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When and Where I Enter: Teaching the Concepts of Critical Pedagogy and Applied Sociology Through Study Abroad Programs

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Introduction

When considering the intersectionality of race, class, gender, poverty, social inequality, globalization, and internationalization, in-depth immersion in a study abroad program has proven to be an exciting, effective and reliable model for increasing a student's awareness and actively stimulating their capacity for higher learning, often leading to an increase in participatory community activism and civic engagement upon the student's return to their home campuses and community environments. As a student is guided through the learning process to look introspectively and critically at the races and cultures of our world and at the intergroup relations that emerge from ethnic, religious, cultural, class, gender and other differences, this teacher's roadmap for student learning is considered basic to developing a critical and necessary understanding of our society. It is a known fact that in-depth immersion in a study abroad experience has a way of enhancing the relationship between the teacher and the student in valuable and immeasurable ways. When a professor has the ability to use creative teaching techniques which use examples from the experiential component gained from study and travel in a country other than a student's home country, teaching and learning come together in an exciting way in the classroom and every fact imparted to students produces a series of teaching moments whereby teaching and learning are both enhanced and intensified. This becomes true not only for the students, but for the teacher as well. Participation of students in study abroad programs which focus on teaching the active learning of core concepts and principles in a different country enhances a student's understanding and appreciation of the host country's culture and brings alive the concept of globalization in a way that no other classroom experience in America could ever do.

Within the field of sociology, there are innumerable concepts that can be creatively taught to students which address social and cultural interaction, intercultural awareness, interaction between and among individuals and groups, social diversity, class diversity and differences among ourselves and others. My participation as a faculty member in coordinating and teaching in a study abroad program has enhanced my ability to impart the wisdom and knowledge gained from such an experience and has allowed me to creatively teach these important constructs to students in a social, cultural, and geographical environment by providing examples which are different from those held by the student. As I engage in and with students in a process that transfers their learning from the

page of a book to the real life experiences of a people and culture different from their own through in-depth immersion in a study abroad program, a student is provided with “a perfect vehicle that creates a life-changing experience for them including the ability to learn from and with peers whose life views will certainly differ from their own.” (Shupe, pg 124, 2013).

Review of the Literature

The benefits of study abroad as evidenced through in-depth and experiential learning has been well documented by a number of scholars in the fields of sociology, psychology and international relations. Doerr summarizes the experience by stating that, “Research on study abroad considers immersion as the most valuable part of the study-abroad experience. It is what makes study abroad special as it allows students to immerse themselves in a living laboratory that forces them to become actively involved in the learning process on every level – intellectual, psychological, and emotional. This holistic dimension is what makes education abroad uniquely suited to promoting an appreciation for cultural differences in today’s interdependent global community.” (Doerr, pg 61, 2013). In addition, “increased students’ exposure to multicultural, cross-cultural, and cross-national content relevant to sociology helps develop students’ critical thinking skills and prepare them for lives of civic engagement. (Persell, et al., pg 109, 2008).

One of the most creative teaching techniques for imparting knowledge to students through in-depth immersion involves the use of critical pedagogy. Great attention is taken to make sure this technique is used in courses that I teach on-site as a professor in and coordinator of the Madrid, Spain study abroad program offered through the University System of Georgia. Students engage in “high levels of student learning, personal development, and educational effectiveness through powerful learning outcomes which include more openness to diversity, social tolerance, and inter-personal development.” (Zhao et al, pgs 115-116, 2004). Catherine Forbes and Peter Kaufman (2008) purport that critical pedagogy “promotes a problem solving dialogue emanating from the lived experiences of the learner; that it strives for reflection and action of the social world in order to transform it; that teaching and learning both are used to effect positive social change; and that critical pedagogy can help students find a comfort zone for exploring and learning about topics that they might otherwise be uncomfortable with including (but not limited to) issues of race, immigration, class, gender, homophobia and tolerance. Because critical pedagogy is not value neutral, students are taught to work towards a more equitable society and to do

so by becoming social change agents, eradicating social inequalities and promoting social justice". (Fobes et al, pgs 26-27, 2008). Indeed a critical portion of my teaching pedagogy depends on the use of critical thinking and analyses in each portion of the in-depth immersion exercises. To witness the increased tolerance and appreciation for differences in others that students exhibit as a result of participation in our study abroad program speaks volumes to the effectiveness of using critical pedagogy, critical thinking, and critical analyses in the students' study abroad learning environment.

