

Authority and Imposition in the Study Abroad Curriculum A Poststructural Lens

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Introduction

FOR DECADES, pre-service teachers have been traveling overseas to study, undertake classroom observations, or complete their student teaching requirements. Moreover, when they travel, they take with them a host of rules and requirements mandated by their U.S. teacher education program. But imagine if, much in the manner of Paddington Bear, our student arrived at her host's door step with simply a note that said, "Please take care of this student." What would it look like to entrust the education of our future teachers completely to experts in other countries, just as developing countries have done for years by sending their students to enroll in U.S. universities? Could we do it?

Much attention has been paid in the literature to the phenomenology and outcomes of overseas experiences, but less investigation has focused on questioning the overall structure and function of such efforts. While much good comes from these practices, this article questions how we can think critically about such processes, how we may lessen the imposition of our ways of educating students on others, and how we can expand our conceptualization of what "best-practice" may mean.

I have spent a good deal of my career focusing on overseas student teaching (Mahon, 2007; Mahon & Cushner, 2002, 2007). Let me make my position clear from the outset. I am absolutely a proponent of overseas student teaching. I firmly believe that students gain a wealth of unique personal and professional competencies otherwise unavailable to them through the traditional student teaching semester. Not only have I personally heard the stories from returning students attesting to this fact, and worked in the international setting with student teachers, but I have seen the data that supports such assertions. And, perhaps because I believe so strongly in the benefits of such an experience, I believe equally strongly that we should strive to improve it—and that improvement must start with the way we fundamentally understand and structure the experience

from an administrative standpoint. In order to do this we must examine taken-for-granted ways of doing and being surrounding student teaching. Notes Cherryholmes, “To avail ourselves of possible choices, however, it is necessary to identify and criticize privileged themes in texts and discourse-practices as well themes that are silenced” (1988, p. 153).

In addition to drawing from the literature, the information I put forth in this article is culled from my experiences working to establish overseas student teaching while employed at three different institutions over the course of my career and working with many others who were interested or involved in sending students abroad. Certainly in the last decade, especially in light of increased rhetoric surrounding global competitiveness and world “flatness,” it would appear that many teacher education institutions are recognizing the value of international practice and sending their students overseas. It is not my intention to assert that institutions are forbidding international practice on a large scale; rather, the purpose is to critique the methods which are used. Clearly, there may be institutions that exist which do not follow the operational patterns I talk about in this article. Nonetheless, I believe the policies and procedures discussed tend to be more the institutional norm rather than the exception. Before training a critical eye on this process, we turn to the existing literature on overseas study to ground the present study.

Background

Authors (Dennis, 2003; Lane, 2003) have noted that study abroad has become one of the top ten trends in higher education. The numbers of U.S. college students traveling abroad has grown by approximately 250 percent (Institute of International Education Network [IIEEN], 2005; Kitsantas, 2004) over 10 years. Study abroad can have profound effects because it requires not only physical and geographical adaptation, it necessitates wrestling with complex thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. First-person experience has consistently been shown as critical to intercultural development (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Bennett, 1993; Cushner & Brislin, 1996) cross cultural-awareness (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Lowe, Dozier, Hunt-Hurst, & Smith, 2008; McCormack, 2004), multicultural learning (Davis, 1997), and knowledge of diversity (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002; Pease, 1993). It has also been shown to augment students’ worldview, sense of autonomy, and cross-cultural effectiveness (Kaufmann, Martin, Weaver, & Weaver, 1992; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002; McCabe, 1994; McCormack, 2004; Zhai, 2000).

Study abroad has also demonstrated positive effects on teachers. These benefits include long-term impact on career advancement and personal accomplishment (Martens, 1991). Benefits such as increased confidence, respect for differences, and importance of communication have been shown from short-term study abroad in which clinical/observational coursework has been completed overseas (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001).

