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Internationalization of Counselor Education: Lived Experiences of US Counselors-in-Training Abroad

Cristen C. Wathen

Montana State University, christen.wathen@montana.edu

David M. Kleist

Idaho State University, kleidavi@isu.edu

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Abstract

In response to globalization in the counseling profession and the incorporation of international immersion courses in counselor education programs, the purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of counselors-in-training participating internationally in a study abroad course. The research question was: What is the experience of a counselor-in-training who has participated in a study abroad trip as a part of their training program? Utilizing van Manen's phenomenological methodology (1990), the researcher explored the experiences of four counselors-in-training participating in an international study abroad course. Overall emergent themes included experiencing new contexts, emotions, and new learning with an emphasis on "experiencing." These themes highlighted implications for counselor educators in international curriculum development and course planning as well as informing counselors-in-training on potential impacts of international immersion courses.

Keywords

Counselor Training, Internationalization, Study Abroad, Phenomenology

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Internationalization of Counselor Education: Lived Experiences of US Counselors-in-Training Abroad

Cristen C. Wathen
 Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, USA

David M. Kleist
 Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho, USA

In response to globalization in the counseling profession and the incorporation of international immersion courses in counselor education programs, the purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of counselors-in-training participating internationally in a study abroad course. The research question was: What is the experience of a counselor-in-training who has participated in a study abroad trip as a part of their training program? Utilizing van Manen's phenomenological methodology (1990), the researcher explored the experiences of four counselors-in-training participating in an international study abroad course. Overall emergent themes included experiencing new contexts, emotions, and new learning with an emphasis on "experiencing." These themes highlighted implications for counselor educators in international curriculum development and course planning as well as informing counselors-in-training on potential impacts of international immersion courses. Keywords: Counselor Training, Internationalization, Study Abroad, Phenomenology

"One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things." – Henry Miller

The 2009 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards emphasize that counselors must have an understanding of the relationships, issues, and trends of a multicultural society. In section II.G.2.A this competency is expanded to understand multicultural trends both nationally and internationally (CACREP, 2009). Gerstein and Ægistottir (2007) wrote that the best way to gain perspectives on other cultures is to travel and immerse oneself into that culture. They promote counselor education programs sponsoring international experiences for counselors-in-training (CITs). More and more United States based counselor training programs have begun to implement these types of immersion programs in the past five years (Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010; Gerstein, Heppner, Ægistottir, Leung, & Norsworthy, 2009; Mehta, 2011; Platt, 2012; West-Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2011).

Despite this increase in study abroad programs in counselor education, there is little research (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; Fawcett et al, 2010; Gerstein et al., 2009; Mehta, 2011; West-Olatunji et al., 2011) on the experience of counselors-in-training participating in study abroad trips. In this article, the authors discuss the rationale, methodology, findings, and implications of a phenomenological qualitative study incorporating photo sharing and looking at the lived experiences of four counselors-in-training who studied internationally as a part of their counselor training program. Utilizing Hunt's (2013) description of creating qualitative research manuscripts, the researchers aim to deepen the understanding of this phenomenon for counselors-in-training, counselor educators, and counselors. The findings provide insight for these stakeholders in determining how international experiences may fit into their program, training, and counselor development.

Conceptual Framework

Internationalization of the Counseling Profession

Counseling has become increasingly internationalized in today's global society and the need for culturally competent counselors in the United States has grown (Gerstein et al., 2009; Kim & Lyons, 2003; Leung, Clawson, Norsworthy, Tena, Szilagy, & Rogers, 2009; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Ng, 2012; Platt, 2012). The American Counseling Association (ACA) has started an interest network for International Counseling (Singh Sandu, 2012), reflecting the development of cross-cultural counseling in our profession. Research, training, and study abroad opportunities across cultures and countries have increased over the last twenty years (Gerstein et al., 2009). The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) and CACREP have initiatives in place to support other nations developing the counseling profession (Singh Sandu, 2012). NBCC International is supporting over two- dozen countries developing counselor credentialing and asking for organizational support (Shallcross, 2012). CACREP has developed the International Registry of Counsellor Education Programs (IRCEP), supporting high standards while recognizing the realities and differences of counselor training in other countries (Shallcross, 2012, Stanard, 2013). Email, Skype, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and social networking have allowed greater access to counseling research in places that previously were not feasible (Brown, 2002; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Singh Sandu, 2012). The flagship journal for the American Counseling Association (ACA), *The Journal of Counseling and Development*, has featured international articles focusing on the development of counseling in other countries from Australia to Zimbabwe during 2011 and 2012 (*Journal of Counseling and Development*, 2012). This journal also sponsored a special international section in its winter 2010 edition (Stanard, 2013). In a recent issue of *Counseling Today*, Hodges (2012) discussed international counseling as one of the counseling profession's next frontiers. She stated:

I believe many graduate counseling students will go overseas for course work and internships in the near future as U.S. counseling programs partner with those in Africa, Asia, Australia, and elsewhere. This has already occurred, though such joint endeavors are in their infancy. By 2020, however, this trickle is likely to become a swiftly flowing river. In fact, international counseling programs aren't much of a stretch considering that undergraduate students have been involved in study abroad for decades. Imagine what an internship experience in Singapore, Cape Town or Alice Springs could teach a graduate counseling student. Imagine how these global experiences would transform the counseling profession. International collaborations and joint counseling programs will help strengthen the international counseling profession and, in turn, open international occupations prospects for counselors. (p. 15)

In another recent issue of *Counseling Today*, Lee (2012) discussed the intention of the International Association for Counselling (IAC) to reach out to national counseling organizations to promote the profession in areas where counseling is beginning to develop. He wrote that in order for counseling to have a global impact that professionals in the field must have the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to communicate and work effectively in a cross-cultural environment. Lee (2012) also stated that in many countries the profession of counseling does not exist; therefore, providing access and understanding of our profession is of value. He described his experience leading counselors on an ambassador trip to Vietnam where those they met with did not understand the profession, but expressed an interest in it;

noting that they potentially saw the profession as a means for “addressing educational and social challenges in the rural parts of the country.” (Lee, 2012, p. 15)

Internationalization of Counselor Training

With the internationalization of the counseling profession opening doors globally, there is a call for counselor training that embraces this cross-cultural perspective. Of note for this research study is the parallel between the interpersonal interaction and exchanges that can occur in an international cultural experience and the working alliance of a counselor and client. Immersion contact promotes the social-emotional relearning necessary for developing cultural competency (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Dickson, Jepson, & Barbee, 2008; Mehta, 2011; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; West-Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2011).

An immersion course provides the opportunity for impactful growth in multicultural competency (Canfield et al., 2009; Fawcett et al., 2010; Gerstein et al., 2009; Mehta, 2011; Platt, 2012; West-Olatunji et al., 2011). Gerstein et al. (2009) suggested “intense emotions may deepen students’ sensitivity to the cultural context in new or different ways compared with studying various multicultural issues while in their home culture” (p. 45). Immersion trips may also lead to more cross-cultural trips and/or experiences in the future (Gerstein et al., 2009). According to Fawcett et al. (2010), a convenience sample of counselors-in-training traveling to Guatemala on a cultural immersion trip showed significant multicultural development in the nine areas of multicultural competency. Platt (2012) discussed a model of immersion education for marriage and family therapists and clinical psychology students in Mexico City based on Freirean pedagogy. The course focused on working with Latino communities and intentionally promoted experience with the Spanish language, interactions with the local community, and exposure to different contexts and perspectives. Themes prevalent from the post-immersion survey included increased self-awareness of culture as well as increased understanding of Latino culture leading to changes in perceptions of clinical work (Platt, 2012). Participants stated that they will be more clinically aware of contextual factors potentially impacting Latino clients as well as more aware of imposing their own values in their clinical work with this population. They especially appreciated that their new perspectives came from interacting with community members rather than based in reports from those outside the community. Canfield et al. (2009) described a study abroad experience for counselors-in-training in the Yucatan region of Mexico. One focus of the trip was the exploration of the students’ own cultural identities. By experiencing themselves as *foreigners* and utilizing experiential assignments designed to help students recognize how citizens saw them, they gained access to how “their particular world view might impact their assumptions about other people,” (Canfield et al., p. 319).