Service learning activities and ethnographic field experiences are also important in helping students who participate in study abroad programs to gain valuable knowledge of sociological concepts, ideas and theories. Everett Penn (2009) provides research which validates the fact that "service learning pedagogy is ideally suited for courses in the social sciences, history or literature. Students demonstrate an expanded vision of the world, are more tolerant in their approach to issues, and become prepared to participate effectively in an increasingly interconnected, international community which demands they have cross-cultural skills and knowledge, something vital as the world becomes more globally interdependent." (Penn et al, pgs 267 & 279, 2009). As I strive to include critical pedagogy, field experiences and service learning experiences in the development and coordination of my study abroad program in Madrid, Spain, these processes become essential in teaching concepts in sociology that might otherwise be difficult for students to grasp in a classroom environment at the students' home campus.

Finally, studies by Salisbury (2009) have shown that "students who study abroad develop a deeper understanding and respect for global issues, more favorable attitudes toward other cultures, stronger intercultural communication skills, improved personal and professional self-image, and better foreign language skills." (Salisbury et al, pg 120, 2009). I have personally witnessed students return to their home campuses from our study abroad program and begin participation in volunteer work with students in the local high school community, join campus clubs which promote an increased understanding of diversity and differences in others, and gain confidence in their ability to effect change in not only their campus community but in local neighborhoods and surrounding communities as well.

Background of the University System of Georgia European Council Study Abroad Programs

According to the *OpenDoors* annual report of the Institute of International Education (IIE), 273,996 Americans studied abroad in the 2010-2011 academic year, an increase of 1.3% over the previous year (www.iie.org, 2012) and a testament to the increasing emphasis on global education and awareness of its impact on students' lives. The traditional approach to study abroad throughout the country has involved a year-long or semester-long institutional program focused on one overarching learning outcome, whether it be in language acquisition, art history, or increasingly, medicine, engineering, or business. The new trend, however, is for shorter term study abroad programs that take place during a one, two or three week interterm period or during the summer where they can last anywhere from four weeks to eight weeks. The program currently in existence through the University System of Georgia referred to as the European Council (EC) Study Abroad Program reverses this model, both because of its structure as a system-wide consortium as well as its general approach to cultural and attitudinal awakening. Rather than joining a small group to study architecture in Paris or nursing in Costa Rica, students are encouraged to be a part of a statewide program that crosses institutional, language, and subject matter boundaries. In this way the European Council Study Abroad Programs are able to explore teaching students through creative techniques which implore critical pedagogy, service learning pedagogy and learning community pedagogy.

The University System of Georgia (USG), the fourth largest state system of higher education in the country, initiated the first program of this type in 1993 with a program in London, England. This program originated under the auspices of the European Council (EC), a statewide committee which included representatives from each of the 35 institutions with the USG System that oversees the study abroad component. Since that time, the offerings have continued to include London but expanded to also offer programs in Paris, France; St. Petersburg, Russia; Madrid, Spain; Waterford, Ireland; Bonn, Germany; Edinburgh, Scotland; and most recently, Casablanca, Morocco/Granada, Spain. (USG Handbook for Developing & Maintaining Study Abroad Programs, 2006). Jointly, these short-term study abroad programs have served more than 3500 students over the years and have represented a whole host of academic institutions within the USG system. Of equal importance is the fact that hundreds of USG faculty have applied to engage in creative teaching techniques by teaching, in English, one lower division course and one upper

