

**A CASE STUDY OF AN EDUCATION STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM IN  
ITALY**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

LAURA MARIE WOODSON, SARAH ELIZABETH CRAWFORD, and JASMINE MARIE  
VELA

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Dr. Mónica Vásquez Neshyba

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# **ABSTRACT**

A Case Study of an Education Study Abroad Program in Italy

Laura Marie Woodson, Sarah Elizabeth Crawford and Jasmine Marie Vela  
Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture  
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Mónica Vásquez Neshyba  
Department of Teaching, Learning & Culture  
Texas A&M University

## **Literature Review**

As discussed in “Towards a Research Agenda for U.S. Education Abroad” (Ogden, 2015) and in other studies on transformative learning, research can be used to encourage the proliferation and continuation of study abroad programs, particularly for preservice teachers.

## **Thesis Statement**

This research study seeks to address how students define transformative experiences within the Italy Education study abroad program in the College of Education and Human Development.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, critical reflection, and high impact educational practices.

## **Project Description**

This study is centered around determining what justifies an education study abroad program as being transformative for students. By completing a case study on a study abroad program, we intend to analyze the components of the trip and see if they aid towards a transformative experience.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the town of Castiglion Fiorentino and to all of those who discovered it alongside us.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank our incredible faculty advisor, Dr. Monica Neshyba, who not only made the study abroad possible, but life-changing. Without her, we would not have experienced Castiglion Fiorentino, nor the challenges and joys of research.

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## **KEY WORDS**

TL Transformative Learning

EL English Teaching

SA Study Abroad

IC Intercultural Competence

PST Pre-service Teachers

## INTRODUCTION

This research aims to discover how students define, respond to, and interpret an educational study abroad trip for pre-service teachers in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University. This is a study of one program, and researchers will look for common characteristics of the travels that students note as being transformative, as well as any differences.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory is very important in the research that it is being conducted because it lines up with our goal. Mezirow's theory states that learning that comes from an experience causing a deep change in a person resulting in an action, is indeed transformative (Blake-Campbell, 2014). Our research is looking into how education study abroad programs lead to transformative learning experience for the students that participate. Under transformative learning, cultural awareness and intercultural competence are two themes that also contribute to our research.

Similar studies have found that cultural awareness can increase as a result of study abroad preservice teachers. Research has shown that students who study abroad have greater knowledge of cultural practices and sensitivity to cultural context (Carlson, J. S., & Widaman, K. F., 1988, US Congress, 2005). This has been done through researching the effects of a study abroad program in Honduras while observing the importance of students being critically reflective of their time in other countries (Malewski, 2011). As stated by Mahan & Cushner, studying abroad allows students to "build cultural competence. . . as students examine their own understandings of self, [and] cultural identity" which benefits the student as a person and a pre-service teacher (as cited in Marx, 2010, p. 218). Another study based on a study abroad program



for preservice teachers in Utah looked at the student's perspectives on various teaching theories to see if they developed more intercultural competence after studying abroad (Marx, 2010). It is important to look at pre-program and post-program data that students have after spending time abroad to examine student growth.

# CHAPTER I

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning is crucial to study abroad because in many cases, it is one main reason students are permitted and encouraged to travel as a part of their collegiate education. Without transformative learning, study abroad programs start to resemble a glorified vacation. Typically, people know that study abroad programs have the capability of being a transformative experience, but whether or not that is the case depends on the program. Jack Mezirow states:

transformative learning is the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Mezirow, 2000, p.7-8).

Research must be conducted on a regular basis to ensure that study abroad programs are resulting in a transformative learning experience for its participants and fulfilling their stated purpose(s).

One aspect of a study abroad program that plays a role in transformative learning is the duration of the program. Study abroad programs typically range in length from one week to one academic year. Strange and Gibson (2017) conducted a study on 216 students that participated in summer study abroad programs through a south-eastern U.S. university. The programs were faculty-led and exchange programs, which ranged in length from one week to one semester. An

online survey was designed, which included a fixed-choice and open-ended response questionnaire with three sections. The first section consisted of statements relating to Mezirow's (1997) precursor steps of transformative learning that were made into a yes/no answer format. The second section was related to experiential learning and the program type. The participants selected which class components applied to their program and answered open-ended questions about components related to their specific program. The third section measured demographic information such as gender, age, and class. After gathering data from program participants, the results suggest that programs shorter than 18-days have a significantly lower chance of transformative learning. The data shows that programs ranging from three to six weeks in length have just as great an impact as semester or year long programs. "The results of this study support the idea that there appears to be little difference in the transformative educational ability of programs based on program length, given they are more than 18 days in length"(Strange, 2017, p. 96). The findings of this study show that the likelihood of transformative learning taking place in a study abroad program is higher when the program is longer than 18 days. However, as Strange (2017) mentions, the research they conducted concludes that there is little difference in the amount of transformative learning that takes place in programs that are 19 days to a year in length. Thus, study abroad programs considered to be "short-term", such as those less than a semester long, can be transformative, which provides insight into the effectiveness of such programs.

Study abroad programs present real world experiences for students that challenge their beliefs about the world around them through curriculum and activities (Blake-Campbell, 2014, p. 64). Dr. Blake-Campbell, a professor at Queensborough Community College conducted a study looking into transformative learning during a short-term study abroad program. The

program was seven days long, took place in Salzburg, Austria, and sixteen students participated. The participants were diverse in areas of study, socioeconomic status, age, and ethnicity and were selected by the Study Abroad Task force on campus. “The program’s curriculum and activities in the host country revolved around themes of ethics and engagement, and included daily workshops, numerous strategies for guided reflection, and dialogue at faculty-led sessions” (Blake-Campbell, 2014, p. 65). Narrative responses were analyzed from the pre-survey and postsurvey which were completed by the participants. The pre-departure asked the students for their anticipated benefit of the study abroad experience. Around 47% of participants said that it would be an opportunity to learn about other cultures, 33% stated that they would gain knowledge outside of the United States, and 19% felt that they would expand upon their knowledge of globalization (Blake-Campbell, 2014, p. 66). The survey also asked questions regarding intercultural skills and global concerns. The post-departure survey results showed that more than half of the participants claimed that they experienced an increase in academic and cultural knowledge. Also, over fifty-percent of the participants believed that their “intercultural skills” were significantly improved from their time abroad. This study is a springboard for short-term study abroad research and its aim “is to convey that although a short-term study abroad program has limitations it is still a viable option and a catalyst for transformative learning to shape ideas of ethics, empathy, and engagement for the path to global citizenship” (Blake-Campbell, 2014, p. 69).

Global education is linked to transformative learning because it is at the core of study abroad programs. The reason students are permitted to participate in study abroad opportunities is due to the concept of learning and expanding knowledge in a foreign place. Transformative learning and global education go hand-in-hand since teaching or learning abroad can lead to a

transformation in what one may have previously believed or assumed. Studying abroad, or teaching abroad, holds the purpose of bringing education all across the world. We now live in a global society due to technology and social media that unites every person together. Today's schools are incorporating more global aspects into curriculum, which encourages students to think look and explore beyond their neighborhoods. By looking at the various ways education can be brought to other countries, students and educators can enhance their practices to include other cultures and deepen their knowledge of how other countries operate in education.