In another example of multicultural development in international immersion courses, West-Olatunji et al. (2011) described three themes from a qualitative study of six counselors-in-training on an immersion trip to South Africa. The authors discussed how the immersion experience influenced the participants’ cultural awareness and critical consciousness development. The three themes reflecting this in the study were *processes of critical consciousness development*, *blocks to critical consciousness development*, and *critical consciousness development*. In regards to processes of critical consciousness development, personal experiences with community members led to affective responses in the participants. Participants described how these emotional responses allowed them to feel connected to community members and to the culture. Blocks to critical consciousness included resistance through feelings of frustration directed at other group members who were a part of the immersion experience. In addition the blocking of critical consciousness development

included guilt/confusion/unawareness in relation to contexts of poverty and oppression. The authors point out that these feelings of frustration were consistently expressed by the participants with assertions about guilt and White Privilege. The block occurred when participants were not able to work through these feelings and instead ignored them, stalling personal growth. Finally, consciousness development emerged from students' journals and "reflected a new level of understanding that is not evident in the two previous themes" (p. 342). Through writing about their immersion, the participants experienced an internal process of reflection that integrated the resistance seen in the second theme and "allowed for movement past the resistance toward increased self-awareness" (p. 343). This supports the use of reflective writing throughout immersion experiences for enhancing the cultural development of counselors-in-training.

In a comprehensive qualitative dissertation, Mehta (2011) explored the study abroad experiences of counselors and counselors-in-training. Mehta (2011) named *cultural knowledge, empathy, personal and professional impact, relationships, reflection, personal characteristics, and structure of immersion experience* as themes uncovered from her interviews. Implications of the study included experiences of cognitive dissonance as key to sustained change in cultural awareness, cultural empathy, and cultural self-awareness. Experiences of being a *foreigner* were imperative to developing cognitive complexity and an understanding of differing world-views, and connections with the cultural community as influential in evoking affective cultural experiences. Limitations of the qualitative study included a lack of diversity within the sample in gender and ethnicity. Mehta (2011) called for similar research from diverse perspectives and for informed pedagogies based on these themes.

In a counseling mixed method research study, Ng, Choudhuri, Noonan, and Ceballos (2012) developed an internationalization competency checklist for U.S. counselor training programs. The checklist consists of 43 items such as "program has a faculty member whose research agenda includes traveling outside the country," "students are offered opportunities to build collegial and networking relationships in global contexts," "students are encouraged to engage in cultural and international immersion projects to increase knowledge, skills, and awareness," and "university support for international/study abroad experiences is evident in its mission statement, financial support, and collaborative programs with international universities/programs" (pp. 29-33). The authors described the importance of understanding what intercultural competency looked like in order to avoid the counseling profession from simply "exporting" counseling theory, technique, and practice. The creation of checklists like this one along with the increase in research for international counseling speaks to the need for an international focus in the pedagogy of counselor training programs as well as support for faculty members to gain these intercultural skills.

With international counseling, training, and collaboration on the horizon, the present study is timely and relevant as it enhances the understanding of how cross cultural training experiences impact counseling students. Knowing about the experiences of counselors-in-training on study abroad trips as a part of their program will help inform researchers and educators as the counseling profession moves through this new frontier.

Multicultural Competency in Counselor Education

Pedersen (1991) described multicultural awareness as the fourth force in counseling. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) provided the profession with a list of multicultural competencies focused on awareness, knowledge, and skills. Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Sanchez, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler (1996) operationalized these competencies, providing training programs with measurable standards. Multiculturalism has been infused throughout the CACREP 2009 standards and the ACA ethical code (ACA, 2014). Since the call for

multicultural competency in counseling (Sue et al., 1992), counselors have been charged to gain cultural awareness personally, to understand the experience of others, and gain skills to promote multiculturally competent counseling. Multicultural competence has been given priority in the CACREP 2009 Standards, the ACA ethical code, and throughout counseling and counselor education literature (Kim & Lyons, 2003; Mehta, 2011; Sue et al., 1992; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; West-Olatunji et al., 2011). Therefore, it is the responsibility of counselor educators and their programs to begin and encourage this multicultural developmental process in their students. In a qualitative study investigating the experiences of U.S. based counselor educators teaching abroad, Malott (2008) wrote that participants perceived that more skills were necessary besides having knowledge and experience in counselor education. These skills included flexibility, respect, a willingness to alter personal and pedagogical approaches to teaching, passion for contextual learning, and humility. Achieved “gradually, over a time frame that involved numerous international ventures, often to numerous locations” (p. 75), these were not skills that were possessed without intentionality and openness. Similarly, counselors-in-training might want to participate in cross cultural counseling both at home and overseas; however, addressing the skill development process and offering numerous opportunities, such as study abroad experiences, to develop these skills is of primary importance.

