

A Reflection on the Nature of Teaching and Learning in the Context of Study Abroad

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Abstract: As educators are increasingly called upon to integrate international content into curricula to reflect the world's growing interconnectedness, study abroad programs have become an integral part of higher education across disciplines. Education abroad provides an invaluable method of offering experiential learning to enhance students' awareness and understanding of multicultural issues. However, the degree of intercultural learning obtained has been questioned, particularly within today's corporatized model of higher education and its emphasis on student recruitment and retention. Critics have likened today's study abroad students to privileged tourists, having limited opportunities for engagement and understanding of diverse people and cultures. This paper uses an autoethnographic approach to explore a six-week summer semester in Japan. I, the author, examine the nature of teaching and learning within the context of study abroad.

Keywords: travel, Japan, study abroad, autoethnography, cultural humility, cultural competency

The call to highlight global interconnections in social work curricula reflects the importance of intercultural engagement in an increasingly transnational world (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). This importance is reflected in ethical standards that call on the profession to "work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (National Association of Social Workers, 2000, p. 61), and "promote respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions amongst different ethnic groups and societies" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2012, para. 15). Cultural competence has been identified as an essential social work skill, crucial for alleviating conflict across cultures (Rotabi, Gamble, & Gammonley, 2007, para. 2). Toward this goal, international study abroad programs are increasingly employed as a means to enhance intercultural engagement and understanding.

Throughout its history, education abroad has been carried out in various models, each providing a different emphasis and experience of intercultural learning. Central to these models and their varying emphases is the degree to which students experience opportunities for engagement that facilitate a deeper level of intercultural understanding. For many students, long-term international stays are often unfeasible. The rising costs of a university education and the time constraints of students have resulted in a remarkable growth in short-term programs (Walters, Charles, & Bingham, 2017). Defined as programs lasting "less than a standard academic semester or quarter" (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009, p. 366), short-term stays now account for the majority of all study abroad programs (Institute International Education [IIE], 2015).

Additionally, the issue of financial incentives for higher education institutions providing study abroad has raised critical questions regarding trends in international education. In an increasingly competitive environment, universities vie with each other to recruit students, and study abroad opportunities may offer enrollment incentives. Consequently, are these programs

viewed as educational opportunities or as a chance for students to encounter a novel international experience? Some have likened today's study abroad students to the privileged travelers of previous generations. Touring foreign locales from the standpoint of a vacationer, the American study abroad participant has been described as a "colonial student" (Ogden, 2007–2008), having limited engagement with and understanding of local people and their culture.

Foronda and Belknap (2012) pointed out that much of the literature on education abroad presents the experience as positive and transformative; disappointing or problematic experiences receive limited attention and educators may be less inclined to report such experiences. My own encounter with study abroad was filled with unexpected challenges. Attempting to teach in a very different environment from the traditional classroom, I was pushed to examine my assumptions about teaching and learning. This paper employs an autoethnographic approach as a means to explore the experience of study abroad from a more reflective, less approbatory perspective. The use of autoethnography entails the sort of reflection that educators often ask of students and, likewise, must be willing to engage in as well.

Placing Study Abroad into Context

Commenting on the relatively recent growth in international study, Bodycott (2012) highlighted the variety of educational options available to students and trends toward student mobility as an increasingly common part of higher education (Cui, 2013; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). In American institutions, study abroad has encompassed various models, including student exchange, direct enrollment in foreign universities, and the increasingly common "Island Model" (University of Illinois at Chicago, Study Abroad Office, 2014-2017). In contrast to the traditional junior year abroad associated with the origins of international education, Island Model programs tend to be short-term and function relatively independent of the host institution. Home campus faculties teach their students and often reside together, apart from the host institution and its community (Hanouille & Leuner, 2001; Kehl & Morris, 2008). Thus, students and faculty exist in "a self-contained context" (Norris & Dwyer, 2005, p. 121), which may limit opportunities for intercultural learning.

Dwyer (2004) found that interactions with other cultures increased students' awareness of their own cultural values and biases and were significantly more likely to increase knowledge and understanding of diverse populations and communities. However, the length of time students spent abroad appeared to have an important influence on intercultural learning; not surprisingly, students who spent a full year abroad exhibited greater knowledge and understanding of the host culture. Following the Island Model, our six-week semester seemed to limit the level of cultural immersion students were able to experience. As students were taking courses delivered from their own faculty, they had less opportunity for interaction with students and teachers from the host school. Consequently, this self-contained approach may have inadvertently fostered detachment from the local culture, impeding the primary objectives of international education.