According to Sleeter (2007), who reviewed numerous approaches to enhancing the capacity of students and institutions to become culturally competent educators, immersion experiences—both short and long term, nationally and internationally—are highly valuable. However, it is the structure of the experience that matters most:

The most promising programs engage novice teachers with observation and coaching by exemplary teachers, to the greatest extent possible, rather than by whoever signs up. Ideally classroom support is longer than one semester of student teaching because, when

learning to teach cross-culturally, teachers require support while moving through culture shock and disorientation. It appears that without support many lose their optimism and give up, or they revert to teaching based on control and stereotypical interpretations of students and their homes. With preparation and support, novice teachers can become the excellent teachers children need and develop a sense of teaching efficacy that keeps them from leaving the teaching profession. (p. 189)

One such type of international immersion that has arisen is international student teaching. In addition to being exposed to differing educational philosophies and new pedagogical techniques, overseas student teachers gain a significant amount of self-knowledge, develop personal confidence, professional competence, and a greater understanding of both global and domestic diversity (Baker, 2000; Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Calhoun, Wildcat, Annett, Pierotti, & Griswold, 2003; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Mahon & Cushner, 2007; Stachowski, 2007; Stachowski & Brantmeier, 2002; Stachowski & Visconti, 1998).

Nevertheless, the question remains whether or not these experiences can be even more profound and made available to more students. In order to do this, we must critically question what is being sacrificed through the manner in which these experiences are currently implemented. The process of sending students abroad is deeply embedded in the structures of teacher education as a whole. Thus, in order to examine and ideally improve overseas experiences for teachers, we must question and examine these structures. In the present article, I utilize a poststructural lens to achieve this goal.

Poststructural Lens

In order to understand poststructuralism, it is helpful to be grounded in its ideological predecessor. Structuralism (Williams, 2005) is a way of looking at the world that assumes there is a more plausible or common occurrence of things—such is the idea of the normal curve. Exceptions or outliers may occur, but these would lie at the margin of a phenomenon. “The idea is that knowledge should start with the norm and only then consider the exception” (Williams, 2005, p. 2). Poststructuralism, however, does not agree to such tenants. Rather, it is a way of understanding the world that assumes that neither the core nor the margins are any more valid or reliable than the other. On the contrary, “the limit is the core” (p. 2). Limits cannot be known, but rather provide a point of departure to help expand boundaries of knowledge. “The work of the limit is to open up the core and to change our sense of its role as stable truth and value” (p. 3). To this end, St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) assert that the task at hand is, in the words of Judith Butler, “to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses (as cited in St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 4).

Numerous authors (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996; Lather, 2001, 2006; St. Pierre, 2000) have used poststructuralism to critique the institutionalized practices that marginalize and categorize knowledge (and knower) seen as extraneous (or dangerous) to the status quo. Notes Cherryholmes, structural approaches, or metanarratives, remove the individual from the center of the experience, adding, “...we have internalized appropriate rules and ideologies, have accommodated ourselves to dominant power relationships, and are more concerned with performing expected actions than with analyzing them” (1988, p. 6). This fixed mindset can have a profound impact on the ways teachers approach their work. Phelan (2001) observes that teacher education

plays an “integrating rather than a radicalizing role” in shaping teachers. The dominant discourses within schools of education work to mold the new teacher’s identity—which then goes on to shape school practices and values—but in a way that reflects the current paradigms of schooling. Battersby and Retallick (1988) refer to this as a “maintenance orientation” (as quoted in Phelan, 2001, p. 2). Phelan adds,

Put simply, teacher education maintains existing educational and social structures by teaching prospective teachers to assimilate and accommodate to existing ways of thinking and acting – dominant discourses – that are prevalent within a given context during a particular period in time. (2001, p. 584)

“The rules of a discourse govern what is said and what is unsaid. They identify who can speak with authority and who must listen” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 34). Such inability to consider the validity of other pedagogical approaches, to listen to others, suggests not only a lack of trust of the host country/institution’s teacher preparation methods, but an ethnocentrism on the part of U.S. teacher educators.