Exposing pre-service teachers to education across the world creates educators that are more knowledgeable, culturally diverse, and better able to reach their students. "In response to pre-service teachers' limited exposure to diverse curricula, many universities offer international study abroad programs that provide students with experiences designed to increase multicultural and global awareness that they may not receive in their regular coursework" (Vatalaro, 2015, p. 42). Angela Vatalaro, Judit Szente, and Judith Levin conducted a study to understand how a study abroad program can contribute to pre-service teachers transformative learning. The study involved five pre-service teachers from the University of Central Florida that participated in a two-week study abroad program to Reggio Emilia, Italy. The pre-service teachers that participated in the program used the Reggio Emilia Approach to teach the students in the town. The role of the teacher in this approach is to be a facilitator who guides children as they take charge of their learning within the curriculum and the foundation of this philosophy are based on strong child, teacher, family, community relationships (Vatalaro, 2015, p. 45). The "Approach" is not the sole teaching philosophy used in the town, but since it has been studied by Early Childhood educators around the world it is the one used by the pre-service teachers. Data was collected through pre-departure, mid-point, and post-arrival questionnaires. A

demographic questionnaire was distributed at pre-departure to collect background information about the participants such as age, gender, ethnicity, major, international experience, and second language fluency. Another questionnaire given at pre-departure and post-arrival required the participants to assess their knowledge about the Reggio Emilia region as well as culture, values, and language from a personal and a diverse perspective (Vatalaro, 2015, p.g. 47). Every participant also received an eight-item directed reflective journal that was designed to see how their expectations, feelings, and understanding transformed during the study abroad program. The eight questions were the same at each data point; the only difference being the verbs that were used. In looking at the responses of the participants, three themes were common, an increase in content knowledge in the Reggio Emilia Approach, views of cultural differences, and increased self-awareness after reflecting upon experiences and returning to the United States (Vatalaro, 2015, p. 48). All the students showed some growth in global competence where transformative themes such as diverse teaching practice, cultural adaptability, sensitivity, and self-awareness are present. The participants struggled the most with reactions to differences in culture and language, while they found creative and critical thinking activities in the school to be the most beneficial and eye-opening. While it may be hard for all pre-service teachers to participate in a study abroad program, the responses from this study offer helpful activities that may be integrated into existing education programs to increase global competence ( Vatalaro, 2015, p. 51). After reviewing literature, the research being conducted in this study does contribute to existing scholarship on the transformative nature of study abroad programs. This research is important because it takes a look into multiple education abroad programs and determines what experiences are deemed as important factors in educating pre-service teachers.

## **Intercultural Competence**

Competence is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2018) as “a sufficiency of means for the necessities and conveniences of life”. By having to satisfy basic human needs, humans constantly try to attain a sense of competency. By increasing awareness of different cultures, one becomes more competent. Bennet (2015) defines intercultural competence as “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics, that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. xxiii). Both of these definitions provide insight into the skills and knowledge that can result from a transformative experience through a study abroad program. This transformation becomes evident through studying abroad as these programs are “designed to enhance a student’s intercultural awareness” (Walsh, R. & Walsh, M., 2018, p. 129). This competence is dynamic because the world is always changing, which demands the “recognition that perceptions must undergo constant transformation” (Sharmon, Phillion, Maleswki, 2011, p. 19). In study abroad programs, students are given the opportunity to experience this dynamism of a growing world firsthand. They get to directly encounter the world around them, outside of an online article, lecture, or a textbook. This in turn provides the opportunity to gain knowledge and cultural awareness.

Namaste (2017) states that “transformative learning hinges on navigating cognitive dissonance” (p. 1). A sense of cognitive dissonance, of sifting through our past beliefs in periods of change, is essential to transformative learning, as well as building intercultural competence. Stereotypes are easy to come by, and intercultural competency can help alleviate those. Study abroad programs can provide the opportunity for pre-service teachers to encounter new cultures and begin unearthing cultural competencies. Research from study abroad programs in Europe, Australia, and South America have pointed to these trip’s abilities to bring

transformative learning to pre-service teachers and make them more fit to teach globally in today's classrooms (Levin, Szente, & Vatalaro 2015; Collins & Geste, 2016; Pilonieta, Medina & Hathaway, 2017; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011). Students that participate in study abroad programs that are designed to foster transformative learning must be accompanied by “assignments and experiences that intentionally cultivate intercultural competency” (Namaste, 2017, p. 1). Reflection must be at the core of any assignment or assessment that measures growth in intercultural competence. Some of the common practices for study abroad programs in qualitative research include dialogue journals, interviews, and discussions with peers and professors (Palmer & Warwick, 2012; Levin, Szente, & Vatalaro 2015; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011). These authors and others provide examples of students self-reflecting and gaining knowledge of best practices in teaching English language learners as a result of an increase in empathy (Pray & Marx 2010). Growth in reflection and empathy, and thus intercultural competence, support the learning of proper pedagogy as teachers will be more able to effectively implement research-based theories.

Chronister (2017) states that students must learn decision making based on intercultural competence, as it allows people to work together more effectively and to be cognizant of methods to connect to their peers (Chronister, 2017, p. 7). Empathy must be the foundation of increasing intercultural competence, and this empathy must be built on critical reflection. This reflection can be looked at through the lens of Paulo Freire, who described this empathy as an “awareness of the sociocultural reality which shapes lives and the capacity to transform reality through action upon it” (Freire 1970, p. 27). It is through empathy and reflection that students become critically aware of the various cultures surrounding them and develop a sense of intercultural competence (Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2009). A study on a pre-service teacher



study abroad in Honduras used student's journal reflections to assess engagement in globalized learning. The results of this study proved that well-designed global education programs can be a strong asset in creating empathy in pre-service teachers, which becomes a segway for being aware of cultures outside of oneself (Sharma, Phillion, Malewski, 2011, p. 1). Interviews with student participants following the trips showed that they did experience a change in previously held beliefs (17). Themes noted from these interviews include preconceived Notions, conflict between self and others, connect[ing] to broader construction of meaning, examining one's own beliefs, and transformation in beliefs and practices (15-19). As one grows and becomes more empathetic, reflective, and culturally competent, personal biases held within education and language learning can be identified and eliminated, which in turn can increase the effectiveness of future teachers.

As educators interact with and teach students of many cultures, it is important to know the necessities and conveniences of the cultures present in the classroom. It is critical that teachers develop multicultural competencies if they are to succeed in teaching diverse students in the U.S. (Sharma, Phillion, Malewski, 2011, p. 21). With competencies previously defined as recognizing needs and conveniences of life, we can see the need to understand these needs from a perspective that accepts multiple cultures. This goal of heightened awareness of the various cultures in the classroom can be attained by using research-based practices and seeking out transformative experiences in study abroad trips.

The literature provides data from multiple program structures that can enhance the learner's sense of intercultural competence. A study by Malewski, Phillion & Sharma (2011) analyzes the effects of a short term (3 week) study abroad to Honduras, designed for pre-service teachers. The participants completed two courses with the program alongside field work in

elementary schools, and three visits to rural schools (Malewski, Phillion & Sharma, p. 13, 2011). A phenomenological study of five education majors from the University of Central Florida who took a two week study abroad to Reggio-Emilia, Italy, to study “The Approach” found that student perceptions of global competence are indeed transformed through educational experiences abroad (Vatalaro, Szente & Levin, 2015). These are two examples of similar short-term programs, but there are a variety of program structures that can influence a student’s intercultural competence. Research by Jiang and DeVillar (2014) studied three different semester long programs in Belize, China, and Honduras. This study in particular looked at differing program factors such as residency situations for students, knowledge of language of host country, and type of school; as well as the demographics of the students participating in their respective programs (Jiang & DeVillar, 2014). Their findings showed that students from all programs gained “an authentic appreciation of multiculturalism... [and] the theme of cultural responsiveness” (Jiang & DeVillar, p. 56-57, 2014). However, a study done by Terzuolo (2018) on intercultural development in study abroad suggests that program characteristics bear little importance when compared to the dispositions of the students participating in the trip. Alternatively, literature reviews completed by Strange & Gibson (2017) cite studies that note that “reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis are essential elements if programs are to reach their potential” and that program structure can be the defining element in whether or not a short-term study abroad can lead students to “achieve a new worldview by the end of the program” (Tarrant 2010).

Our research incorporates other literature similar to this study, such as the aforementioned study abroad in Honduras, in addition to a trip in Reggio-Emilia, Italy

(Vatalaro, Szente, & Levin, 2015), Mexico (Pray & Marx, 2010), as well as a comparative study on programs in China, Belize, and Mexico (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011).