Dwyer's (2004) longitudinal study provides what may be the most comprehensive review on international education. Employing a large representative sample obtained through the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES), her research found that a full year of study

abroad provides measurable benefits in terms of academic achievement, career options, and maintaining foreign language skills over time. While short-term stays also produced benefits, Dwyer concluded, “clearly the greatest gains across all outcome categories are made by full-year students” (p. 161). Unfortunately, as noted, long-term study abroad is unrealistic for many students today. Moreover, while intercultural engagement may be the primary goal of study abroad for educators, this may not necessarily be a priority for students. Thus, identifying the values and objectives that motivate various participants and stakeholders is critical.

Factors Influencing Decisions to Study Abroad

Perkins and Neumayer (2014) reported that the average income of the host country’s citizens had greater influence over decision making than the academic reputation of the host institution for students outside the US. Students from Africa and China often pursue study abroad as a means to obtain a measure of financial security for their future (Bodycott, 2012; Maringe & Carter, 2007). In contrast, Norwegian and American students reportedly viewed international education as opportunities for travel, pleasure, or career advancement (Payan, Svensson, Høgevold, & Sedbrook, 2015). Despite increased racial diversity among US study abroad participants in recent years, students continue to be predominantly white and are more likely to come from affluent backgrounds (Horn, Jerome, & White, 2008; Institute of International Education, 2016; Stallman, Woodruff, Kasravi, & Comp, 2010). This economic disparity played out within our group of students. One student, who appeared to have fewer financial resources, seemed less integrated into the group. Unfortunately, the student’s inability to take part in some tourist activities due to financial constraints occasioned criticism from other students. Students’ interest in sight-seeing opportunities, while understandable, also seemed to exemplify the challenge to maintain a focus on educational priorities.

Ogden (2007–2008) posited that the model of education abroad parallels the history of Western colonialism, with students analogous to the “colonial traveler” seeking international travel, while maintaining the privilege and comfort of their own culture. He argued that “students (and their parents) are increasingly demanding familiar amenities and modern conveniences while abroad and seemingly with total disregard to host cultural norms or feasibility” (Ogden, 2007–2008, p. 37). Consequently, critics have charged that the experience of study abroad may be more akin to tourism rather than an opportunity for intercultural exchange and learning (Cheng, 2013; Shannon-Baker & Talbot, 2016). Moreover, acquiescing to student expectations of accommodation may reinforce perceptions of American exceptionalism, rather than facilitate students’ awareness of their own privilege.

Advertising for study abroad programs seems to promote student expectations of privilege. Zemach-Bershin (2008) examined promotional materials targeting US students for international education. The dominant images repeatedly portrayed white students as the center of attention, with locals on the periphery, seeming to serve the function of an audience. Likewise, Zemach-Bershin argued that the language of this advertising often emphasizes active and adventurous American students, contrasted with passive, uncharted cultures and people waiting to be discovered (e.g. “Let’s wake up the world” and “The World Awaits”). This unfortunately parallels Western culture’s history of arrogance and ignorance of cultures beyond its own

borders.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that our students' behaviors were also influenced by the cultural norms of hospitality demonstrated by our hosts. The Japanese concept of *omotenashi*, referring to Japanese hospitality and an emphasis on caring for guests (Yi, 2016), was in evidence throughout our stay. Students and faculty were often treated as visiting dignitaries, attending receptions arranged by our hosts and receiving gifts at various agency visits. At times, the level of attentiveness could feel awkward and overwhelming. I remember feeling some embarrassment as we exited a reception held on the evening of our first day in Japan; students and faculty of the host school lined both sides of the hall and applauded as we walked out. Certainly, it would be difficult to fault students for having a sense of privilege after receiving this kind of attention.

Japan is generally considered a "Westernized" culture, with a highly developed economy. Thus, issues of poverty and oppression may be less evident than in other international settings. Conversely, other study abroad experiences may expose students to the realities of poverty and oppression that can be particularly distressing. Namakkal (2013) noted the experience of a University of Chicago student who wrote of her shock at the sexual harassment she encountered shopping for saris in the market bazaars of India. Similarly, reflections on the experience of education abroad revealed students' surprise at the hostility they encountered due to their identity as Euro-Americans (Brown University, Office of International Programs, n.d.).

