

Influences of a Short Term International Field Experience on Preservice Teachers' Perceptions and Cultural Competency

Abstract

This qualitative study investigated a ten-day international field experience in Peru and its influence on undergraduate and graduate level teacher education students' cultural competency. Data were collected on 8 participants through observations, focus groups, individual interviews, and course assignments. Participants reported positive personal and professional change in regards to cultural learning and intercultural understanding. They identified how the experience positively influenced their teaching and how they would apply their increased knowledge and understanding about cultural diversity in their classrooms and in interactions with children and parents.

Keywords: cultural competency, preservice teacher education, study abroad

1. Introduction

“The number one reason teachers teach is because they want to help young people learn and develop” (National Center for Education Information [NCEI], 2005, p. 3). Teachers overwhelmingly identify this reason regardless of their age, gender, race, grade level, or community. However, in order to successfully realize this aspiration, teachers must be prepared to effectively teach in a culturally diverse environment.

The importance of cultural competency in preservice teacher education programs has been established and advocated for by educational organizations such