What would it look like if we worked from the limits rather than the core? How might we bring the student to the center of the experience? St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) liken poststructural work as the “not-yet thought,” calling upon Derrida’s idea of the “as-yet unnamable which begins to proclaim itself” (as cited in St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 4). The task for poststructural educators is:

...to “look awry” (Žižek, 1991) and ask questions that produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently, thereby producing different ways of living in the world. What might such reinscriptions look like? And, importantly, how do those of us who have been privileged by the authority of foundationalism, those who have begun to understand their complicity in perpetuating its indignities, proceed? (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1)

St. Pierre and Pillow note that such work does not suggest we have found any answers, where “one regime of truth simply replaces another” (p. 4). Rather, by critiquing what is, what has always been done, we have the opportunity to refresh it “to such an extent that it might, indeed, become unrecognizable” (p. 9).

Nomadic Inquiry

In order for the current structures of overseas student teaching to become unrecognizable and reinvigorated, we must embark on a journey as nomads. St. Pierre (2000) calls to our attention the use of nomadic inquiry as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Such inquiry requires the distinction of striated versus smooth spaces. The former consists of boundaries, structures and limits, whereas the latter is situational, “anonymous, collective, and non-subjective” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 263).

St. Pierre acknowledges the power of the geographical place because of its significance to our identities—and growth only comes from finding “new earth,” or

...that different place, can only be imagined from a particular location and requires risking the loss of the positivities that have coalesced and rooted themselves there. The point here about attachment to places, and our histories in them, is that home is not a haven; identity can never be a refuge. A consolation derived from an authentic, stable essence is no more possible in places than in subjectivities. Both are performances accomplished within relations, and both, for the sake of ethics, require persistent critique. (p. 260)

Along these same lines, as teacher educators we may begin to call home our own ways of educating, staying rooted to the conceptual spaces of what we deem best practice. Moreover, these efforts are generally of the striated nature as a large system of rules and procedures go along with the process of sending students abroad. These rules formulate what Foucault called a discursive practice—or historically and culturally determined ways of acting—which in turn creates a specific discourse—or set of rules about what can be said (or written) and by whom (Cherryholmes, 1988). Foucault referred to a system of discursive practices as regimes of truth that constitute forms of social constraint serving to legitimize some power and knowledge over others (Fraser, 1989). Foucault's form of analysis, or genealogical method, was concerned with the "process, procedures, and apparatuses whereby truth, knowledge, belief are produced" (Fraser, 1989, p. 19).

For our practice to emanate from a smooth space would require putting our students and their international hosts at the center, and ourselves at the periphery. Most of all, it would necessitate mentally traveling to a seemingly different universe—putting our identities as "experts," and our (national) notions as best practitioners, aside. In this way, the student journey would be more profound. We would ask them to spend a longer time selecting a placement that is right for them, that fits their needs and future plans, not ours. We would require them to complete a comprehensive pre-departure orientation semester, so they are best prepared to face the challenges of safely and satisfyingly living and working in another country. We would demand that they learn about the culture and educational system of their host, just as they are learning about education in the United States. We would expect them to give the same (if perhaps not better) attention and professional behavior to their hosts as they would in their U.S. placement. And then we would let them go.

We might ask them to communicate with us, just so we know they are safe and happy, not so we are checking up on the quality of the work they are doing. We would ask them to bring back some evidence that they have met the requirements of their host who will attest that they are ready to be members of the teaching profession. And we will warn them that should their host not feel they are prepared, we will simply agree—not intervene or question the methods the host used—but require them to repeat their student teaching. We will expect that they share with their fellow students and us many of the new philosophies, the different techniques and approaches they learned from their hosts, and to tell us what they believe we should change in our approach to education in the United States. Finally, we should ask them to explain how they will incorporate their new knowledge in their future classrooms.