Although the Island Model of study abroad may protect students from the sort of experience described above, it also limits opportunities to grapple with issues of privilege and structural oppression (Foronda & Belknap, 2012). This illustrates what may be a fundamental dilemma of education abroad; in order for students to experience the immersion that leads to intercultural learning and a critical examination of power and privilege, they must be able to experience a degree of autonomy and risk that self-contained programs do not provide.

The Dilemmas of Profit and Privatization in Study Abroad

Describing market-based trends in the contemporary university, Gilbert (2013) argued that neoliberal economic philosophies in the US have influenced the development of the "corporate university" in which the focus on academics competes with an emphasis on revenue. The issue of financial incentives for institutions providing study abroad has raised questions regarding trends in international education. The increased demand for higher education and growth in student mobility have led to the development of study abroad as a global industry, with higher education identified as a major export among some countries (Bodycott, 2012; OECD, 2014).

As noted, opportunities for international study may be seen as a valuable recruitment strategy for higher education institutions. For example, some of the literature on planning study abroad trips have noted the value of working with university public relations staff to promote the program and recruit potential students (Gammonley, Rotabi, & Gamble, 2007). The question remains as to how educators can develop and structure the study abroad experience to facilitate an educational experience rather than a tourist experience.

The current trend in higher education toward a student-as-customer model (Searcy, 2017) may further complicate the balance between meeting students' learning needs and their expectations of international education. Students may generally approach education from a "customer-service" orientation, expecting university faculty and staff to provide resources to minimize discomfort or inconvenience. This can be particularly problematic within the context of study abroad. For example, some students reported having a "meltdown" because they didn't have access to wi-fi in their dorm. This was especially disconcerting because our host school had clearly gone out of their way to accommodate the American students. This increasing perception of higher education students as "customers" (Ogden, 2007–2008) may reinforce the emphasis on tourism over learning and critical thinking as the focus of the study abroad experience.

As noted, this paper uses autoethnography to explore a study abroad experience in which five BSW students accompanied me and a faculty colleague on a six-week summer semester to our university's sister school in Japan. The critical reflection of autoethnography also allows for an examination of study abroad as it relates to cultural considerations of privilege and the nature of teaching and learning within the context of international education.

Methodology

Autoethnography has been defined as a post-modern approach intended to "analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 1). The value of self-reflection as an educational tool was pioneered by John Dewey (1910/1991). However, its merit as a strategy for anti-oppressive practice is especially relevant to social work education (Mattsson, 2014). Fook and Askeland (2007) provided a particularly applicable model, emphasizing reflection on cultural factors as an examination of taken-for-granted assumptions regarding "normal" behaviors and ideas, as well as what constitutes knowledge. The authors acknowledged that the process of "unearthing deeper assumptions" may precipitate anxiety, but ultimately has the power to transform social work education and practice (Fook & Askeland, 2007, p. 521).

Within the process of autoethnography, the experience of authors as they interact and connect with the culture is the phenomenon being explored. Thus, critical self-reflection is essential. Perhaps more importantly, helping students navigate the distress of social disconnect and culture shock in a foreign environment requires that educators be willing to acknowledge their own struggle and distress in this regard (Furman, Coyne, & Junko Negi, 2008).

Students and faculty went through a 15-week pre-program orientation at our home school prior to the trip to Japan. During that time, we met weekly with an instructor from the Office of International Programs for lessons in reading, writing, and speaking Japanese. The summer semester ran for six weeks, during the months of May and June. Our daily schedule included classes in which students and faculty met four days a week for courses on cultural diversity and comparisons of social services and policies in US and Japan. Classes were loosely structured with an emphasis on interactive discussion. Additionally, the host school coordinated weekly visits to various organizations and agencies, as well as opportunities for American and Japanese

students to interact in classes and social functions.

The process of data collection involved reviewing entries from journals kept of my experiences during the semester and e-mail communications with friends and family members describing the study abroad experience, as well as my own reflections on our experience in Japan.

Emergent Themes

Manifestations of Privilege?

In a “call to action” to combat racism, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) defined the concept of “privilege” as a “collection of benefits...[including] access to resources and social rewards and the power to shape the norms and values of society” (NASW, 2007, p. 10) that may or may not be consciously recognized by the recipient. Manifestations of privilege, such as impatience with host cultural customs and living conditions may be viewed as American arrogance by local people and may create barriers to intercultural communication and learning (Rotabi et al., 2007). Over the course of our time in Japan, I occasionally observed what seemed to be students’ lack of concern for Japanese cultural norms.