Despite studies discussed thus far, others still say that “there are few qualitative studies that investigated [the] impact on college student’s intercultural competence and personal development” (Majaraha, 2018, p. 18). The case study we are completing rises up to meet this need and is unique in that it is the longest study abroad program for pre-service teachers in the College of Education and Human Development at our university, as well as having the unique length of half of a semester. All the while, it reaches the University’s goal of “develop[ing] global leaders through transformational opportunities abroad” (Texas A&M University Study Abroad Programs Office).

### **Teaching Abroad**

Teaching abroad is seen as a life changing experience for people who are getting outside of their comfort zone and gaining outside exposure. This exposure is very different than just teaching in a typical classroom in the United States. While undergraduates are studying to be educators, field-experience is really important and beneficial to their future career. There is research shown that when students have taught abroad it has increased cultural sensitivity and competence, confidence, and global awareness (Bradfield-Kreider as cited in, Cross & Dunn, p.g. 4, 2016). Teaching abroad helps increase pre-service teachers’ marketability because “[Principals] felt an overseas placement helped the teachers develop a global worldview” (Cross & Dunn, p.g. 74, 2016). Educational experiences outside of the United States are valued (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman as cited in, Shiveley & Misco, p.g. 4, 2012), and brings pre-service teachers an advantage in the hiring process as they will likely receive an interview (Shiveley & Misco, p.g. 6, 2012). In one study about long-term impacts of a short-term study

abroad program, many respondents had stated that they had an advantage during the hiring process because others did not have the same experiences teaching ELLs they did while abroad (Shiveley & Misco, p.g. 9, 2012).

However, some students who learn from these experiences first had to overcome culture shock which means there is “a difficulty understanding and adapting to new cultures” (e.g. Germain as cited in, Cross & Dunn, p.g. 5, 2016). This is where the learning takes place as students undergo culture shock and later adapt to their new environment seeing things in a new perspective and incorporating what they learned upon returning to the United States. Pre-service teachers who have experienced culture shock and have learned from it come back with an understanding of diverse cultures, ambition, confidence, and tolerance (Gilson & Martin, p.g. 4, 2010). Students who teach in an international setting should be taken into consideration because of what they have learned abroad since their experiences would have not been the same if they would have taught in the United States (Cross & Dunn, p.g. 10, 2016). Pre-service teachers should be highly “encouraged to go beyond what is known and comfortable and teacher education programs need to provide opportunities to incorporate local and, if possible, global experiences into their programs” (Collins & Gest, p.g. 15, 2016). Pre-service teachers who teach abroad have meaningful experiences and develop their skills in an incredible way than if they had stayed in the U.S. to gain exposure (Brindley, Quinn & Morton as cited in, Collins & Gest, p.g. 3, 2016). The word ‘meaningful’ expresses that the opportunities pre-service teachers have had abroad were important and significant to them. Shiveley and Misco’s study is about long-term impacts in a short-term study abroad program that involved pre-service teachers from the University of Miami who studied abroad in Austria and Switzerland. These pre-service teachers only studied abroad for 3 weeks and were able to interact with the teacher, students, and observe

classrooms. Respondents have stated that “beyond professional growth and classroom practice, one of the largest areas of change was in the area of personal growth” such as confidence and self-sufficiency (Shiveley & Misco, p.g. 10, 2015).

According to Baecher and Jewks (2014), PSTs graduate from their undergraduate programs feeling underprepared to teach and accommodate ELLs, which determines that something else should be provided besides coursework and basic field experiences to prepare PSTs. Undergraduates should be well prepared to teach ELLs before they enter the workforce because there is a slim chance that they will receive professional development to improve competency once they begin teaching (Pilonieta, Medina, Hathaway, p.g. 3, 2017). Very rare is there professional development given to teachers that allows them to fully understand the “complex linguistic, cultural, and curricular issues impacting ELLs” (Pilonieta, Medina, Hathaway, p.g. 3, 2017). “Study abroad programs positively contribute to the preparation of a culturally sensitive teaching force” (Pilonieta, Medina, Hathaway, p.g. 3, 2017). Allowing PSTs to take part in study abroad programs help them to get outside of their comfort zone and out of normalized college classroom to experience something bigger.

According to Marx and Moss (2011a), it is important for teacher educators to prepare teachers to push out any ethnocentric views they have and prepare them to teach culturally diverse student populations. As undergraduates, pre-service teachers are required to take multicultural classes and attend field-experiences in schools that may have a diverse student population (Marcus & Moss, p.g. 2, 2015), but it might not be enough. Therefore, developing study abroad opportunities for pre-service teachers is “the key ingredient if the United States wants its future teachers to be culturally and globally literate to meet the challenges of this new age” (Quezada, p.g. 464, 2004). Teachers will have a better understanding of their diverse

student population in the classroom and how to effectively teach them. Before pre-service teachers start to embark on their teaching careers, study abroad programs should be taken into consideration because of experience that comes with it. Pre-service teachers are able to see how the educational systems differ or are similar from one another. With that in mind, PSTs are able to expose themselves to distinct ideas and procedures “challenging their ideas that certain teaching strategies or administrative practices are universal” (Shiveley & Misco, p.g. 2, 2015). Students are able to grasp ideas and procedures from both countries and combine them into their own. Not only will PSTs develop skills for the classroom, but they will also be able to show their future students lessons about the world and other perspectives. Their future students will be able to “appreciate multiple viewpoints and, recognize stereotyping...” (Longview Report, p.g. 9, 2009). PSTs are not only going to a foreign country to enhance their own abilities or develop/change their ideas but also to teach their future students “to be more open-minded and less ethnocentric” (Moseley, Reeder, & Armstrong as cited in, Shiveley & Misco, p.g. 3, 2015).

International teaching is recommended because of the valuable effect it has upon pre-service teachers. However, it is unfortunate that PSTs are an underrepresented group that studies abroad (Marcus & Moss, p.g. 4, 2015). Although, education majors are represented as only about 4% of students who study abroad (Institute of International Education as cited in, Marcus & Moss, p.g. 2, 2015), but they do have the opportunity to participate in internships within their own country. Researchers have examined that pre-service teachers are able to “observe and apply new pedagogical approaches and teaching techniques” (Grossman, Onkol, & Sands as cited in, Ateşkan, p.g. 4, 2016) during international teaching. PSTs are able to read and attend seminars about these techniques but it does not compare to experiencing it first-hand. According to Cross (1998), PSTs become independent in an international setting and can make

decisions in their working environment once they return back to their country (p.g. 4). In a report called “Overseas Student Teaching Project” at Indiana University M,ahan and Stachowski (1994) state that “pre-service teachers inevitably experience personal and professional changes usually leading to insights that might never have surfaced, learning that no book can supply, and a professional self-portrait that in-state experiences alone cannot reveal” (p.g. 29-30). Teaching abroad challenges students in many ways that they do not receive from attending classes at the university or interning at a school within their home country. This is a way for pre-service teachers to reflect on their own lives and certain teaching techniques.

A goal for teachers is to be prepared for global interconnectedness with nations, people, and communities. Ochoa (2010) has agreed with this goal and stated that “preparing teachers for the twenty-first century is one of the most critical tasks facing teacher education programs in the United States and in the world” (p.g. 103). Research has proven that pre-service teachers who have had the opportunity to teach abroad have received many personal and professional benefits. In addition, the same benefits have also been presented even in short-term programs for PSTs. According to Walters et al. (2011), short-term programs allow PSTs to grow ““a new appreciation of both home and host countries, new tools and techniques to bring to the classroom, and knowledge of themselves and others as cultural beings” (p.g. 37-38). Since our research is focused on a short-term study abroad program, the articles we have read have stated the positive aspects international opportunities could have on pre-service teachers despite being in a different country for a short period of time. Finally, our research will build upon this by getting personal feedback from our participants and seeing the reality of how impactful a study abroad program could be for pre-service teachers.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODOLOGIES**

This research has been completed as a qualitative case study, using semi-structured interviews and written reflections as the main sources of data. We decided on qualitative case study because we knew we wanted to receive input from the other participants of the trip and use the data in our analysis and findings. We interviewed twelve other pre-service teachers from Texas A&M that participated in Italy Education Study Abroad program in Spring 2018 as a part of the College of Education and Human Development. The trip involved teaching English as a second language (ESL, alternatively, English as a foreign language) to 10-14 year olds (divided into 4 classes) 4 days a week in Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy. Three pre-service teachers were placed in each classroom. In addition to this, we managed and participated in a bilingual musical with 6th and 7th graders and tutored 8th graders in preparation for their end-of-year English exam.