division course of their choosing but related in some way to the local culture of the host country. When English is not the primary language of the host country the courses have often included the study of the country's indigenous culture and people while including opportunities for service learning with local community groups, all the while having to communicate with the people in their primary language. One such course taught by me which followed this model was entitled "Social Class in Spain". Other courses which follow the model mentioned above have included titles such as , "The History of Crime and Punishment in London", "Hemingway in Paris", "Music in the Nazi Era", "War and Revolution in St. Petersburg", and "The Irish in America." For any student who attends a college or university within the University System of Georgia and desires to participate in one of the EC's study abroad programs, there is no language requirement or recommendation process. Any student in good academic standing (generally determined by grade point average) is eligible to participate in any one of the programs offered by USG's European Council. Many of the creative teaching techniques used throughout these study abroad programs have combined the pedagogies of critical thinking, service learning and learning community processes to address a number of learning outcomes, including: 1) what is the impact on student learning that these programs make?; 2) how does instruction through these study abroad opportunities promote civic engagement and global awareness among student participants, especially upon return to their own country? 3) how does study abroad teach students to break down pre-conceived notions and barriers by deconstructing ethnocentrism and stereotypes?; 4) How does study abroad instruction promote an understanding of cultural awareness, cultural relativity, cultural sensitivity and empathy towards the people of the host country?; 5) How do these programs enhance a student's ability to become a well- informed global citizen and acquire the skill of global competence?; and, 6) When enrolled in study abroad courses through the EC program, how are students guided through a critically thinking process to learn about subjects such as poverty, class, race and inequality in a way where their learning is transferable to their everyday lives, particularly when they are often hesitant to take classes at their home institutions which target these subjects considered by many students to be "too" sensitive? (Will et al, 1999). It is proposed that the University System of Georgia European Council study abroad programs offer a unique approach to teaching all of these concepts, especially, for example, when students are able to live and breathe daily experiences and cross-cultural comparisons while in a country outside of the United States and in a culture outside of their own. By utilizing experiential learning that focuses on application, transparency, and transferability, the

program invokes C. Wright Mills' familiar theoretical concept of *The Sociological Imagination*, where students become active learners in grasping the true nature of how the intersection of history and biography meshes with that of sociology, psychology, and economics, just to name a few. (Henslin, 2006). In addition, students benefit directly from these cross-cultural study abroad experiences because they return to their communities with sufficient tools and knowledge to facilitate change as well as the motivation to become more involved in service learning, community activism, civic participation, and peaceful resolution of conflict to local, regional, or state injustices.

Rationale of the USG EC Programs

The *prima facie* argument for any study abroad program, regardless of its length, focus, or content, revolves around the basic act of getting students on an airplane and facilitating their entry into an environment beyond the security of their family and familiar culture. Certainly, the EC programs fulfill this first step, treating students as adults and giving them the freedom to explore, but acting at the same time as a safety net in cases where a student may have been pickpocketed, has experienced illness away from home, or needs to make additional travel plans in a foreign language. Examples abound of students who, having gone through these programs, confidently return to Europe on their own or even travel to other destinations, after gaining the skills and experience that participation in a EC study abroad program affords them. Several students (who have been former participants in one or another of the USG EC study abroad programs) have returned to Europe to live on their own and attend European universities. Another student has been living in Korea now for three years, and many students have gone to other continents for a more traditional year-long study abroad program in either Africa, South America, or Asia just to mention a few locations. The USG EC programs without a doubt act as a springboard for global exploration, literally through extended travel and intellectually through increased awareness.

Structure of the Madrid, Spain Program

July 5 – August 9th, 2013 will mark the tenth consecutive year of the University System of Georgia's Madrid, Spain summer study abroad program. The five-week total immersion program typically includes a Program Director and an On-Site Director, both of whom are fluent in the Spanish language, and includes 10 professors who represent as few as five and as many as ten different colleges and universities within the University System of Georgia. Faculty

members must submit a lengthy application to the USG EC council and are selected based on a competitive application process with key criteria for acceptance including but not limited to, knowledge of the host country; previous experience teaching in a study abroad program; familiarity of and/or ability to speak the language of the host country; creative teaching techniques as well as the quality of an experiential learning component included in courses proposed to be taught during the summer program; quality of experiential learning activities, interactive activities, and/or ethnographic field exercises proposed; and ability to recruit students from diverse backgrounds as participants in the program. Applications are reviewed by a panel consisting of all Program Directors for the various study abroad locations and these Program Directors select the faculty members who will teach at each study abroad location. Faculty are typically notified in March or April of the year preceding the study abroad teaching assignment.