McDowell et al. (2012) described how international courses provide understanding regarding power and privilege, understanding different cultures in the context of counseling, and developing an awareness of the role of culture in values and behavior. As study abroad courses are developed to meet multicultural competencies, it is imperative for counselor educators to understand more about the experiences that take place in the development process for students.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a pedagogical approach that deepens the levels of understanding and personal growth of counseling students (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Canfield et al., 2009; Ferch, 2006). The CACREP 2009 standards (II.G.2.B) specifically acknowledge that counselor educators incorporate experiential activities to facilitate the social and cultural awareness of students. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) stated that from a constructivist perspective, our experiences and most importantly, our perceptions of cultural differences influence our ability to develop cognitive complexity regarding them. “The more perceptual and conceptual discriminations that can be brought to bear on the event, the more complex the construction of the event, and thus the richer will be the experience” (Hammer et al., p. 423). Experiential learning may take place in the form of games, service learning, simulation exercises, and immersion experiences (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Canfield et al., 2009; McDowell et al., 2012). Experiential activities develop self and self-other awareness by accessing both cognitive and affective levels of learning (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Cordero & Rodriguez (2009) qualitatively studied social workers in training participating in a 12- day experience in Puerto Rico, and shared that their participants expressed both a cognitive understanding of cultural differences and a deeper affective understanding of what it is like to be from a Puerto Rican community. Themes described were presented as transformative learning outcomes and included cultural awareness regarding worldviews, values, and practices, knowledge acquisition in history, oppression and indigenous social work practice, skills development of cross cultural competency, and inductive learning regarding transformative learning and advocacy.

In a study exploring a domestic cross-cultural immersion course to New Mexico, Ishii, Gilbride, and Strensrud (2009) found that students had cognitive, affective, perceptual, and

empathic reactions to their course, resulting in impactful development in multicultural knowledge, skills, and awareness. Ishii et al. (2009) implicated instructional techniques that encouraged cognitive dissonance, evoked emotion, and developed cultural empathy. Canfield et al. (2009) connected experiential cross-cultural learning processes to developing multicultural competencies in counselors-in-training. Framing learning activities from a knowledge, skills, and awareness context (Arrendondo et al., 1994), counselor educators can use experiential techniques for engaging students in cross-cultural learning.

Cultural immersion trips are in themselves, experiential learning activities. Heppner and O'Brien (1994) explored counselors-in-trainings' experiences in a multicultural counseling course and discovered that students described interpersonal cross-cultural interaction as vital to their personal change process. Guest speakers to the class provided perspectives and interactions that gave students personal connections to oppression, new ideas, and different perspectives (Heppner & O'Brien).

This study provided insight into the lived experiences of four counselors-in-training who studied abroad. Seeing the impact of the international portion of their counselor training informs and has implications for future counselors-in-training, counselor educators, and counselor training programs as they seek to promote multicultural counseling competency through experiential learning with an international and cross-cultural perspective.

Philosophical Qualitative Foundations

“What can we do with phenomenological research?” or “Can phenomenology, if we concern ourselves deeply with it, do something with us?”- Max van Manen

van Manen’s Hermeneutic Phenomenology

This qualitative study utilized van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology aims to understand the world from the perspectives of those viewing the world (Lavery, 2003). Similar to how a camera captures a photograph, phenomenology strives to capture a picture of what the world is like for a person or people. The terms *lived experience* or *life world* describe the essence of phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). Manen’s version of hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes an internal connection to the phenomenon on the part of the researcher and a strong orientation to the research phenomenon throughout the research process. Furthermore, this version requires looking at experiences as we live them, rather than our ideas of them, uncovering essential themes that describe the essence of experiences, interpreting the lived experience by reflective writing and rewriting, and navigating the interplay of the parts and whole of the research context (van Manen, 1990). The lived experience frames phenomenological inquiry. Lived experience is defined as the “breathing of meaning” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). There is a reflective interplay among the researcher and the participant and the phenomenon that is interactional and forward moving; just as one breathes in and out in the context of being alive.