The interview questions are divided into 7 sections (2-3 questions each) based on what we considered to be the most important components of the trip in regards to transformative learning experiences: community engagement, transformative experiences, communication, intercultural competence, teaching, language, and relationships with other participants. We recruited participants via email and interviews were completed one on one in our advisor's office as well as on audio-video platforms such as FaceTime and Skype. All interviews lasted somewhere between 20-30 minutes with about 23 questions being asked.

We interviewed 12 of the 18 participants that went on our trip, including ourselves. All participants interviewed were female, and among them are varying amounts of previous travel



experience, previous classroom experience, concerns about money and funding, and knowledge of language of host country. Ages are not included because we chose to focus on academic classification and to protect the identities of the participants. Table available in Appendix D.

Allison had completed 2.5 years of college at the start of the trip and had experience in the classroom through substitute teaching and completion of Junior Methods coursework at Texas A&M. Successful completion of Junior II coursework denotes 1 full day in the classroom per week for 12 weeks. She had previous travel experiences abroad but no knowledge of the language of the host country.

Marie had also completed 2.5 years of college but had minimum classroom experience. She had relevant non-vacation travel experience abroad and does not know Italian, but is fluent in Spanish.

Sophia had completed 2.5 years of college at the start of trip and had experience in the classroom through Junior Methods and substitute teaching. She had non-vacation travel experience abroad before and does not know Italian, but Spanish.

Jesena had 1.5 years of college completed at the start of the trip and had minimum experience in the classroom. She had not traveled abroad before and knows no Italian, but knows Spanish.

Diana had 2.5 years of college at the start of trip and had experience in the classroom through Junior Methods and substitute teaching. She had non-vacation travel experience abroad before and does not know Italian.

Avani had 2.5 years of college at the start of trip and had experience in the classroom through Junior Methods and her sorority's philanthropy. She had previous non-vacation travel experience abroad and no knowledge of Italian.

Taylor had 2.5 years of college at the start of trip and had experience in the classroom through Junior Methods and as a substitute teacher. She had no travel experience abroad or knowledge of Italian.

Karla had had 2.5 years of college at the start of trip and had minimum experience in the classroom and no previous experience abroad or knowledge of Italian.

Julie had completed one semester of college at the start of the trip and had no classroom experience. She had non-vacation traveling experience abroad but did not know Italian.

Kaylie had 1.5 years of college complete at the start of the trip and had classroom experience as a substitute teacher. She had non-vacation travel experience abroad but did not know Italian.

Both Susan and Vanessa had 1.5 years of college completed with minimum classroom experience. Susan had non-vacation travel experience abroad and Vanessa did not; neither knew Italian.

### **Positionality**

We, the authors of this thesis, were also participants in this study abroad. Consequently, it was our peers and friends that we interviewed throughout the data collecting process. This created the advantage of a basic level of familiarity and friendship already established, and potentially allowed for more depth in participants responses. These pre-existing relationships gave us more thorough data to analyze in order to obtain accurate results.

### **Limitations**

This study was originally designed as a comparative case study of programs. However, due to the difficulty of obtaining data from participants of other programs, the research shifted to focusing solely on the Italy program. This difference could have shifted the development of

empathy in participants due to the cultural differences throughout different countries and continents. A comparative study for such programs could also take a linguistic direction in distinguishing the transformative effects of a trip where students already knew the language of host country, and students who did not.

Due to the demographic of a typical education class, the data collected focused solely on females. This indicates that males are under-represented in teaching as a whole, but consequently in research on study abroad programs for pre-service teachers.

## CHAPTER III

### FINDINGS

Study abroad programs are designed to produce global leaders; building relationships and collaborating with those that are different than oneself are key characteristics of a global leader. In order to develop these skills, one must learn to be reflective and empathetic. As these skills are grown, both in community and by oneself, one can see the growth in a leader come to life.

Through reflective journals written throughout Italy Education 2018 and interviews conducted months later, pre-service teachers at Texas A&M demonstrated growth in interpersonal growth, intrapersonal growth, and external outcomes. Reflection journals and participant interviews are a commonly used means of assessing growth in transformative learning and intercultural competence, as seen in studies by DeVillar, 2011; Dunn, et. al, 2014; Palmer & Warwick, 2012; Pray & Marx, 2010; and Vatalaro, Szente, & Levin, 2015. The unique aspect of this study is that we (the team who compiled the research and wrote the thesis) have a double role in the thesis as authors and interviewees. Our interview data and reflections are incorporated in the findings, as well as our colleagues that participated in the trip and research process with us.

#### **Interpersonal Growth**

##### *Relationships*

Relationships are at the heart of teaching and this remains true for teaching abroad. In the combination of interview and reflection journals, all of the 12 participants interviewed mentioned relationships contributing to the transformative value of the study abroad. These

relationships were seen in many forms, with the most significant ones being within teaching teams and teacher to student. Pre-service teachers had the opportunity to experience first hand the benefits and challenges of working in teams in a setting that they were completely unfamiliar with. One participant, Susan, shared in an interview how teaching in a team brought transformative value to the program through having a support system:

I don't think that I would feel as transformed if it wasn't for the relationships I built while I was there. . . everyone definitely was constantly encouraging of one another. . . not competitive[ly], but I think we definitely drove each other to do more and to make a bigger difference. (Susan, personal communication, March 19, 2019)

This type of support demonstrates how the rigor of instruction can increase as the result of working in a team, especially in a new environment, where one might be inclined to shy away from challenges. Another participant, Allison, noted that building relationships in teaching teams provided a space for sharing “certain situations and things we were feeling in the classroom and even outside of it” (Allison, personal communication, December 9, 2018).

Collaborating and growing while in a new culture can increase intercultural skills, as suggested in similar studies as well (Blake-Campbell, 2014, p. 69). These pre-service teachers built relationships with students from a different country and culture, transforming them into more equipped teachers that are ready to work with a diverse population of students.

The students that the pre-service teachers taught on the Italy Education 2018 program were key in creating transformative experiences, as one would expect. Between work with students in the classroom, tutoring, and play rehearsals, pre-service teachers had many opportunities to build relationships with students, which in turn set them up for positive learning experiences. When asked what strategies or techniques learned from the study abroad that they

can implement into their future teaching, Susan responded, “I think the most important thing [is] just [being able] to make connections with the students and to let them know you care” (Susan, personal communication, March 19, 2019). In her final field reflection journal entry, Avani noted, “I can tell how important relationships are in the classrooms here and I hope to create that kind of atmosphere in my classroom one day” (Avani, personal communication, January 24, 2019). One commonly used technique that appeared in interviews for building relationships in the classroom was one-on-one work with students. In her interview, Sophia noted that an effective way she built relationships in the classroom, as well as scaffold instruction, was working with students one-on-one. Sophia stated that “some students were really proficient in English, and they understood everything, but then some students were super blank, didn't know what to do, and once I did one-on-ones with them, they slowly started understanding [the content]”. Relationships with the students gave pre-service teachers insight into how to develop the connections with students in the classroom, as well as communicating exactly how important they are.

### *Community*

Ten of the twelve participants interviewed noted the effect that community had on their transformative experience abroad. The participants had a brief idea of the type of community they would encounter upon arriving in Castiglion Fiorentino. As Avani noted in her pre-departure reflection journal, “It seems to be a very small, tight-knit community, which makes me believe the school community is similar to that as well” (Avani, reflection, March 8, 2019). Throughout the trip, the participants found this to be true.