While it may seem that the student's journey is a long one, it pales in comparison to the distance that must be traveled by myself, by the teacher educator. Ironically, in comparison to the students, our list of tasks is shockingly short—to learn about and trust the international host and his or her ways of teacher education, ensure no harm comes to the student, and let go—yet despite its brevity, it is infinitely more difficult to achieve. Why?

Generally, overseas student teachers must complete their student teaching under the same regulations and using the same historically constituted processes as they would in the United States. Ostensibly, this occurs because of a belief that the current student teaching system functions sufficiently to create the competent teacher. Secondly, for some, it may be invigorating enough to teacher education practice that a layer of internationalization sits atop the professional program. That is, simply getting the student overseas may seem like a radical departure from the norm. But is it really any different? As Lather asks, “In making room for something else to come about, how do we stop confining the other within the same?” (2001, p. 219). To journey beyond this conceptualization, we must bracket this notion that there is one or any best practice approach to student teaching, let alone one that can transcend national boundaries. By not fully entrusting the education of our students to their hosts, we subjugate our international colleagues and privilege our method of teacher education. For example, in a report of their overseas study program, Brindley, Quinn, and Morton (2008) recommend that faculty have a good relationship with hosts because: “Ultimately the more this person understands your programme and the needs of your trainee teachers, the more capable they are of finding suitable placements and articulating *your objectives* to head teachers and teachers alike before your arrival” (p. 532, emphasis added).

As I have mentioned elsewhere (Mahon, 2007), such ownership and exportation of one’s own agenda is described as monocropping (Evans, 2004) or, “the imposition of blueprints based on idealized versions of Anglo-American institutions, the applicability of which is presumed to transcend national circumstances and cultures” (p. 30). What we send abroad on this one-way road of teacher education is also grounded in specific race, gender, and class notions that certainly have no guarantee of translation to other contexts. The knowledge that constitutes the present discourse-practice of preparing the U.S. public school teacher has grown from a white, male, middle class tradition of what education and knowledge should be. Further, it may be assumed that since the U.S. is a developed nation, bringing our ideas to others will cause their development. We must step outside this structure if we are to enable students to learn about other ways of knowing and doing education.

Perhaps more than any other time during a teacher education program, what is at stake for students during the student teaching semester is greatest. After all, if they do not satisfactorily complete the semester, more than a grade hangs in the balance, but also the final attainment of a degree and a teaching license. Maybe they would like to try different pedagogical techniques, to become knowledgeable about another country and culture, to consider if there are not better ways to educate. Yet this would require drawing attention away from the agenda that has been set for them in their approved program of study. Given the power differential, it is not surprising that students accept the status quo. The job of challenging the dominant discourse then falls to the teacher educator. By altering the discourse, we have the opportunity to alter the way our students understand and “do” school, as well as the ways they understand cultural differences. If we, as teacher educators, begin to think outside the traditional paradigms, we can open up new possibilities for learning, not only for our students but also for our own professional growth. As the following discussion shows, we must begin by examining these rules at macro and micro levels—beginning with the overall structure of the university system and working down to specific elements such as certification, accreditation, curriculum, supervision, and even to the assignments students are required to complete.

The Structural Prison of the University System

As authors have argued (Scott, 1998; Van Damme, 2001), universities are modeled on a nation-state system. That is, most modern universities have been part of a process of capitalistic expansion and democratization. Most are highly dependent on the state for their budgets, and many are influenced by the machinations of political parties. Their international efforts grew from these roots. Van Damme notes,

Thus, universities institutionally have grown up within a national political framework and have established specific national educational systems, regulations and procedures, adapted to meet the needs of the domestic economy and culture. Even the first significant forms of internationalization, characterized by the exportation of university systems in the context of colonization or, nowadays, development aid and international trade in education, still are situated within the national frame of reference of the domestic nation state. (p. 416)