Visual Methodology in Qualitative Research

The use of visual media, specifically photography, is gaining acceptance and popularity in qualitative research (Davidson, Dottin, Penna, & Robertson, 2009; Onwuegvuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010; Reavey, 2011). Photography as a data gathering method began with the anthropological field and has moved into the research arenas of sociology, education, and health care. Counseling research has begun to utilize this research technique (Koltz et al., 2010; Smith, Bratini, & Appio, 2012). Photography can be a means for qualitative data collection

within the context of phenomenology. Sharing pictures can allow participants a catalyst to share a story, to go deeper into their experience, and to connect their internal experience to a verbal expression, helping to integrate and express their thoughts and feelings (Close, 2007; Hall, Jones, Hall, Richardson, & Hodgson, 2007; Harper, 2002; Schulze, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Reflexive photography, or using photos to reflect or symbolize experiences (Close, 2007; Schulze, 2007), and photo elicitation interview techniques, or using photography in interviewing (Harper, 2002), were utilized in this study. In this technique, participants are asked to choose photos symbolizing an experience and then share about them in an interview with the researcher (MacDonald, 2007). Shulze (2007) and Close (2007) have found reflexive photography was useful as a qualitative research technique, focusing on the symbolic interaction between the participant and his or her environment as well as deepening the subjective interpretations of the participant revolving around their experience.

Reflexive photography as a means for data collection fits into this qualitative framework. Through photos, participants are given even more power in sharing their lived experiences through sharing the meaning they made (Reavey, 2011). Also, as a researcher pays attention to the interpretation of the phenomenon, hearing and visually seeing the symbolic interactionism among the person, the experience, and the verbal and visual description of the experience in the current environment. Harper (2002) wrote that photo elicitation accesses parts of the brain that may produce “a different kind of information” (p. 13) in interviews. Harper (2002) argued that the visual processing parts of the brain developed earlier than those that process verbal information, potentially allowing for pictures to provoke a deeper consciousness than simply spoken words. Photographs allow memory of past lived experiences and looking at them can produce both sensory and emotional reactions.

Methodology

“We must go beyond textbooks, go out into the bypaths and untrodden depths of the wilderness and travel and explore and tell the world the glories of our journey.” – John Hope Franklin

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study using van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological method is to understand the lived experience of counselors-in-training participating internationally in a study abroad course. The research question asked was: What is the experience of a counselor-in-training that has participated in a study abroad trip as a part of their training program? This research will add to the body of knowledge on the multicultural development of counselors-in-training, provide more insight on the proposed validity and reasoning for an international experience, and give counselor educators and counselors-in-training more knowledge regarding immersion training in a global society. For counseling training programs considering implementing a study abroad program in their curriculum, hearing the authentic voices of counseling students who have been impacted by this type of learning is imperative.

Role of the Researcher

Congruent with van Manen’s phenomenological stance, this research embraced the researcher’s involvement in the research process (van Manen, 1990). Following the lead of the methodology, the researcher took an active part of the co-construction of the research themes, and utilized trustworthiness techniques to recognize her own impact on the phenomena. The

second author participated in the study as the dissertation chair. The researcher conducted the entire research study (conceptual framework, interviews, coding, theme development, and writing process) under the mentorship of the chair and second author.

Participant Information

Data collection focused on counseling graduate students in nationwide counselor training programs through purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005). A call for participants was emailed through a counselor educator's listserv and a counseling graduate student listserv by the researcher. Before putting out the call, a proposal was submitted and approved by Idaho State University's Human Subjects Board. Those students who volunteered to participate were given an informed consent to sign before research commenced. The final participants consisted of three males and one female. Two were currently in their master's programs while two had begun doctoral work in Counselor Education. Three participants were Caucasian and one participant was African American. All students were training in United States based counseling programs. All traveled to countries outside of the United States while taking a course for their counselor training program, one to Central America, one to South America, one to the United Kingdom, and one to several Western European countries. Specific countries have not been revealed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Two of the participants' courses were taken as independent studies and these students were not accompanied by other counselors-in-training, while two of the participants travelled in classes that included a group of students. The length of time for the study abroad experiences varied from 7 days to several weeks.

Interview Process

Participants were given the choice whether or not to use email and electronic interview (hushmail, Blackboard Collaborate, Skype) and all participants chose to utilize electronic means of communication for interviewing and corresponding. In an initial email sent before the first interview, participants were asked to bring pictures of significant events they experienced or pictures that symbolized thoughts and feelings experienced during their study abroad trip (Schulze, 2007).