Journal Entry: It’s certainly interesting to walk through Tokyo with the group. [My colleague] tried to warn them about revealing too much skin in Japan because that would be considered inappropriate. Some of them didn’t listen, and we get quite a few stares from men and women as we walk down the street.

Prior to our trip, my colleague (who had been to Japan on previous occasions) cautioned students regarding cultural considerations of appropriate dress. Clothing that was typical in the warmer climate of our home campus, such as lower necklines and exposed shoulders, were considered inappropriate in Japanese culture. However, some students seemed to forget or discount this, and their style of dress appeared to be a source of disapproval from some in the local community. This neglect of local standards seemed to exemplify a sense of privilege; however, my acute embarrassment at what I interpreted as disapproving looks at our students may have been a reflection of my own self-consciousness in an unfamiliar cultural environment. I often felt reduced to a dependent state as I tried to manipulate chopsticks or communicate in a different language and was forced to rely on the patient guidance of our interpreters. Possibly, the disorientation I felt in attempting to navigate an unfamiliar culture while also maintaining a sense of control as instructor colored my perceptions of students’ demonstrations of privilege.

Our reaction to lacking familiar comforts and conveniences may also be interpreted as a reflection of privilege. Students at times appeared to be at a loss being removed from technology, and some students were alarmed at finding they did not have internet access in their dorm rooms. Expectations and cultural stereotypes regarding Japanese proficiency with technology seemed to further students’ frustration with the lack of available internet access; as one student exclaimed, “We’re in Japan! How can we not have internet?” Additionally, although the host school had gone out of their way to be accommodating, there was still the language barrier; thus, we did not have the option of getting questions answered quickly nor needs met

immediately.

Journal Entry: In Japan, people make requests in what seems to be a very indirect, almost apologetic manner. The students feel free to say “no” to things that [my colleague] tries to let them understand we can’t really decline.

Language barriers appeared to be exacerbated by cultural differences in communication style. Our Japanese hosts seemed to make requests indirectly, and consequently, the American students felt free to decline engagements or events the hosts had gone to great lengths to coordinate. While it may seem reasonable to consider students’ reaction as an example of American arrogance, it is equally plausible that differing cultural communication styles can lead to perceptions of cultural insensitivity. The direct, often blunt communication style viewed as admirable in American culture presented a clear contrast to our hosts’ style of communication, where requests seemed to be presented as suggestions that could be accepted or declined. Thus, when we admonished students who created a minor crisis by breaking their dorm curfew, the students were visibly upset and confused. They had not interpreted what they perceived as the dorm parents’ suggestion to be in at a specific time as a “curfew.” This illustrates how cultural differences in communication affect intercultural understanding and could have served as a learning opportunity. Although we had gone through 15 weeks of Japanese language sessions prior to the trip, our focus was primarily on “content,” with limited attention paid to the underlying context and the process of communication in another culture.

The study abroad experience allowed me to examine my own notions of teaching and learning, exploring my biases vis-a-vis the relationship between teacher and student, and what constitutes learning. Reflecting on the experience pushed me to examine the culture of higher education and my own identity as a teacher and social worker.

Defining the Nature of Teaching and Learning in Study Abroad

Journal Entry: Still uncertain as to how to really conduct a class here. . . . Yesterday one of the students complained about their assignment for a paper comparing US and Japan policies, etc. . . . I found myself getting more nervous and feeling like I should do something completely different (e.g., be more formal; start with a PowerPoint each day, etc.).

As noted, my colleague and I met with the students in loosely structured classes focusing on issues of cultural diversity. We attempted to use this time to facilitate reflection and open discussion; however, the loosely structured format appeared to be confusing and frustrating for students. Some expressed dissatisfaction with this lack of structure, noting the absence of traditional methods, such as formal lecture and technology to illustrate the material. Activities and assignments were intended to foster independent learning. Thus, students were expected to gain knowledge and understanding of the host culture through class discussions, field visits to various agencies, literature searches via the campus computer lab, and communication with the Japanese students living with them in the dormitories. However, presenting students with this non-traditional learning format seemed to precipitate significant anxiety. My initial reaction to students’ apprehension was a sense of guilt that I had not sufficiently prepared the course to

replicate a more traditional class structure. Eventually I recognized that students' anxiety was an expectable and understandable reaction.

