



Increasing Cultural Awareness of Future Teachers through Virtual International Experiences

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Abstract

It is essential that education programs prepare future teachers for the ever-increasing diversity of their students. Efforts to do so are often referred to as developing “culturally responsive teaching,” a concept based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory that learning is socially mediated and occurs when students participate in culturally meaningful activities (Vygotsky, 1978). While the ideal would be for future teachers to experience immersion in another culture through study abroad, this is often not possible. Yet, researchers are calling for efforts to prepare future teachers for culturally diverse classrooms as early as the pre-service level and underline the importance of creating cross-cultural awareness through experiential learning (Malewski, E., Sharma, S. & Phillion, J., 2012). Our presentation will describe one viable option for increasing cultural awareness of future teachers through a virtual international experience. Details will be provided on a project where 30 undergraduate students in the United States and 30 undergraduate students in Hong Kong, China, all enrolled in an educational psychology course at their home institution, participate in asynchronous online discussions on four educational case studies. Instructors of each class collaborated to align curriculum of their courses, and students met regularly online to critically analyze case studies that described American and Hong Kong classroom scenarios related to learning theories being studied in class. All students completed the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI), an online survey assessing cross-cultural competence, before and after participating in the online discussions. Results indicate that the opportunity to discuss and apply learning concepts with individuals from a different country increased cross-cultural awareness. Specifics on how to establish international collaborative online courses will be included in the presentation for those interested in creating virtual international experiences for future teachers at their institutions.