The participants were given many opportunities throughout the trip, formal and informal, to partake in this unique town and community. One of the more formal ways the

participants partook in the community was by planning and acting in a bilingual musical with the Italian students. Through this, the study abroad participants had the benefit of seeing both the formal and informal registers of English language learners. Kaylie observed these differences in her reflection journal, stating that, “For play practice, we let the students be slightly less focused at times. . .we let them play games in between practicing scenes. I think it allows for more informal language interaction, which the students enjoy” (Kaylie, personal communication, April 23, 2018). Through this, pre-service teachers also got to witness firsthand relationship development that can take place with a student when one has a way to connect with them outside of the classroom. After a few weeks into play rehearsals, Sophia noticed that, “Our interactions with the students are more formal in class, and the students in this class seem to open up to us a little more at rehearsals because they are more relaxed.” (Sophia, personal communication, April 11, 2018). The relationships developed outside of the classroom with students served as a positive reinforcement for relationships in the classroom, and in turn, developing their acquisition of the English language.

Other optional ways that pre-service teachers were able to participate in the community of Castiglion Fiorentino included attending a local carnival, volunteering in the local community, and being present in the businesses around town. When asked about an event(s) that had a significant impact on their experience, Marie noted that “just interacting. . . when we did our play, and we spent time with them at the carnival and we would see them around the streets” (Marie, personal communication, December 9, 2018) changed her the most. This demonstrates how all of the program components can together create a transformative experience for participants.

### *Collaboration*

Responses from the participants showed an increased awareness of the importance of collaboration within education. Due to the varying levels of experience the pre-service teachers had before the start of the trip, collaboration with lesson plans and instructional strategies were key. Pre-service teachers were given time before the trip and during their on-campus classes, to plan, as well as planning periods throughout the day while in Italy. In addition to this, there were two weekly meetings with all PSTs and the faculty advisor to review the next week's plans and give feedback. Jesena noted that she found the collaboration through these meetings helpful, as she said in her interview, "I love that they were giving me feedback. . . I was able to learn from those that had already created lesson plans before" (Jesena, personal communication, December 11, 2018).

### **Intrapersonal Growth**

Reflection is the root of personal growth because one is able to look back at past experiences and see how much has changed within yourself. Many participants expressed the words confidence and empathy in their formal interviews and written reflections which helped obtain an understanding of what kind of growth they experienced on this study abroad program.

### *Confidence*

Confidence was expressed in the participant's written reflections and formal interviews. The participants had different involvement and experiences in American classrooms such as substituting or hours of mandatory field-experiences before participating in the Italy study abroad program. Furthermore, not all participants had taken the same classes prior to the program. In spite of how experienced or inexperienced each participant was, they all mentioned confidence in their interviews, reflections, or both. The participants were able to develop



various abilities as pre-service teachers based on their experiences in a foreign classroom with students who were native Italian speakers. One respondent, Avani, stated, “I gained confidence by proving to myself that I am capable of so much more than I previously thought going into this experience” (Avani, personal communication, March 5, 2019). Avani was able to identify that she felt a certain way about her abilities before she entered an Italian classroom, but after being immersed and teaching in a new environment for two months, she was able to notice the changes she made within herself by being able to reflect once she returned back to the U.S. The PSTs were all assigned to teach in teams in various English as a Foreign Language classrooms, which meant they all had unique experiences such as not all participants were placed in the same classrooms, interacted with the same students, and had students in their classrooms who had various English proficiency levels . Participants were able to be reflective throughout their experience in Italy by writing everyday reflections when they taught in the schools, which was a course requirement for two of the four courses connected to the program. At the end of the study abroad program, participants were able to identify the differences between the way they felt on their first day of school versus their last. They were also able to identify how much their abilities had changed once they returned to the United States. In Jesena’s interview, she was asked on a scale of 1-10 how she felt before and after the program regarding developing a lesson plan and classroom management skills. Her response to this question was:

I would say before the trip, I was probably at a three or four. I didn't feel like I was really that well-prepared. And then through our classes and through the trip, I think afterwards, I would say I'm in a five or a six. I feel pretty good. (Jesena, personal communication, December 11, 2018)

Jesena's confidence in her abilities had changed from the beginning to the end of the study abroad. This transformation happened with all 12 of the participants because they were able to determine and describe how their confidence grew. The respondents were able to take the time to reflect on this particular question and explain how this study abroad allowed them to expand their skills even after being back in the U.S. for months. They were able to take what they learned in Italy and apply it to their classes or field-experiences when they returned. Jesena also mentioned in her formal interview that:

I was a sophomore going into being in the trip and I had never done a complete lesson plan. So I think that really prepared me so now coming back from the trip, and being in my classes, our teachers would be like, "okay, you're gonna create a lesson plan". And I wasn't scared or I wasn't shocked (Jesena, personal communication, December 11, 2018).

Diana was also able to confirm how confident she felt about her teaching abilities when she returned to American schools by stating:

I think in multiple ways, I guess the first was teaching at the schools made me more confident in my teaching abilities, and since I'm an education major, I spend a lot of time at schools, so it just made me more confident walking into any school and teaching students (Diana, personal communication, January 12, 2019).

Jesena and Diana were able to take on tasks without doubting themselves because of the skills they developed and acquired during their time in their Italian classrooms. According to Romano (2008), "students who taught abroad returned to the United States more confident and ready to serve as "cultural workers" in their schools because they had the opportunity to transform their vision of teaching..." (Romano as cited in, Cross & Dunn, p.g. 5, 2016). Additionally, an

increase in confidence was an attribute that each participant related to since their return. A growth within each participant was present as they were able to be reflective while they were attending their study abroad and months later when they were being interviewed. With confidence, comes stepping out of your comfort zone and learning from something new. In order to progress as a professional and evolve individual skills, it is essential to break out from what is already known and discover something unfamiliar. In Taylor's reflections she expressed, "I have learned that you can't be too self conscious as a teacher and when the situation calls for it, being about to step out of your comfort zone is helpful" (Taylor, reflection, March 21, 2018). The participant was able to learn from stepping outside of her comfort zone, which could be helpful for her teaching career. She was able to determine that she could be capable of anything when timidness or insecurity is replaced with having the confidence to take on something new.

Furthermore, Avani felt the impact of leaving her comfort zone and showed increased confidence stating, "Travelling and living in a new place stretched me outside of my comfort zone in the best way possible. Teaching in the middle school made me even more confident in my desire to become a middle school teacher" (Avani, reflection, June 3rd, 2018). Avani was able to confirm that her choice of career was something she was sure about because of her teaching experience in an Italian middle school. Her confidence was decided and established at the end of the study abroad program when she wrote her final reflection. She was able to connect that stepping outside of her comfort zone was a positive aspect that contributed to her time in Italy. During and after their two month duration in Italy, confidence had transformed and increased these participants' belief in themselves and their skills.