Journal Entry: It occurred to me that what we are asking [the students] to do is radically different from anything they have to do in the traditional classroom. Generally, students have a course syllabus and/or outline that detail [sic] every reading and activity over the course of a semester. . . . If the information is fed back using the same language, concepts, etc., provided from the text and instructor, the students earn an "A."

Expecting students to produce traditional course outcomes in the absence of the traditional course structures may have been a major source of students' anxiety. Attempts to replicate the conventional teaching and learning within the context of education abroad may undermine the experiential learning opportunities that are the primary advantages of the study abroad experience.

In addition, it seems possible that by recreating a formal "classroom" environment, we were recreating the differential positions of power between students and faculty and impeding group cohesion. Consequently, attempts to facilitate open discussion related to our feelings and reactions to a different culture and our struggles in it often felt unproductive. At the same time, I was dealing with some of the same struggles in understanding cultural variances and coping with language and monetary differences while trying to maintain the sense of control I felt in the classroom. This disparity raised questions for me regarding the definitions of teaching and learning beyond the traditional university environment.

Lessons Learned

The Value of the Pre-Program Orientation

Foronda and Belknap (2012) identified guidelines for educators to facilitate intercultural learning and prepare students for education as opposed to tourism in the study abroad experience. Critical to this is the pre-program orientation process that prepares students not only to anticipate cultural differences, but also to anticipate students' emotional reactions to such differences. This was particularly critical given the comparatively insular nature of our home school's community. For example, while visiting Buddhist temples one student indicated her discomfort with the icons due to her Christian beliefs. The student's reaction indicated that we as faculty had not fully considered and discussed beforehand what it might be like to have students' views and beliefs challenged by exposure to different spiritual beliefs. Clearly, a more thorough orientation, in keeping with social work values, could have supplemented practical learning with an exploration of potential reactions to encountering alternative norms and values.

A number of social work theorists provide guidance in this regard, offering detailed descriptions of pre-program orientation that include exploration of students' expectations prior to on-site arrival and daily sessions for debriefing and critical reflection (Bell & Anscombe, 2013; Moorhead, Boetto, & Bell, 2014). Sossou and Dubus (2013) detailed a comprehensive pre-departure orientation process that integrated a social justice perspective through assigned

readings and essays on the unique political, economic, and cultural issues of the host country. Similarly, Gammonley et al. (2007) described how exploration of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) facilitate students' understanding of the relationship between global economics and the local community.

Higham's (2014) use of student journals also provides a means of facilitating critical reflection. After being prepared by assigned essays in response to required readings prior to departure, at the host site students provide written reflections on each day's activities. Within this model, reflection refers not only to students' subjective experience in diverse environments, but also how these experiences link to social work issues of privilege and oppression. In this way, study abroad affords a holistic experience, in which the phases of preparation and on-site study are connected and maintain the focus on education and social work themes.

Examining Ethnocentrism & Western Privilege

An important question to answer when addressing the issue of privilege is how we conceptualize and apply the term to students within the context of study abroad. Reflecting on my own experience, I began to wonder if we were seeing demonstrations of privilege or a lack of preparation on our part as faculty and the university institution overall. In recruiting students for study abroad, are we preparing students for the culture shock they may encounter? Furthermore, are we judging students too harshly when they have strong emotional reactions to witnessing circumstances they may have only read about?

Cultural competence denotes not only understanding diverse cultures, but also the ability to function within a different cultural context (Bodycott, 2012). Consequently, the inevitable struggle toward adaptation and the potential for culture shock should be anticipated. Instances such as the situation in which the American student was shocked by her exposure to harassment in the Indian marketplace may not necessarily be viewed as evidence of the student's naiveté or privilege. Rather, such instances of culture shock are what we would expect when students have second-hand knowledge of oppression but limited first-hand experience. Such a response may not represent a failure to appreciate diversity and the realities of oppression, but simply reflect the difference between knowing about its existence and actually witnessing it. This can be re-framed as an important learning opportunity that one can only get from the study abroad experience rather than a limitation or failing of the experience. Opportunities to process these emotions need to be built into the study abroad process, especially in short-term programs, and educators must anticipate these reactions and prepare for them through discussion before the actual trip. If we disparage genuine reactions, we risk suppressing authentic responses that would generate insight and understanding regarding differences and foster cultural competence.