Internationalization, generally, is defined as universities' efforts to "expand their reach over national borders" (Van Damme, 2001, p. 417). However, Wächter offers a more sophisticated, and less commonly adopted, form of internationalization, "the process of systematic integration of an international dimension into the teaching, research, and public service function of a higher education institution" (as quoted in Van Damme, 2001, p. 417). Perhaps because of the nation-state origins of the modern university, it is more difficult to adopt a truly global model of international education, as the two often conflict. What has become more important than the full integration of international efforts is commodification of internationalization. For example, students coming from abroad are a lucrative business for a university because they are often full-fee paying. An international experience is seen as a way to set one's resume apart, thus increasing one's competitiveness in the global job market. Thus, students who have the financial means to afford such study may have a leg up on the competition. Van Damme notes that student financial resources are not the only barrier to internationalization, so is institutional funding, given the trend towards decreased higher education funding. Other problems include lack of a clear strategy for international development, legal and administrative obstacles, and variations in administration approaches—from centralized offices to departmental or even faculty efforts.

In relation to international student teaching, such a nation-state/global conflict is evident. Research continues to bemoan the lack of internationalization of teacher education (Longview Foundation, 2008; Schneider, 2003a). According to a comprehensive report compiled by the Longview Foundation, *Teacher Preparation for the Global Age* (2008), attempts to prepare teachers to be globally competent are usually disconnected and haphazard. Funding is also an issue. Further, the authors note,

Course requirements and student teaching take up significant space in most pre-service teachers' schedules, leaving little room for study abroad, world language study, or internationally oriented electives. Craig Kissock, Professor Emeritus at the University of Minnesota–Morris, has pointed out that the culture of teacher education is local and therefore has advanced policies that serve the neighborhood schools but not the needs of future citizens of today's globalized world. Hence, most teachers begin their careers with little more than superficial knowledge of the world. (p. 6)

In examining the prospect of internationalization of teacher education across 24 campuses, Schneider (2003a) found both study abroad and international student teaching to be rarities—enrollment of teacher education students was “close to zero,” on most campuses surveyed—a casualty often born of curriculum requirements.

The power of the nation-state and the curriculum come together in the form of certification or licensure requirements for teaching, and of course, every state has different regulations. Schneider (2003b) found that interviewees cited the major deterrents to international experiences within education were supervision and “the frequent existence of state rules requiring that practice teaching be done in the certifying state” (p. 14). I see this finding to be particularly indicative of Foucault’s regimes of truth, or what Walkerdine (1990) called “fiction lived as fact” (p. 48). In my prior research (Mahon, in press) surveying more than 60 percent of state offices of teacher education, only three states (Texas, New Mexico, and Kansas) appear to require that student teaching be completed within state borders. Rather for the majority of the states, international student teaching was either permissible or was placed in the hands of university officials. That is, if teacher educators approved any deviation, such as international student teaching, to the approved program, the state would abide by that recommendation. This places a great deal of power in the hands of those within schools and colleges of education.

The Transcendental Signified: Highly Qualified, Best-Practice and Accreditation

A key concept at the center of a poststructural analysis is to examine what Cherryholmes (1988) refers to as the transcendental signified—an overarching or fundamental idea that “rises above” the rest and to which all others are compared. Cherryholmes asks: “Where did they come from? How were they produced? How are they reproduced? Why are they authoritative? What do they assert?” (p. 32–33). In the current teacher education discourse, one transcendental signified that bears much weight on the curriculum, and thus the overseas student teaching process, is the notion of the “highly qualified” teacher that was the product of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Schools and colleges of education are pressured to ensure the continuous production of the “highly qualified” teacher. Selwyn (2007) has argued that NCLB has forced schools and colleges of education to emphasize testing above all else. Even if everyone involved agrees a student would make an excellent teacher, if they do not pass the state-mandated tests, they cannot become certified.