## *Empathy*

The participants were able to place themselves in their students' shoes and develop empathy by living in a foreign country where the native language is Italian. Empathy is an essential trait for any teacher, which can be developed in pre-service teachers that participate in well-designed global education programs (Sharma, Phillion, Malewski, 2011, p. 1). Since the participants were exposed to a new language that they had never spoken before or interacted with on a daily basis, they were able to understand how their students felt while learning English. During the interviews, a question was asked about whether or not they believe their empathy increased. Kaylie was one out of the 12 participants who mentioned that she felt like a minority in the classrooms when it came to knowing the Italian language. She directly stated,

Going into the classroom as the teachers and being in the minority as far as who knew which languages and that sort of thing, it definitely increased my empathy because I was able to understand how they were feeling even almost in the same moment. (Kaylie, personal communication, March 20, 2019)

There was a connection that Kaylie felt with her students because she was able to place herself in their shoes realizing this is how they must feel even though she was the teacher in the classroom. Referring back to our literature review, empathy increases intercultural competence based on critical reflection and this is what Kaylie presented. Allison was able to respond to this question by explaining how she realized in her study abroad experience that working with ELLs takes understanding and patience. Allison answered this question by expressing:

I believe it did because now I understand the struggle that students face when trying to learn another language. And specifically this semester, I worked with some students who are ELLs and I now have that empathy of realizing, "Hey they have a harder time than

you might first realize," and spending an extended amount of time with the Italian students helped me to realize that it's a process that these students have to go through. It takes time and you have to be patient and willing to work with them and just understand where they're coming from and not force them or get frustrated with their learning because every student learns at a different rate. (Allison, personal communication, December 9, 2018)

Our participant realized how her empathy had increased by spending two months with her Italian students and also by her personal experience by not being able to fluently speak Italian. Similarly, to Kaylie, Allison was also able to understand the difficulties of learning a new language. While in Italy and teaching Italian ELLs, she was able to take what she learned from them and apply it to her previous field-experience. Because of her time in Italy, she has a better understanding of ELLs such as how they might learn better and how a teacher should approach and view ELL students. In our literature review, Pray and Marx (2010) identified increased empathy happens when students are self-reflective and gain knowledge of the best practices for English Language learners. The participants also had the opportunity to take on a play with their Italian students. The students performed their lines in English and the pre-service teachers in Italian. This is exactly where the PSTs were the students and the Italian children were the teachers. Vanessa was able to reflect on this part of the study abroad program and mention during her formal interview that:

There was one day, or a few days at rehearsal where the kids were helping us to try to learn our Italian lines. And having the tables turned like that makes you realize how incredibly difficult it is because you say the line, and you're like... You think you didn't do that bad, that you're like, "Okay, that went pretty well." And then they just start

bursting into laughter and they think it's so funny. They're like, "No, you say it like this," and you think, "That's what I just said." (Vanessa, personal communication, March 22, 2019).

and Avani also expressed, "The play also gave the students an opportunity to teach us a little Italian, which really gave us a new appreciation for our students who had to practice English every day" (Avani, personal communication, January 24, 2019). As roles were switched throughout their experience in Italy, they were able to get a glimpse of how their students felt in the classroom. Even though the play was an informal setting, the Italian students wanted for the participants to correctly learn their Italian lines. Empathy was a part of our participant's experience in Italy because of the roles they were placed in and the feeling of being in a completely distinct environment trying to navigate their way around and interacting with their students.

### **External Outcomes**

As a result of the time spent abroad and in a new culture, pre-service teachers experienced transformative learning due to the components of the program structure. These factors include language, teaching impact, cultural immersion, and the length of the trip.

#### *Language*

Since the study abroad program took place in Italy, the native language of the majority of the students was Italian. Although none of the study abroad participants were fluent in Italian, three participants knew Spanish and mentioned in their interviews that it helped to understand their students and the locals because Spanish is similar to Italian. Other participants also mentioned how it helped having group members that knew Spanish. Out of the 12 participants, 11 stated in either an interview or reflection that the language barrier played a role

in their transformative experience. Some participants suggested that the language barrier had a negative effect on their transformative experience, while other suggested that the effect was positive. These mixed reactions are similar to another study by Vatalaro in 2015 in which the participants (pre-service teachers) were said to have struggled the most with reactions to differences in language (Vatalaro, 2015, p. 48). In a reflection, Susan said, “I struggle with helping them [the students] sometimes because I can’t speak Italian. Sometimes they need to know how to say a word in English, but I can not translate” (Susan, personal communication, March, 19, 2019). While in Italy, the participants received three Italian lessons to learn very simple words or phrases to help them while traveling or communicating with locals, but Italian language learning was not a focus of the program. Participants also mentioned that due to the language barrier, they were not able to get to know their students as well as they could have. In an interview, Julie stated, “We got to build a lot of relationships, but a lot of it was very surface level. And that's just like the way it is due to the language barrier” (Julie, personal communication, March 5, 2019). Diana had a different perspective, she stated, “I assumed that communicating with students would be extremely difficult, but I realized that we all laugh and smile in the same language” (Diana, reflection, May 3, 2018). Allison realized that knowing Italian would have been helpful while abroad, she states:

I don't think it [language barrier] made my experience any less transformative. It just made it a little bit trickier but I feel like I found ways around that language barrier and I was able to figure out a way to communicate maybe not through words, but through actions. (Allison, personal communication, December 9, 2018)

All 12 participants mentioned either in their interview or reflection that they found ways around the language barrier by altering their lesson plans or trying different instructional strategies. One

participant discussed a teaching method that aided her in overcoming the language barrier with her students. Vanessa said in a reflection, “Giving students one-on-one attention was very helpful for classroom management because of the language barrier” (Vanessa, reflection, March 22, 2019). Kaylie mentioned how she overcame the language barrier, “The students also needed some language scaffolding by their teacher. That being said, this was one of the methods used to support language development, as it aids in student understanding. We also spoke more slowly and used pictures and gestures to increase understanding” (Kaylie, personal communication, March 20, 2019). Even though the students and teachers didn’t speak the same language, they found ways around the barrier.

### *Teaching Impact*

Out of the twelve students that agreed to partake in this study, nine mentioned the impact teaching had on their transformative learning. The participants created lessons based on what the school said the students had learned or needed to learn in English. One participant, Allison, shared some insight into the way teaching impacted her, she states, “through the whole program, we saw them [the students] growing, but at the end, we were really able to notice that, "Hey, they actually learned through our teaching and we impacted their lives just like they impacted ours" (Allison, personal communication, December 9, 2018). In the interviews, the participants were asked a question about how they would implement what they have learned through the program into their future classroom. One participant stated, “ One thing that I learned from my study abroad is that one-on-ones are really important because, with ELLs...even being there, right beside them, they just needed the one-on-one help [to] explain it in a slower version and rephrase what you taught everyone else” (Marie, personal communication, December 9, 2019). Julie regards the opportunity to teach very beneficial in her



development as a teacher, she states, “I guess just the teaching was really probably one of the most impactful things. Of just being so independent and having so much freedom, versus just observing and learning about education” (Julie, personal communication, March, 5, 2019).

Karla stated that she learned the importance of differentiation by working with students that had a wide range of English language proficiency since “everyone learns at different rates and so you have to be mindful for the students who are ahead and behind” (Karla, personal communication, January 20, 2019). The opportunity to teach had a profound impact on the pre-service teachers suggesting that transformational learning occurred.

### *Cultural Immersion*

Since the participants spend two months abroad, they were immersed in a new culture. In the interviews, they were asked to define cultural immersion. All of the participants answered the question. Allison stated, “I think cultural immersion is just integrating yourself in a culture other than the one you either grew up in or you're used to” (Allison, personal communication, December 9, 2018). The pre-service teachers interacted with their students, spent time in town, and produced a bilingual play with their students, so they were greatly immersed in the Tuscan town. Taylor enjoyed living in the small town and stated:

I felt like part of the community there and part of the culture. So, we got to go to the same coffee shop that all the locals went to, and we taught at the same school that the locals went to, and got to walk around the streets and see how they live there in that town that we stayed at. (Taylor, personal communication, January 24, 2019)

Another participant, Avani said, “being in a small town, I feel like I really was able to be immersed in the culture of that town, and learn about the things they do and the way they live” (Avani, personal communication, January 24, 2019). Since the pre-service teachers taught

in the schools, they also experienced cultural immersion through their teaching. Marie commented, “I would say our teaching abroad was definitely cultural immersion, because education is definitely a large part of culture, and we were completely immersed in the education system there by teaching four days a week” (Marie, personal communication, December 9, 2018). The pre-service teachers were very immersed in the Italian culture and it had a significant impact on their experience abroad.