Lund and Lee (2015) challenged the concept of cultural competency in favor of *cultural humility*, defined as an ongoing process of critical self-reflection on the intersectionality of privilege and oppression. This presents a contrast to the common conceptualization of cultural competence as the acquisition of knowledge and skills vis-à-vis diverse groups. Similarly, preparing students to engage with other cultures with the expectation of *learning from them* underscores the importance of addressing cultural humility as part of the pre-departure

orientation (Gammonley et al., 2007). Again, intercultural engagement calls for a process of self-examination. According to Mattsson (2014), self-reflection enables us to gain greater understanding of the dynamics of structural oppression and our role in maintaining these structures. This awareness can ultimately lead to challenging accepted conventions, such as approaching study abroad as a replication of the traditional classroom or an institutional strategy that prioritizes student recruitment over education.

Implications for the Profession

Social work educators are tasked with enhancing students' understanding of diversity and oppression within the context of an increasingly consumer-oriented model of higher education. This challenge is made even greater by indications that American study abroad students tend to be less diverse and more affluent than students who do not pursue international study. Namakkal (2013) questioned the assumption that universities can shelter students from the realities of poverty and oppression in the context of education abroad, and whether such attempts ultimately hinder learning. She proposed an alternative model, in which students actively engage with oppressed people (e.g., women, gay, lesbian, and transgender populations) in order to fully understand their experience. This offers genuine opportunities for increasing students' cultural competence and awareness of global issues. For social work educators, a focus on a service-learning project, supplemented by readings and discussion of social justice and critical theory may help facilitate students' awareness of the meaning and impact of "culture."

As noted, some of the literature has commented on the lack of objective outcome criteria for study abroad (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009; Walters et al., 2017). However, this privileges a reductionist perspective that frames learning as a series of quantifiable inputs and outputs. Moreover, evidence suggests that quantitative methods, such as measures of cross-cultural competence, have not been sufficiently validated (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). We may gain greater knowledge of students' experience in international contexts through more qualitative methods that capture a deeper understanding of their subjective experience.

While it is certainly possible to define concrete outcomes and methods with which to measure them (Kim, 2015), this could potentially limit the benefits of study abroad. Such an approach fails to appreciate that valuable learning can occur in less structured contexts. Research suggests that students' engagement with diverse people and cultures may provide the most salient learning experiences (Heublein, Hutzsch, Schreiber, & Sommer as cited in Petersdotter, Niehoff, & Freund, 2017). Thus, educators can foster cultural competence by simply facilitating opportunities for intercultural engagement. This finding seemed to be validated by the experience of seeing the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

Toward the end of our stay, we had the opportunity to visit Hiroshima. Despite the fact that we had to travel only an hour ahead of a potential typhoon, the students and faculty wanted to see this historic site commemorating the victims and survivors of the world's only nuclear attack. Students were clearly moved by the experience of seeing the remains of the A-bomb Dome and the potent reminders of the realities of war.

Touring the museum, we were all absorbed in the artifacts and stories of people who had their lives irreparably altered in an instant. While visiting the museum my colleague purchased books of survivor accounts for each student, and they spent the remainder of the train ride back to the host school engrossed in the readings. This incident provided a counterpoint to the structured agency visits we had been going through for the past several weeks. The most affecting experiences seemed to be when students had a more genuine encounter, allowing them to engage with an aspect of the culture that provoked thoughtful reflection.

Conclusion

The necessity for developing culturally competent professionals challenges us, not only as a means of ensuring adequate practice, but also toward the goal of advancing the profession's mission toward social justice. This mandate takes on greater significance given recent indications of global crises and instability as reflected in the increase of political refugees, the rise of nationalism and intergroup conflict, and ongoing threats to the welfare state in response to economic uncertainty (Baron & McLaughlin, 2017). All of these conditions demand a response from social work as a discipline defined by its historical advocacy for human rights. The trend toward international education offers hope of providing the type of intercultural engagement and understanding that cannot be obtained in the classroom.

Ultimately, study abroad can provide an opportunity for social work faculty to advocate for a greater emphasis on intercultural learning as opposed to student recruitment. Within the context of social work education, these programs provide unique opportunities to increase awareness of issues of privilege and ethnocentrism as we examine our own response to cultural differences and strive toward cultural humility in our interactions with different populations.

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