Therefore, programs are changing and rearranging curriculum to give students the best shot at passing tests. The Center on Education Policy (2006) issued a report showing that NCLB has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, with more than 70 percent of schools reducing instructional time in other subjects to make more room for math or reading and placing more demands on how teaching must occur. Schneider (2003a) found that the majority of education students took between 30 and 60 hours of general education courses as well as at least 24 education credits, not including observation hours and student teaching, and most have very few electives (Graber, 1996). Schneider (2003a) also found that interviewees perceived that one of the biggest obstacles to overseas study for education majors was a lack of creditable overseas programs that were appropriate for education majors. Clearly, this finding shows a perceived core structure and discourse-practice to teacher education, one that privileges U.S. American ways of teaching and

learning and pronounces other options as less than. More will be said on this subsequently as I investigate other nations' programs of teacher education.

Further, to demonstrate “data-driven” compliance with the highly qualified standard, students are subjected to in-service and post-program testing, certain curriculum standards such as literacy instruction, and often must produce “evidence” in the form of a teaching portfolio. This last requirement is especially necessary for those institutions accredited by such bodies as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Given Schneider's findings, it appears that certification requirements may be structural limits that should be critically examined. She explained:

How hard and fast are certification requirements, and what determines them? It seems to be a fast-changing set of domains. State legislatures may play strong roles, as do some state Boards of Education, but I also heard from Education deans that they (the SCDEs) [Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education] really have considerable latitude, that the key is accreditation, through NCATE (the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and its member organizations rather than the state bureaucracies. Several deans added that the increasing number of mandates from the accreditors is unlikely to include anything “international.” (2003b, p. 3)

Personally, I have heard principals, educators, and administrators remark that international student teaching may not be viewed as a worthwhile expenditure of time and effort as it could be seem to detract from the goals of creating highly qualified teachers familiar with navigating the mandates and necessities of public schooling. In these situations, some institutions will approve an additional semester of student teaching, in effect asking the student to complete his or her “real” or legitimate semester at home, and then to go abroad for the “experience.” Given the fact that there is less additional scholarship monies for overseas endeavors (Schneider, 2003a), it should be obvious the extent to which this privileges students from higher income levels. However, this may also privilege white students who are statistically shown to be less reliant on financial aid than their counterparts of color (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). On the other hand, administrators will refer to such experience as a “resume-builder” which will help to set graduates apart from the masses applying for a teaching position. Student teaching abroad is valued less for its potential impact on pedagogical competencies than it is as a commodity.

Giving “Approval:” On Appropriate Hosts and Supervisors

A number of areas common to the international teaching experience indicate evidence of regimes of truth. These include institutional approval, supervision, assignments, and pre-departure orientation. Current practices tend to privilege schools and procedures that are as similar to those used in the U.S.—an irony for a program emphasizing international study. Not only does this suggest that U.S. teacher education programs are good enough to be internationally exported, it also exploits both the teacher and international hosts.

Once an institution approves student teaching, the location of the placement is questioned. For example, often a placement will only be approved if it is accredited according to U.S. standards, such as an American International School or Department of Defense Dependent

(DODDs) school. Schneider's (2003b) respondents often mentioned arrangements with DODDS, but which the author noted, "are not very likely to offer strong immersion experiences in a foreign culture" (p. 14). On occasion, exceptions may also be made for other western models such as a British or Canadian International School. It appears to be the rare student teacher who is approved to student teach in a local public school, although it is more common in England or Australia. Clearly, in these situations, a student must have the necessary language proficiency; however, exceptions can be made for students who are teaching English as a Second Language or in schools that have bilingual programs in English. Yet still these types of placements are much more difficult to get approved. Moreover, when we accept public school placements in English speaking nations but disapprove of them in other countries, despite the student's language abilities, what does this say about the types of educational systems that are most valued?

