiences as a vehicle for personal and professional transformation. Although cultural competence was not the main effect studied in all the reviewed articles, gains in this area were reported by pre-service educators. The combination of critical reflection as described by Lee's Levels of Reflection (Maynes et al., 2012) and immersion was a predictor of increased cultural competence, as reported by the pre-service educators. Through immersion in an unfamiliar culture, they were able to reflect on their own experiences and understanding and accommodate their perspective. In order for international experiences to be transformative opportunities for pre-service educators, frequent opportunities for reflection that moves through Lee's Levels of Reflection from level one (non-reflection / description) to level four (critical reflection / reflectivity level) must be included or integrated (Maynes et al., 2012, p. 71). Both written and verbal discussion of events and thoughts should be encouraged in order to foster critical reflection and interactive dialogue.

The goal of international experiences is not for pre-service educators to completely adopt another culture's practices or to become an expert on another culture. Cultural competence does not mean "becoming a member of another culture by a wholesale adoption of another group's values; attitudes; beliefs; customs; or manners of speaking, dress, or behavior;" labeling individuals with certain characteristics without accounting for the diversity within cultural groups; or claiming expertise on all cultures (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 451). Instead, self-awareness, personal growth, and change are integral to the continued development of cultural competence. Educators must have cross-cultural competence to be effective service providers. The understanding, awareness, and sensitivity that come with cultural competence allow early childhood educators to uphold the third core consideration of developmentally appropriate practice: knowing what is culturally important. When early childhood educators have this knowledge, they are better able to "provide meaningful, relevant, and respectful learning experiences for each child and family" (NAEYC, 2009a).

In the reviewed literature, outcomes were generally described in broad contexts, such as global competence. Increased global competence is an outcome that primarily benefits the individual. Focusing on the effect of international experience on an individual's *global*

competence communicates that the outcome of the experience was on the *individual's* ability to interact in a global community and as a cultural “other”. This is a significant outcome as it is essential for individuals in our global world to be able to interact in foreign settings. However, once pre-service educators return home and enter the workforce, they are once again immersed in their familiar routines, interactions, and environment. By focusing on how an international experience may develop or increase a pre-service educator’s *cultural* competence, the outcome ultimately benefits the *child*, particularly the child who is a cultural ‘other’ (Boury et al., 2013).

## **Chapter 5 - Future Implications**

Literature examining the effects of international experiences on college student outcomes demonstrates that there are significant short- and long-term benefits. Although the research on early childhood pre-service educators is limited, findings from the available literature uphold the findings of the broader study abroad literature: international experiences facilitate personal and professional growth, to include increased cultural competence.

### **Implications for Higher Education**

Given the likely gains for pre-service educators after an international experience, higher education and early childhood teacher education programs could see positive outcomes from the incorporation of study abroad opportunities. Cultural immersion can significantly impact the development and growth of cultural competence and in turn lead to long-term benefits in the early childhood classroom setting. However, the cost of such trips may be a prohibitive factor in making these experiences mandatory. Universities can encourage participation in study abroad experiences by offering credit and financial assistance.

The studies reviewed in this article consistently described international experiences organized by phases: preparation, execution, and follow-up. Findings from these studies stressed the importance of critical reflection throughout all phases. In order to fully realize the potential for early childhood pre-service educators to develop and grow cultural competence during international experiences, higher education and teacher education programs must be intentional in the planning of such experiences.

Each phase holds equal importance in the transformational learning experience for pre-service educators. The preparation phase should include introductory information for the pre-service educators and prepare them for cultural dissonance and potentially disorienting experiences. The structure of the execution phase is also key. Transformative learning theories hold that transformation occurs through critical reflection and discussion with others. During immersive international experiences, it is crucial that opportunities for reflection and discussion are planned in conjunction with varied, hands-on experiences. Finally, debriefing activities should be planned post-trip in order to facilitate continued reflection and support the pre-service educators as they share their experiences with others and begin to apply their transformed personal and professional identity to their work.

### **Implications for the Field (Early Childhood Education)**

The implications for early childhood pre-service educators in the field are immense. Early childhood educators' practice is guided by DAP, a core tenant of which is cultural competence. Research on international experiences suggests that increased cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency can be achieved through travel abroad. National early childhood organizations such as NAEYC, the Association for Early Childhood International (AECI), and Zero to Three have highly visible platforms from which to advocate for the benefit of international experiences. These national organizations are in an ideal position to promote cultural competence in early childhood educators. The overall goal of providing the highest quality of care to young children can be achieved through their continued dissemination of relevant literature and future expansion of services to include networking (connecting organizations and individuals with domestic and international partners), financial support (scholarships or grants for international travel awarded to practicing child care professionals or teacher education programs), and facilitation of international experiences (sponsorship or promotion of travel experiences).