Two interviews for each participant were conducted by the researcher. The first semi-structured, open-ended interviews were done online, synchronously, through Blackboard Collaborate. Reflexive photography interview techniques were used within a hermeneutical phenomenological construct (Schulze, 2007). In each semi-structured interview photo-sharing between the researcher and the participant took place. For the purposes of this study, the pictures were utilized to help participants connect to their experiences and to the researcher instead of being part of the data interpretation (Reavey, 2011). The researcher shared a photograph of her international experience as a part of the interview process. Interviews began with basic questions that were designed to give the participant directions to focus their answer on the actual experience rather than their reflection of the experience (van Manen, 1990). Example questions to start the first interview included the following:

- What is the experience of a counselor-in-training traveling to (country) on a study abroad trip?
- Put yourself in the moment you described. What were you thinking, feeling, smelling, and experiencing?
- What does the photograph(s) you brought symbolize to you?

The second semi-structured interviews focused on co-constructing the emerging themes as well as exploring the thoughts and feelings regarding the study abroad trip and photos that were new or still present. Emergent essential themes were presented to participants and discussed, modified, and refined during this interview.

Coding Process

All interviews (first round and second round) were videoed/recorded, professionally transcribed, and coded for themes utilizing van Manen's holistic and selective approaches (van Manen, 1990). When reflecting and reading the transcriptions of the interviews, the researcher focused on the text as a whole and finding a phrase from each participant that reflected its central significance. The researcher used the selective approach to highlight specific phrases line by line that stood out as speaking to the experience vividly. Together these methods of coding enhanced trustworthiness and according to van Manen (1990), provided a means for revealing the parts and the whole of counseling students' study abroad experience. In the coding process essential themes emerged for each participant and were identified, compared, and contrasted. Specific quotes from the participants that embodied these themes were identified.

Member Check

A member check regarding final emergent themes was completed through SurveyMonkey after the second round of interviews were transcribed and coded. Each survey form consisted of five questions related to the co-constructed themes and the experience of participating in the study. The feedback form was set up so that each participant could type their responses in a blank text box. This allowed for as much reflection and time spent on the survey as they deemed necessary, and the ease of emailing the individual links to the participants made it so that they could complete the member check at their own convenience. Each participant returned the email survey and verified the final themes. The participants all shared that they were in agreement with the co-construction that took place.

Trustworthiness

For this study, trustworthiness was defined as research that is "worthy of paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Tracy (2010) wrote about eight criteria for quality qualitative research: rich rigor, sincerity, resonance, credibility, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. The researcher followed these parameters in undertaking this research and believes that the study met these eight criteria. As Tracy (2010) wrote, crystallization invites different types of data, voices, methods, and frameworks, though not with the intent to provide a more clear truth.

Potential threats to researcher trustworthiness in this study included researcher bias pertaining to the phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Existing preconceptions regarding international sojourning experiences can be seen as a qualitative research bias (Maxwell, 2005). Though the researcher's experiences can enhance the process, it is important to not make these experiences the focal point. Triangulation of the interpretive material took place through periodic confidential process meetings with the second author in his role as dissertation committee chair. A member check was done after the second round of interviews with the participants and all participants agreed with the final themes that were co-constructed. Rolfe, (2006) promoted member checks as essential to trustworthiness in qualitative research.

To increase trustworthiness and decrease researcher bias, the researcher implemented blogging as a form of memoing. The researcher kept a blog of the interviewing, coding, and writing process. The blog was private, password protected, and confidential. Participants consented to the blog and it was accessible for them to read only (not open to the public). The researcher chose to blog my research process as a part of increasing trustworthiness in hopes of increasing her awareness of how she was interacting with and understanding the participants. A form of memoing, blogging is a way to express feelings present during the research process and a way for me to maintain awareness and orient to my participants' experiences. Blogging also served to help the researcher stay aware of her perspective and how it influenced the research process. For the researcher, blogging thoughts and emotions throughout the dissertation provided a way to stay connected to the phenomenon, to triangulate and crystalize her voice in the research, and to share in a creative way that included writing, photographs, music, videos, and quotes. Blogging has a history in qualitative inquiry and has been utilized for diary, research data collection, field notes, to promote research, and to share research (Wakeford & Cohen, 2008). Reflections, notes, and journals hold an important place in qualitative research (Wakeford & Cohen, 2008). In this phenomenological study, van Manen's (1990) focus on the participatory role of the researcher was key and was utilized through blogging reflections after interviews and during the process of coding and writing.