The most obvious reality of going abroad is that it requires an additional set of skills and knowledge, but often students are treated no differently than if they were simply going to another county or state to complete their requirements. They may be given little to no intercultural adjustment orientation, language training, or emergency preparation. Moreover, due to accreditation requirements, many schools of education require students to complete observation reports, submit lesson or unit plans according to a strict format, compile learner assessment data, and finally to complete a portfolio or other final report. This again privileges and imposes the U.S. method of teacher training, and as one international host told me, creates another set of paperwork to be learned and evaluated by the host teacher and supervisor who clearly already have their own work to complete (Neil Andersen, personal communication, April, 2000).

This leads us to supervision. The name in and of itself suggests an assumed superiority. Taken literally—higher sight—assumes that someone has a wider, better view and is thus more qualified to judge the efforts of others. Certainly, supervision is a necessity to some extent in the student teaching process; however, within the international student teaching process, it takes on even greater meaning. As noted, Schneider (2003a) found that supervision issues were the most often cited obstacle regarding overseas student teaching. The method of supervision must be approved by U.S. based faculty. (And even in this global age, in some cases, the red tape surrounding paying foreign nationals through the university accountancy system has led some to require that only U.S. nationals living abroad be supervisors!) This may lead U.S. based faculty to judge methods of supervision or credentials of supervisors without a clear understanding of the method or the person. Furthermore, by what and whose standards are these supervisors and supervision methods to be judged? Clearly, we want students to have excellent supervisors, but rather than trust their international counterparts, some schools will still assign a U.S. based supervisor to communicate with both the host supervisor and the student, which, in effect, adds another level of regulation not expected of the student teacher who stays in the United States.

Questioning our Right to be the Authority

In many cases it appears the assumption for overseas placements is that if the school in question passes our (read U.S.) standards for quality, it is a worthy placement site for students. Unfortunately, what goes unexamined is the question of whether non-U.S. accredited placements could be as good, if not better sites of learning for our students. As no data exists which makes a comparison of the international and in-country school possible, I turn instead to evaluations of teacher education programs in other countries who prepare teachers for the public schools. It can

be assumed that teachers trained in these systems would generally be the supervisors of our students should they be placed in such a school.

In a comprehensive review of the literature, Akiba, LeTendre, and Scribner (2007), examined educational quality in the U.S. compared to other nations. They report that students in the U.S. are behind in math, science and reading, and have “one of the lowest rates of school retention in the developed world” (p. 370). The U.S. also has more children living in poverty, a greater achievement gap for students from single-parent homes, and tends to rely more on the school to alleviate the effects of poverty. Unfortunately, in a comparison of 46 countries, the authors found only three other nations had greater numbers of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds being taught by less qualified teachers. They found that countries with the highest numbers of students being taught by highly qualified teachers tended to recruit and retain the best teachers. In addition, data from these countries showed that exposure to more high quality teachers, continuous quality professional development, and more equal school funding led to greater student achievement and less of a gap between outcomes for rich and poor.

Wang, Coleman, Coley, and Phelps (2003) completed a comparison study of teacher education programs of countries who had scored as well or better than the United States on the International Mathematics and Science Study at the eighth grade (TIMSS). These countries included Australia, England, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, and Singapore. This study examined such programmatic elements as entrance/exit requirements, practical experience, certification requirements, and in-service or professional development requirements. In general, the report found the following:

With the exception of Australia, the other countries have more centralized teacher education systems leading to greater control. In addition, only the United States has additional oversight from a number of bodies such as accrediting agencies or professional organizations, which leads to a much greater disparity across programs than other countries. In regard to gate keeping as to who enters the profession, Wang et al. (2003) write, “Compared to the United States, screening criteria are more rigorous and are applied earlier in the teacher education and certification pipeline in most of the countries surveyed” (p. 4). In addition, graduate level programs in the U.S. also had the least stringent entry requirements for content area mastery than any of the other countries.