### **Implications for Further Research**

Theory indicates that personal and professional change, including the development of cultural competency, can be achieved through a transformative learning experience and accompanying critical reflection. Therefore, future research exploring the effects of international experiences directly on cultural outcomes is needed. Longitudinal or follow-up studies of early childhood educators who have entered the workforce is also needed to determine to what extent these effects continue and are demonstrated in practice (impact on curriculum, classroom environment, or children's development).

Several of the reviewed studies discussed the need to compare beliefs of teachers who experienced international experiences vs. those who did not. More in-depth investigation of the short- and long-term outcomes on cultural competence of culturally focused pre-service preparation courses is recommended. Can similar outcomes be achieved for pre-service teachers who engage in critical reflection of course work or cultural immersion experiences in a domestic setting? If so, is there an argument for the superiority of a domestic experience vs. an international experience?

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## Appendix A - Search Strategy

1. Appendix A Search terms:
  - a. “Early childhood”
  - b. “Early childhood educators”
  - c. “International”
  - d. “International experiences”
  - e. “Cultural competence”
  - f. “Preservice/pre-service/pre service”
2. Expanded search terms:
  - a. “Study abroad” replaces “international/international experiences”
  - b. “Teachers” replaces “educators”
  - c. “Awareness” and “sensitivity” added to “cultural competence”

### SEARCH 1 (P1)

\*Key words = “early childhood educators”, “early childhood”, “international experiences”, “international”, “cultural competence”, “preservice/pre-service/pre service”

- SEARCH 1: "early childhood educators" AND "international experiences"
- SEARCH 2: "early childhood" AND "international experiences"
- SEARCH 3: "early childhood educators" AND "international experiences" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 4: "early childhood" AND "international experiences" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 5: "early childhood educators" AND "international" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 6: "early childhood" AND "international" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 7: "early childhood educators" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 8: "early childhood educators" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "international experiences"
- SEARCH 9: "early childhood" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "international experiences"
- SEARCH 10: "early childhood educators" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "international"
- SEARCH 11: "early childhood" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "international"
- SEARCH 12: "early childhood educators" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "cultural competence"

### SEARCH 2 (P2)

\*Key words = “early childhood teachers”, “international experiences”, “international”, “cultural competence”, “preservice/pre-service/pre service” (- “*educators*”, + “*teachers*”)

- SEARCH 1(P1-1): "early childhood teachers" AND "international experiences"
- SEARCH 2 (P1-3): "early childhood teachers" AND "international experiences" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 3 (P1-5): "early childhood teachers" AND "international" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 4 (P1-7): "early childhood teachers" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 5 (P1-8): "early childhood teachers" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "international experiences"
- SEARCH 6 (P1-10): "early childhood teachers" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "international"
- SEARCH 7 (P1-12): "early childhood teachers" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "cultural competence"

### SEARCH 3 (P3)

\*Key words = “early childhood educators”, “early childhood”, “study abroad”, “cultural competence”, “preservice/pre-service/pre service”

(-“*international/international experiences*”, + “*study abroad*”)

- SEARCH 1 (P1-1): "early childhood educators" AND "study abroad"
- SEARCH 2 (P1-2): "early childhood" AND "study abroad"
- SEARCH 3 (P1-3): "early childhood educators" AND "study abroad" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 4 (P1-4): "early childhood" AND "study abroad" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 5 (P1-8): "early childhood educators" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "study abroad"
- SEARCH 6 (P1-9): "early childhood" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "study abroad"

#### **SEARCH 4 (P4)**

\*Key words = “early childhood educators”, “early childhood”, “international experiences”, “international”, (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”), “preservice/pre-service/pre service” (*cultural competency a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”*)

- SEARCH 1 (P1-3): "early childhood educators" AND "international experiences" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 2 (P1-4): "early childhood" AND "international experiences" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 3 (P1-5): "early childhood educators" AND "international" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 4 (P1-6): "early childhood" AND "international" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 5 (P1-7): "early childhood educators" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 6 (P1-12): "early childhood educators" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)

#### **SEARCH 5 (P5)**

\*Key words = “early childhood educators”, “early childhood”, “study abroad”, (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”) (-“*international experiences/international*”, + “*study abroad*”) (*cultural competency a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”*)

- SEARCH 1 (P1-3): "early childhood educators" AND "study abroad" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 2 (P1-4): "early childhood" AND "study abroad" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)

#### **SEARCH 6 (P6)**

\*Key words = “early childhood teachers”, “study abroad”, “cultural competence”, “preservice/pre-service/pre service” (-“*educators*”, +“*teachers*”) (-“*international experiences/international*”, + “*study abroad*”)

- SEARCH 1 (P1-1): "early childhood teachers" AND "study abroad"
- SEARCH 2 (P1-3): "early childhood teachers" AND "study abroad" AND "cultural competence"
- SEARCH 4 (P1-8): "early childhood teachers" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND "study abroad"

#### **SEARCH 7 (P7)**

\*Key words = “early childhood teachers”, “early childhood”, “international experiences”, “international”, (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”), “preservice/pre-service/pre service” (-“*educators*”, + “*teachers*”), (*cultural competency a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”*)