The Madrid program was developed in 2003, first implemented in the summer of 2004, and will conclude its tenth year of operation in the summer of 2013. Each professor who teaches in the program offers two 3-unit courses of instruction in the fields of Social Sciences, Humanities, Languages, Intercultural Communication, Art, Religion, Anthropology, Film Studies, and Spanish. Students typically return to their home campuses with 3 to 6 transferable credits towards their graduation requirements, regardless of major.

PROGRAM GOALS, CONTENT, PEDAGOGICAL COMPONENTS AND CREATIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Pre-Departure Structure

The program begins with several pre-departure planning sessions for all faculty members and a pre-departure orientation/first class session for the student participants in each program. Due to the fact that both students and faculty are located across the state of Georgia, an attempt is made to choose a centralized location to hold all pre-departure orientation meetings and class sessions. For the USG EC study abroad programs, the pre-departure sessions take place at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Georgia. All pre-departure sessions require mandatory attendance for both faculty and students in each EC study abroad program.

Subject matter typically addressed in the student pre-departure orientation session includes a brief historical summary of the country of Spain

and the city of Madrid; how students should prepare for the trip including travel documents to bring, recommendations for acquiring money while there, clothing recommendations, a sample packing list, communicating with family back home in the states, trip logistics including specifics about transportation and lodging, acceptable behavior and disciplinary procedures and health and safety precautions. (Shupe, 2013). Directly after the general orientation sessions students attend their first pre-departure class session with their professors for the two courses they will be enrolled in while on-site in Madrid. At this session courses are structured to provide students with an overall birds-eye view of the history and culture of the host country they will be visiting and the syllabi for the courses they will be enrolled in. Courses have been front-loaded with extensive reading material and writing exercises to be completed by students prior to departing for the host country. This pedagogical technique has proven to be quite effective in providing students with a thorough background of the host country they will visit as well as an in-depth immersion into the subject matter of the courses they will be enrolled in. By front loading courses to include traditional classroom work in the form of academically rigorous exercises about the history and culture of the host country and the subject matter of the respective courses they will be taking prior to departure, students leave America with an incredibly thorough knowledge of the culture, art, history, literature and people represented in the host country and are freed-up to become fully immersed in the experiential learning component once they arrive on-site.

On-Site Classes/The Experiential Component

The Madrid study abroad program is the only program within the USG EC offerings fortunate to have its own on-site consultant who is a native of the city of Madrid. Having this built in consultant feature is valuable to the overall success of the Madrid program as the consultant is able to handle the logistics of every aspect of the on-site program throughout the year-long planning process. This includes on-site coordination of transportation to and from the airport, facilitation of the housing and lodging contract, coordination of all the various ethnographic field excursions that will make up the experiential learning component including transportation to all sites that will be visited, interfacing with local community organizations which will provide guest speakers, and service learning opportunities with local community organizations. Lodging for students and faculty takes place at a residential dormitory within the vicinity of the University of Madrid known as the Colegio Mayor Padre Poveda. Students

enjoy the pleasure of eating their meals, including breakfast, lunch and dinner with their professors on a daily basis.