Findings

“All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.” – Martin Buber

The three fundamental themes emerged as essential for capturing the experience of the participants in this study were *experiencing new contexts*, *experiencing emotions*, and *experiencing new learning*. *Experiencing* was the word that highlighted the active nature of each participants' study abroad trip. There was an active nature to the anecdotes described by each participant. The CITs were not passively traveling and having knowledge come to them. Instead, they were actively participating, feeling, learning, and connecting to their environments while experiencing the international study trips. Therefore, *experiencing* was named as core to each essential theme. The following sections describe of the three emergent themes, experiencing new contexts, experiencing emotions, and experiencing new learning from the study.

Experiencing New Contexts

Being a CIT on an international study abroad trip meant *experiencing new contexts*. Openness, living with uncertainty, context as a catalyst for transition and new awareness, present focused awareness, and intentional interactions were all pieces of experiencing the new contexts in another culture. The participants shared their new contexts through the photos they were asked to bring. Participant One was to share a photograph with me of her trip:

That's of me in [City, Country], standing up on one of their hills overlooking the city. I just thought it was a pretty picture and one of the most memorable times for me while I was studying abroad because I was with my new friends.

As she shared about her picture, she used the words pretty, new friends, scenery, and friends I met. Context and environment was an important theme throughout her interview. Participant One spoke about the feelings that came alongside being open in a new context and around new people, places, and environments:

The biggest thing for me was to get out in nature as much as possible, to try things I'd never tried before, to experience things I've never seen or done before.

In studying abroad participant one encountered new people as a part of her context: her roommates, her students, families in the community, new friends, and other community members. The experience for her included being open to these new contexts and interacting with them rather than ignoring them. Openness to connections and relationships were an important part of experiencing a new context. She discussed a situation where her roommate pointed out to her how much time she was spending on Facebook chatting with people back home and spending all of her time alone in the house:

And she pointed it out to me, and, it was like you're right. I didn't want to admit it at the time but I was like, she's had prior, a lot more experience living abroad than I have. ... And instead of trying to go back to the normal status quo of having my family around, trying to reach out to the other resources that are more local or available to me in present time.

Her roommate had a profound impact on her experience, expressing the theme of interactions with and openness to new contexts as a vital ingredient for this trip. Other people that were impactful to the experience included a young male student who served as the mediator between her and her Spanish Speaking students:

He would just be like, "She doesn't speak very good Spanish," and he would explain things to them that I was maybe trying to explain. ... He was just a very sweet kid and I actually still stay in touch with him sometimes on Facebook."

Participant one also connected with the family she stayed with. She traveled with her roommate and the 16 year-old son of her host family, and several of his friends to [city, country]- a sixteen-hour trip by bus. They traveled far into the jungle and in interacting with this new context, participant one had a personal learning experience:

Yeah. It was cool because this kid was like a jungle boy and he made his own fishing rods out of trees, out of plants that were growing.... We were all catching piranha that night... His mother made dinner for us, and it was a very, very small, inclusive place. ... We decided that night that we were going to sleep out in the jungle on the way, way back of somebody's farm area. It was completely out of my comfort zone... We set up camp and we're immediately starting to get eaten by mosquitoes so this was not very planned out and we get in these tents and it starts pouring rain. There's water coming through the tent so all-night we are just drenched in water. ... It was just crazy. ... It was a learning lesson for me because I realized that I have a comfort zone and that was my breaking point. It was my breaking point. I think I was frustrated, I was exhausted, but I was also excited. It was a really great feeling to be surrounded by this family. They were very sweet, very kind hearted. It was a mixture of emotions.

Besides connections and relationships with people in the context, participant one described an openness and interaction with the places or environments she encountered as a

CIT on a study abroad program. The environment both challenged and excited her as she experienced a variety of different contexts. As listed above, she encountered the jungle and nature in a rain drenched and not so pleasant evening. Before that experience she fished for piranha and took a 16-hour bus trip, which left her exhausted.

Oh, God, it was excitement but a lot of exhaustion. The trip, I think, it was just too much of a trip in such a short weekend. I think that with everything that was... we were taking showers in an outhouse. We were going to the bathroom in a toilet that wasn't working. It broke me.