- SEARCH 1 (P1-3): "early childhood teachers" AND "international experiences" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 2 (P1-5): "early childhood teachers" AND "international" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 3 (P1-7): "early childhood teachers" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)
- SEARCH 4 (P1-12): "early childhood teachers" AND "preservice/pre-service/pre service" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)

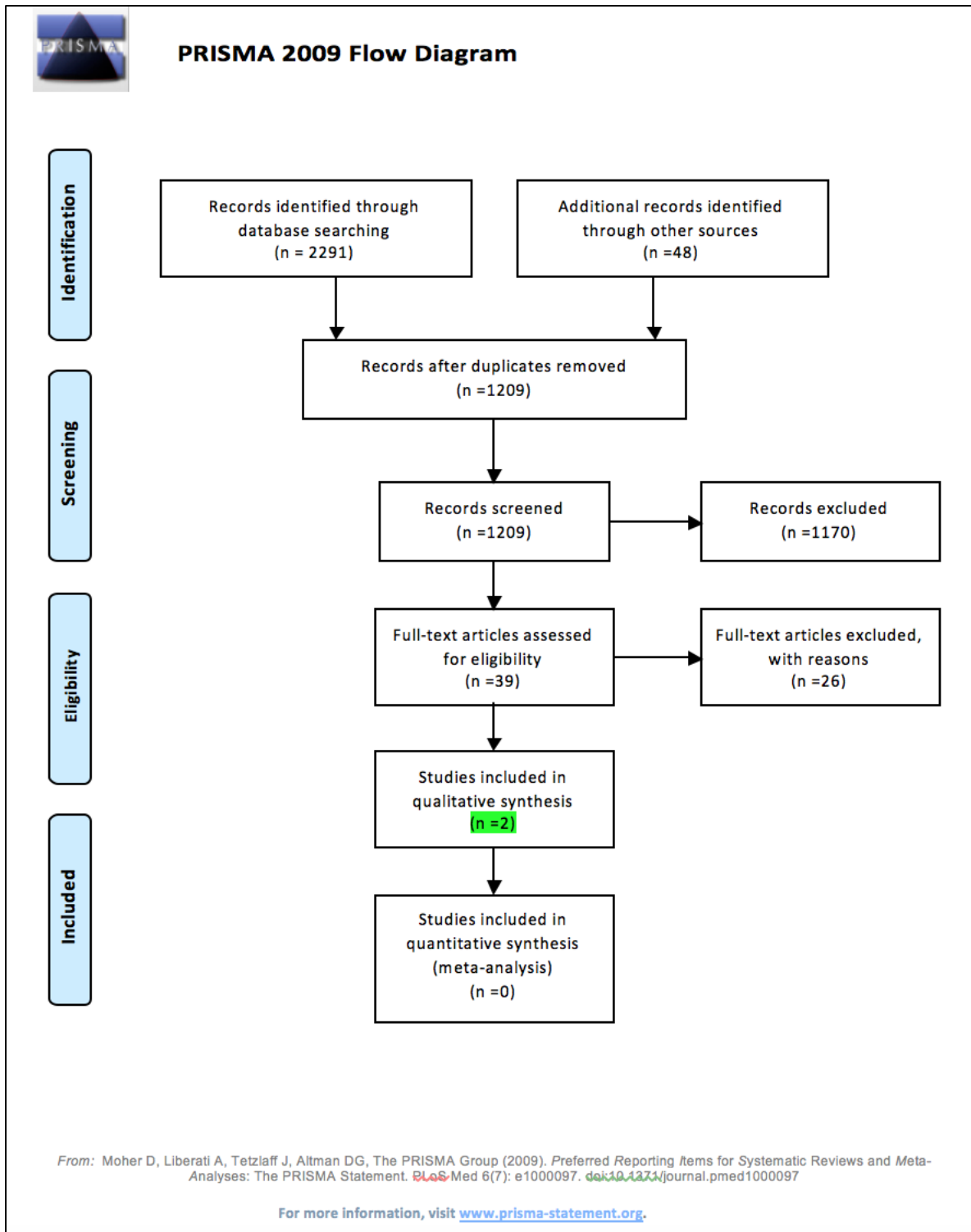
#### **SEARCH 8 (P8)**

\*Key words = “early childhood teachers”, “study abroad”, (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”), (- “*educators*”, + “*teachers*”), (- “*international*”, + “*study abroad*”), (*cultural competency a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”*)

- SEARCH 1 (P1-3): "early childhood teachers" AND "study abroad" AND (“cultural competence” a/o “sensitivity” or “awareness”)

## Appendix B - PRISMA Flow Chart: Early Childhood Sample

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n=2) evaluate articles focused on pre-service early childhood educators of children aged birth through 8 years old.



## Appendix C - PRISMA Flow Chart: Varied Sample

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n=11) evaluate articles focused a combination of early childhood pre-service educators, pre-service educators of older children, and other majors.