Formal classroom sessions take place on Mondays and Wednesdays and every Tuesday and Thursday is devoted to ethnographic field exercises which often include travel to cities within one-hour outside of Madrid (Salamanca, Cuenca, Avila, Toledo to name a few); service learning projects with local community organizations; visits to local restaurants, museums, monasteries, churches, libraries, art exhibits, non-profit organizations; seeing movies, flamenco dancing or theatrical performances in local theaters, making a visit to the doctor at a local hospital, visiting various public institutions, observing the architecture, the fine arts, daily life, symbolic ceremonies, religious practices, and paying particular attention to the ties that connect marriage, family and kinship. Students experience in-depth immersion into the culture of the host country while engaging in volunteer work, talking with local people often in the language of the host country, ordering food in the local language and feasting on local cuisine, visiting and discussing the importance of historical sites, or taking part in viewing cultural events specific to the host country, for example, seeing a bull fight or attending the “running of the bulls” in Pamplona, Spain. In-depth immersion into the people and environment of the host country is also invaluable in helping students to understand concepts such as language and social relations, cultural relativity, globalization, and participant observation while at the same time dispelling notions of ethnocentrism. The broadening of awareness and knowledge allows students to gain essential tools for more effective intercultural communications as their study abroad experience strengthens their ability to interact and work with others who are different from them in their own country and provides them with a mirror in which to see the cultural groups in their own country more clearly upon their return. According to Shupe (2013), while “such experiences provide students with a better historical and cultural context in which to understand course material, they may also lead to a broader understanding and appreciation of a students’ own culture”. (Shupe, pg 125, 2013).

The experiential learning component and the ethnographic field exercises which involve In-depth immersion in the culture of the host country are captured and documented by students in a number of ways. Students are required to keep a daily journal and are also required to turn in to their professors two full length page entries on a weekly basis. They are also required to write extensive reflection papers of every excursion experienced, service learning project

participated in and cultural event witnessed. In the courses I teach students learn cultural idiomatic expressions of the host culture at each classroom session. These idiomatic expressions are taught in the Spanish language that they originate in, and not only do non-Spanish speaking students learn a bit of Spanish language and culture every day, but they also learn the cultural significance of the idiomatic expressions presented to them on a daily basis, the context in which certain expressions are used and circumstantially when it is appropriate to use them. Every class session also includes a debrief session whereby all students debrief the entire classroom of their peers on events they have participated in, how they have been affected by these cultural experiences, and what their personal feelings are as they experience the culture of a foreign country on a daily basis. Student presentations and individual student facilitation of various classroom sessions take place throughout the 5-week long program and especially as an essential part of the final examinations that are required and administered.

Additional Cultural Enhancement

The way in which this program integrates into the local culture and influences student attitudes is constantly being addressed through the academic structure of the EC programs, particularly the Madrid, Spain program. The European Model, as it has come to be known, has functioned smoothly across the state and has even been emulated by other programs at individual colleges or universities. The three-hour courses that are offered, including (but not limited to) history, literature, art, sociology, psychology, political science, and foreign language, fit student academic requirements and transfer seamlessly back to the home institution. Even though the courses offered in Madrid (and in some cases, in other EC study abroad locations) aimed at delivering the epitome of a cultural immersion experience, some of the students on location still reported a lack of understanding of certain idiosyncratic cultural habits and practices experienced in their day-to-day experiences in and about the city that their classroom instruction or their ethnographic field experiences did prepare them for. A few examples are as follows: some students reported that they couldn't find a French restaurant in Paris; other students reported that they had visited Barcelona, Spain without hearing any reference to or seeing any work of Gaudi, the famous artist whose work is infused throughout the culture of the entire city of Barcelona. Certain students also reported that while out to dinner at a restaurant in a European country, they had waited an hour for the waiter to bring the check to them at the completion of their meal without realizing that,

unlike in America, European waiters only bring the check upon request. As a result of these and other similar anecdotal experiences, The Madrid program began to incorporate a one-unit "cultural moment class" which meets weekly and is mandatory for all students. The course includes use of the textbook, *"Spain is Different"* by Helen Wattley- Aames (1992) and includes an invitation to local guest speakers to come to the college and share with students the basis for many of the cultural habits and practices they were experiencing that were different from those practices back in their home country. Clearly, addressing some of these basic cultural differences enriched the international experience of the students and made their integration into the local society much smoother, as students were now given specific direction beyond the understanding of common cultural habits and practices and were then able to become immersed into discussions of more serious societal practices and problems.