### *Length*

The participants spent two months abroad in Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy. Since the program was not a full semester long, it was considered “short-term”. Out of the 12 participants, 10 mentioned the length of the program and how it impacted their experience. Kaylie stated:

I think that having those two months abroad, gave us enough time to really have a well-rounded experience of the culture because we got to stay to see the Easter holiday, and the town festival, in May. The experience wouldn't have been as impactful if we wouldn't have been able to build those relationships with the people that were there.

(Kaylie, personal communication, March 20, 2019)

Avani, another pre-service teacher, talked about how since the trip was longer than a week or two, it allowed her to establish relationships, she said, “So I think the longer the time period of the study abroad trip, I think the more relationships you're able to build and the better community you're able to create there also” (Avani, personal communication, January 24, 2019). The study by Strange and Gibson, mentioned in the literature review, suggested that short-term programs that are longer than 18-days have just as great a transformative impact as a semester-long program. Allison believed that the longer the trip, the more meaningful it is, she stated:

I felt that there was more time for transformation to occur because we were there for longer. And so, I think longer programs are often more helpful in causing a transformation because you're there longer, you're immersed in the culture longer, and so you can understand the culture and really figure out how those people live when you're over there for an extended amount of time. (Allison, December 9, 2018). The length of the program plays an important role in the transformative nature of the time abroad.

Despite the Italy Education trip through College of Education and Human Development being academically labeled as short-term, it is the actually the longest study abroad for pre-service teachers in the department.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the interviews and reflection journals yielded three noteworthy categories of growth in transformative learning: interpersonal growth, intrapersonal growth, and external outcomes. Interpersonal growth focused on the change's participants experienced through relationships with their fellow pre-service teachers and the students, as well as becoming a part of the Italian community. Intrapersonal growth inspected the wholistic growth of the person in regards to an increase in their empathy for English language learners and confidence in teaching them. The external outcomes evaluated the growth of the participant's understanding of language, teaching impact, cultural immersion, and significance of the duration of a study abroad program. The responses give evidence of transformative learning while abroad due to the structure and multiple components of the program. Participants appeared to have increased their intercultural competency through critical reflection and developing a stronger sense of empathy than they had before the start of the trip.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In analyzing the data, a frequent code regarding study abroad was money and financial aid. We found that many of the participants struggled to pay for the trip on their own. Many students who participate in study abroad face this issue, and even more face this who would like to participate but are unable to due to their financial situation. Future research could consider the affordability of study abroad for college students in America, particularly pre-service teachers.

In discussing the impact of knowledge of language abroad, some participants expressed that knowing Italian would have made their experience more transformative. Others expressed

that not knowing their language made the trip transformative in its own way. This discrepancy suggests a need for a comparative study that compares two similar or identical study abroad programs with the main difference being the knowledge of language of host country. This could help determine the significance of the knowledge of the language of the host country.

### **Recommendations for Future Programs and Faculty Leaders**

Many participants mentioned in either their interview or reflection that the language barrier played a significant role in their transformative learning. Therefore, faculty leaders should ensure that every participant receives some type of formal foreign language instruction geared prior to the trip. Also, the pre-service teachers should continue to receive foreign language lessons while abroad. In order to properly instruct ELLs, a variety of instructional strategies must be used. For future programs, one way that pre-service teachers could determine if strategies are useful or not would be to have the faculty leader compile a list of instructional strategies that the PSTs could use in their lessons. The PSTs would then reflect on the effectiveness of each strategy. This, alongside feedback from their faculty advisor, could increase the effectiveness of the PSTs through enhancing their sense of critical reflection.

### **Reflections from the Authors**

*Laura Woodson*

Participating in research as an undergraduate student gave me insight into the depth of knowledge that is at my disposal. It showed me the world of possibilities that opens up with a simple bit of curiosity. In the beginning, I had little idea of how this would effect me or what it would require of me, but I quickly learned. This project stretched me to be a critical thinker, to be precise and concise in my writing, and to constantly question the purpose of my actions as to not lose focus. It has sparked an interest in me for pursuing knowledge and to always remember

that I am constantly learning. Even halfway through the study abroad program, I knew I had been changed, and this gave me the opportunity to learn to use qualitative data collection to defend these claims. Interviewing my peers reminded me to not take my status as a trusted peer and friend for granted, especially in asking for the favor of an interview. Compiling data has showed me the importance of paying attention to patterns in order to be able to effectively sort them. Research is persistence, knowledge acquisition, and determination through a subject that sparks curiosity in one's mind--for me, this has been Italy.

*Sarah Crawford*

The opportunity to participate in undergraduate research was challenging and rewarding. It pushed me to work hard, be reflective, and think critically. Compiling our questions and data to prepare to write this thesis has caused me to be more appreciative and reflective of the experiences I have had in my time as an undergraduate student at Texas A&M. It taught me the power of group collaboration as well as the benefits of receiving consistent feedback. I enjoyed interviewing my peers and hearing their unique perspectives and insights on the study abroad experience and how it affected their view of teaching, learning, and culture. They opened my eyes to the ways in which the Italy Education 2018 program was truly transformative and enhanced my view of my future career as an educator.

*Jasmine Vela*

It has been a learning experience being an undergraduate researcher especially with no previous experience. I learned a lot about how important research is and how much hard work and patience goes into it. However, it has been great to compare and contrast the experiences my peers encountered through their responses and reflections. Most importantly, I was able to reflect from where I was a year ago to now. I had the opportunity to look at my reflections and

be formally interviewed to see how much I have changed as a person and professional. I learned how writing is essential and can always be improved. Research allows you to keep discovering new information that you never thought you would actually find and I believe that was the exciting part about this project. I was able to see how education and studying abroad are truly intertwined to make pre-service teachers well-rounded for their teaching careers. I don't believe I would have known how important it was for pre-service teachers to actually take the opportunity to study abroad if it weren't for this research. Undoubtedly, being a participant and an undergraduate researcher has been very valuable to me as a student and pre-service teacher.

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## APPENDIX A

**Interview dates:** December 9 2018 (in person), December 9 2018 (in person), December 9 2018 (in person), December 11 2018 (in person), January 12 2019 (audio-video platform), January 24 2019 (audio-video platform), January 24 2019 (audio-video platform), January 20 2019 (in person), March 5 2019 (audio-video platform), March 20 2019 (audio-video platform), March 19 2019 (audio-video platform), March 22 2019 (audio-video platform)

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol:

#### *General*

1. Which program did you participate in, when and for how long?
2. What first attracted you about the program? Did you apply to others as well?
3. What were barriers that you had to overcome to participate in this program?\*
4. Briefly describe your experience traveling abroad (in general, both past and recent non-vacation type trips). Where did you go, how long did you stay, and was it a study abroad?\*

#### *Community Engagement*

5. Did you participate in any community events on your own accord (outside of the program). If so, please describe it.\*
6. How would you describe cultural immersion? Give me some examples.\*
7. “Specifically, some female students in these studies reported nonverbal, verbal or even physical harassment in the host country, which led them to adopt less open interaction with local culture and host country inhabitants.” Respond to this quotation—did you ever feel that your experience was made more challenging by being female? (need to add citation if this is from an article)

#### *Transformative Experiences*

8. What was the impact of the time period abroad on your transformative experience, if applicable?
9. Has the study abroad experience(s) affected your daily life? If so, how?\*
10. Was there certain experience(s) abroad that had a significant impact on you, which caused a change or meaningful outcome? (emotionally and/or intellectually). Please describe. \*

### *Communication*

11. Do you believe smartphones may get in the way of your transformative learning experience abroad?
12. Did you have good cell reception or wifi while abroad? Do you think this enhanced or hindered your experience?