The authors also found a great deal of similarity in the content of teacher education programs across the countries. Most included courses in subject area knowledge, educational theory, pedagogical techniques, as well as time spent in the field. All countries required their participants to student teach, but the requirements were varied. The U.S. ranked towards the middle of this field with an average requirement of 12 weeks of practical experience. The Netherlands (48 weeks), England (24), and Australia (16) all required more practical experience, whereas Singapore (10), Hong Kong (8), Korea (4) and Japan (3) required less. In general, the authors found that supervision was very similar across all countries, with evaluations generally conducted by some combination of individuals such as university faculty, school personnel, and/or administration. The greatest exception was found in Japan, where in addition to supervision, a committee of faculty is convened to examine all of a student’s evaluations.

The greatest differences between the U.S. and other countries involved testing and in-service requirements. Besides the U.S., only England required a test by another body in addition to tests given by the teacher education program. And both countries were the only ones to require additional testing for certification after the teacher education program was completed and were the only countries to recognize alternative paths to licensure. Japan, Australia, and Singapore all

require new teacher induction programs, whereas the Netherlands and Korea do not. Due to state control and other legislative factors in the U.S., there is no consistency across the states for this factor. Most notably, the authors recommended that the U.S. should learn from other countries' ways of filtering unsatisfactory teachers out of the profession. In general, other countries use much more of what the authors termed "high stakes" filters throughout the entire teacher education program, from initial entry to a program to advanced career standing. High-stakes refers to the need for a pre-service or in-service teacher to satisfy a certain criterion or be forced out of the profession. In the U.S., however, the stakes are generally low (classified as minimal or voluntary) throughout the process with the exception of certification and to some extent initial entry into a teacher education program.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In order to interrogate the striated, structured spaces where overseas student teaching currently exists, we must be willing to leave our "expert" shores and strike out as nomads to what may seem like hostile territories. We must question where we have come by the notion that we have the right to export U.S. American methods of teacher education. Or, worse, how has it come to be that we can justify the mindset that other countries should not and will not serve as adequate training grounds for our pre-service candidates? How have we come to justify asking a student to pay for two semesters of student teaching (one in-country, one abroad) because we do not recognize the overseas experience as "legitimate"? We have a great deal of data to suggest that it is fruitful to look beyond the structures we have come to accept as "best practice," but we often continue to ignore this data or to maintain our own power/knowledge structures without their critical examination. While there are numerous places within the system we can point to as making the situation more difficult, the reality is that, if we are to dismantle the structures that bind, this effort must begin individually. Schneider (2003b) found that respondents admitted the following in regard to changing internationalization on campus:

Yes, the certification requirements are important factors, but many have told me that a lot of discretion is possible within the overall undergraduate context—that with careful planning and advising the prospective teacher can include language training and study abroad in his or her study plan and that many other internationally oriented courses and extracurricular activities can be worked into a student's undergraduate experience. (p. 5)

It is true that international experiences are on the rise. It is tempting to sit and rest upon this knowledge that at least more students may have the opportunity to complete their professional education overseas. But in my nomadic journey to push beyond what I know, I cannot help but notice the annoying rocks within my shoes. As I have said, I have worked in this area for many years, and I have to admit that more can be done. I am guilty of having stayed safely on my own mental plot of land. I question whether I have worked hard enough—whether I have succumbed to the positioning of the untenured faculty member—to challenge the powers and practices that be. I find it particularly inexcusable that I have not done more to bring foreign pre-service teachers to the U.S. to complete their practice teaching (and I have to wonder if, given the study by Wang et al. [2003], other nations see our educational preparation as less than.) And I would like to use this article as an invitation to any international scholar to contact me to facilitate the

placement of student teachers in the United States. Additionally, I know that I can do more to ask student teachers who go abroad not only to tell me about innovative teaching practices, but to tell their colleagues—and mine. In this way, perhaps we can broaden the notion that it is possible to trust other ways of preparing teachers, and thereby to challenge the overarching system, the discourse-practice, in which we are currently imprisoned.

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