Overall Value of Study Abroad Programs; The Talented 1%

Research on study abroad data indicates that of the total number of students enrolled in colleges across the nation, roughly only 1% of all students participate in a study abroad experience of some sort. Everett Penn's article (Penn et al, 2009) has stressed that students who do participate in a study abroad experience are more empathetic to immigration issues, more globally aware, and more tolerant of others in their own country who are different from themselves than those who never participate in a program. Gorka and Niesenbaum (2001) indicate that various benefits of study abroad experiences cause "students to learn in the best way possible the intersection of language and culture; they come to understand that world problems cannot be solved in tidy packages. Ultimately at the conclusion of such a program students tie what is learned abroad to the curriculum at their home campus". (Gorka et al, pgs 102 & 104, 2001). Certainly outcomes produced by the in-depth immersion in study abroad programs result in students who return to their home campuses with a spirit of openness, understanding, collaboration and mutual respect for others. These outcomes seek to directly satisfy one of the goals of the Strategic Plan at Clayton State University (CSU) namely that students obtain an increased understanding, collaboration and mutual respect for others. CSU recommends that this goal can be further achieved by the campus in the following ways: 1) providing the opportunity for the study of international cultures utilizing current university resources; 2) by developing and implementing innovative study abroad opportunities for students, faculty and staff; and 3) by enabling students

to make a deeper commitment to social change by taking courses in service learning and agreeing to fulfill a certain amount of hours of community service. (CSU, Strategic Planning Initiatives, 2012). Elizabeth Lindsey's (2005) work on study abroad indicated the emergence of six key themes as a result of students' study abroad experiences: "opening the mind to new ways of thinking; awareness and insight into one's own values and beliefs; social awareness and challenges to societal values and beliefs; appreciation of difference, cultural sensitivity, and anti-discriminatory practice; social justice; and professional identity development." (Lindsey, pg 236, 2005). She includes findings of many other authors who report that students who study abroad benefit in many ways, including "increased commitment to peace and international cooperation; greater interest in international affairs; greater emphasis on international understanding; greater empathy of the viewpoint of other nations; improvements of the students general learning style; a greater degree of intellectuality; an enhanced academic style; improved work habits; and greater persistence." (Lindsey, pg 231, 2005).

Conclusions On the Value of Study Abroad Experiences from Student Narratives

Several students have contributed meaningful dialogue and comments of the evidence that their participation in an in-depth total immersion study abroad program has added personal value to them and created life-changing situations. As a way of concluding this discussion on the utilization of creative teaching techniques in developing a study abroad program, several narrative comments of student participants are presented below:

Comment #1: "One of the many lessons learned in this in-depth immersion experience is that collaboration of efforts with natives of the host culture produces synergy and synergy produces unfathomable outcomes that are mutually beneficial to all".... student #1

Comment #2: "During intense ethnographic field exercises in the host country, every stereotype seemed to go out of the window as we all began to see how hard we had worked to get here and we have to remember that our mission is to help the people in the host country to solve world issues"....student #2

Comment #3: " The skills that I have learned as a result of my participation in the study abroad program are valuable; and they are the same skills that men and women need to not only solve world issues but common issues that we all experience on a day-to-day basis"....student #3

“I learned how distorted our ideas and perceptions of a place can be if we do not experience it for ourselves; overall, I feel that this experience has allowed me to grow and become more open-minded”. (Lindsey, pg. 236, 2005). This student spoke to the value gained through the in-depth, total-immersion study abroad experience.

“This experience has really opened my eyes to the rest of the world. I feel that it has made me more diverse in my thinking, a marvelous way to open up your mind and make you really think and challenge your own views and values and see things from other perspectives” (Lindsey, pg. 236, 2005). A final student comment on the value of in-depth immersion in a study abroad program.

Indeed, college students who are part of the 1% fortunate enough to participate in an in-depth study abroad experience lead the pack in increased global awareness, tolerance for differences in others, critical thinking skills, enhanced civic engagement, increased political acumen and community activism, enhanced empathy, and social change agents who go on to become the world leaders who will lead our society toward the positive social changes necessary for continued equality and justice in our ever evolving world.

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