### *Intercultural Competence*

13. Did your empathy, defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as being : “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner” for English language learners increase as an effect of the time we spent in Italy (or in said country)\*
14. Has your experience made you more open-minded or interculturally aware such as being open to trying new things or opening up to new people? (might have to rephrase this)\*

### *Teaching*

15. In “Promising Practice: ESL Teacher Education at Home and Abroad and at Home: A Cautionary Tale”, a study that evaluated the effectiveness of a study abroad and classes to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching ELL’s, the researchers state that “Given that preservice teachers are predominantly white, monolingual, and have had little previous experience with ELLs, the beliefs they bring to their teacher education program often demonstrate little sensitivity to the affective variables influencing the academic success of ELLs.” (Have this printed for them to read silently) How would you evaluate this statement before your study abroad program began and after?
16. Describe your past experiences in the classroom? Have you worked in a school or a classroom setting before? Would you say you are very experienced or have no experience?\*
17. Rate on a scale of 1-10 how you felt before and after the program regarding developing a lesson plan and classroom management skills.\*
18. What is one thing that you learned from your study abroad that you can implement into your future classroom?

*Language*

19. While abroad (unless you are already fluent in the language of your host country) was one of your goals to learn the language of your host country? Why or why not?
20. Do you think being more proficient in the language of the host country would have made your experience more transformative? Why or why not?\*

*Relationships with Other Participants*

21. Were you able to develop collegial relationships with the other participants in the program? If so, did these develop before, during or after the beginning of the program?
22. If applicable, did having class on campus help in developing these relationships? Why or why not?
23. Did having these relationships in place support your opportunities to experience transformative learning? Why or why not?



# APPENDIX C

Today < > March 2018							Month	TEXAS A&M	L
SUN 25 16:00 Workshop AA 111	MON 26	TUE 27	WED 28	THU Mar 1	FRI 2 16:00 Aggie Awakening 111	SAT 3			
4 16:00 Aggie Awakening	5	6	7 18:00 RDNG 468	8	9	10			
11 Daylight Saving Time starts 16:00 ITALY 18:00 Laura's 21st Birth	12 Dinner in Rome with Gian Shuttle from Airport to Hotel	13 Dinner in Rome with Gian Lunch in Rome with Gian Morning Tour in Rome 20:00 Visit Vatican Museums	14 Dinner in Rome with Gian Ice Cream in Rome with Gian Lunch in Rome with Gian 2 more	15 Walking Tour of CF with Friends 16:00 Videochat with Elyse 16:30 Free time for shopping 2 more	16 Dinner at Roggi 01:30 Dinner at Santa Chiara 02:30 Orientation with Susan 3 more	17 St. Patrick's Day Dinner at Roggi Group Lunch in Florence 2 more			
18 Lunch on your own Visit Arezzo by Train in Afternoon	19 Lunch at your scheduled 14:00 Teaching English 00:00 Italian Lesson III 01:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	20 Lunch at your scheduled 01:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 21:00 Auditions	21 Lunch at your scheduled 09:00 Teaching English 01:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 2 more	22 Lunch at your scheduled 15:00 Trinity Tutoring 2 more	23 Lunch on your own	24			
25 Lunch with Families in Cortona	26 Lunch at your scheduled 15:00 Teaching English 02:30 Dinner at St. Chiara	27 Lunch at your scheduled 02:30 Dinner at St. Chiara 22:00 Trinity Tutoring	28 Lunch at your scheduled 00:00 Rehearsals 02:30 Dinner at St. Chiara 2 more	29 Easter Break Lunch on your own No School 02:30 Dinner at St. Chiara	30 Lunch on your own	31			

Today < > April 2018							Month	TEXAS A&M	L
SUN Apr 1 Easter Sunday	MON 2 Easter Monday Lunch on your own No School	TUE 3 Lunch on your own No School 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	WED 4 Lunch at your scheduled time 16:00 Teaching English 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Rehearsals	THU 5 Lunch at your scheduled	FRI 6 Lunch on your own 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	SAT 7			
8	9 Lunch at your scheduled 15:00 Teaching English 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	10 Lunch at your scheduled 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Rehearsals	11 Lunch at your scheduled 16:00 Teaching English 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Trinity Tutoring w/	12 Lunch at your scheduled 00:00 Rehearsals 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	13 Lunch on your own 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 13:18 Trip Castiglione Fiorentino	14			
15 20:19 Trip La Spezia Cortona	16 Lunch at your scheduled 15:00 Teaching English 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Trinity tutoring with	17 Tax Day Lunch at your scheduled 3 more	18 Lunch at your scheduled 16:00 Teaching English 00:00 Trinity Tutoring w/	19 Lunch at your scheduled 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Trinity Tutoring (a)	20 Lunch on your own 00:00 Rehearsals 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	21			
22 15:02 Trip Roma Termini 23:30 Theater Visit	23 Lunch at your scheduled 15:00 Teaching English 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Rehearsals	24 Lunch at your scheduled 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	25 Lunch on your own No School 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	26 Lunch at your scheduled 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 16:00 Teaching English 22:00 Trinity tutoring (a)	27 Lunch on your own Rachel & Thea Arrive! 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 06:59 Trip Castiglione Fiorentino	28			
29	30 Lunch on your own No School 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara	May 1 Lunch on your own Mrs. Parish arrives! No School 2 more	2 Lunch at your scheduled 00:30 Meeting with Rachel 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 2 more	3 Lunch at your scheduled 00:30 Meeting with Rachel 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chiara 22:00 Rehearsals	4 Check out of Santa Chiara Dinner at La Pievuccia Ice Cream in Cortona with	5 Cinco de Mayo Dinner at La Pievuccia Lunch at La Pievuccia 2 more			

Today		< > May 2018		Q	⚙	Month	⋮	UTexas A&M	L
SUN 29	MON 30	TUE May 1	WED 2	THU 3	FRI 4	SAT 5			
	Lunch on your own	Lunch on your own	Lunch at your scheduled	Lunch at your scheduled	Check out of Santa Chiar	Cinco de Mayo			
	No School	Mrs. Parish arrives!	● 00:30 Meeting with Rac	● 00:30 Meeting with Rac	Dinner at La Pievuccia	Dinner at La Pievuccia			
	● 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chi	No School	● 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chi	● 02:30 Dinner at Sta. Chi	Ice Cream in Cortona witi	Lunch at La Pievuccia			
		<b>2 more</b>	<b>2 more</b>	● 22:00 Rehearsals	<b>5 more</b>	<b>2 more</b>			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
Breakfast at La Pievuccia	Dinner with Teachers at L	● 09:00 Leave on shuttle t	● 01:35 Arrive in Houston						
Dinner at La Pievuccia	Lunch at La Pievuccia	● 15:00 Rome flight leave:							
● 00:30 Pygmalion Perfor	Tour at La Pievuccia	● 21:20 Leave London for							
● 04:00 Pygmalion Perfor									

The above calendars are from a shared google calendar that documents the tutoring and play rehearsals times throughout the trip. The times are documented in central time and took place 7 hours before (to match time zone in Rome).

## APPENDIX D

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>College complete at start of trip</b>	<b>Classroom experience</b>	<b>Relevant Travel Experience Y/N</b>	<b>Knowledge of Language</b>	<b>Funding concerns Y/N</b>
Allison	December 9 2018	2.5 years	Junior Methods and subbing, work	Yes	No	Yes
Marie	December 9 2018	2.5 years	Minimum	Yes	Spanish	Yes
Sophia	December 9 2018	2.5 years	Junior Methods and subbing, work	Yes	Spanish	No
Jesena	December 11 2018	1.5 years	Minimum	No	Spanish	Yes
Diana	January 12 2019	2.5 years	Junior Methods	Yes	No	No
Avani	January 24 2019	2.5 years	Junior Methods & philanthropy	Yes	No	
Taylor	January 24 2019	2.5 years	Junior Methods and subbing	No	No	No
Karla	January 20 2019	2.5 years	Minimum	No	No	Yes
Julie	March 5 2019	.5 year	Minimum	Yes	No	No
Kaylie	March 20 2019	1.5 years	Subbing	Yes	No	Yes
Susan	March 19 2019	1.5 years	Minimum	Yes	No	No
Vanessa	March 22 2019	1.5 years	Minimum	No	No	No