Participant One relayed some of the sights, sounds, and tastes she experienced in the new contexts. She described the smell of garbage that was prevalent in the city where she lived:

I will never forget the smell of trash. I know that is so negative, but living in [name of city], I physically did not feel well there... Then, when we were driving back towards [name of city], the closer we got, the smell would start to come back. It was just this over-crossing smell.

She spoke of the tastes and smells of food:

The taste of the flan and the desserts, the pastry stores. I remember the smells of my host mother cooking every night, usually rice and beans and chicken or something.

She described sights:

I remember the (kids) always dancing. In their culture, it's wonderful. They have these big parties and they always were dancing, even the kids at the school. Some of the dance moves that these kids were doing, it just brightened my day up.

She shared about the scenery:

The mountains were just absolutely beautiful. We went to a hot springs in [city], and I think the sense I would remember most is sitting inside the hot springs. Feeling so content, and warm, and alive. It was a very happy time because I was with all my friends and stuff.

The essence of the experience in part was made up by the new contexts available to participant one and her willingness to be open to and interact with these new contexts. Other participants described the sights, smells, and sounds of their new contexts as well, as this theme emerged in each interview:

P4: We're tired from the flight, and we're on this train and it just kind of hit me that we were there. I'm looking outside, and like you mentioned everything is so green and you could see the yellow fields too.

P4: So, I wasn't just seeing and hearing and smelling. I was also feeling things and interacting with and really being a part of this new culture.

P3: And I think going to the Holocaust museum the first time kind of set me up for the experience of going to the concentration camp. And, driving up to the concentration camp, you would never think that was there. The countryside was gorgeous; it was beautiful. But once you step onto the grounds that totally changed. And it changed your outlook, and it was dreary and sad, and just ugly, going there. Even though the sun was out, I just didn't feel right taking pictures there.

The participants' rich descriptions of their context speak to their level of experience cognitively and affectively. They each described physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions to their environment. Participant one did not feel well after spending time in a polluted environment and felt happy when watching the children dance around her. Participant four's context provided reflective awareness of his present moment, and Participant three's experience of his context kept him from taking pictures. The researchers used Gowin's (1981) term of *felt-significance*, when affect and cognition combine for new learning, to describe this type of experiential learning for the counselors-in-training. In listening to and coding the participants' interviews, the first researcher felt the participants gained a *felt-significance* in their learning by experiencing their contexts cognitively and affectively. This felt-significance of their environment speaks to a deeper level of engaged learning (Gowin, 1981).

The participants described being open and intentional in experiencing their new contexts, by recognizing the value of being out of their comfort zones, and by the participants reflecting on their experiences through journaling, conversation, blogging, and completing assignments associated with the trip. The following quotes from each participant exemplify the aspects, manifestations, and significance of the theme of experiencing new contexts:

P2: And he didn't really want to translate stuff for us, or he would translate... he would translate cultural norms instead of translating what we asked them to, or what we were looking for, or he would answer for the kids, too. So we'd have a question for them, or a comment for them, and he wouldn't translate. He would just say, "Oh, well, yeah, that's not really possible for them to go to school because blah, blah, blah." So we had some translator issues. So that probably enhanced the awkwardness.

P4: That's what I noticed in the blog. In the beginning, I'm like "Wow. I'm really surprised at how much it's the same here." By the end, it was like "I really like how much it's different."

P4: I had to figure it out by myself, because I had been there at that point about four or five [times], and I always had someone with me, so we kind of tag-teamed figuring out what we needed to do, how do we get somewhere, things like that. So I was literally lowering-it was like a movie- I was lowering down under into the ground further into the depths and I was looking around, "Wow, this is intense."

P3: That was bone chilling for me. And I took out my camera to take pictures, then I just did not feel right taking a picture of that. So I didn't take any pictures there. And it was, it was an experience that I don't know I would like to have again.

Each participant described the contexts of their international environment vividly. One described the difficulty of communicating with translators from another country, another reflected on the learning experience in regards to recognizing similarities and differences in the cultural contexts, another the historical context that brought up difficult feelings, and another the impact of self-reliance in a new context. Again, these new contexts were experienced cognitively and emotionally as each participant talked about how the learning meant more than reading from books, as they were actually experiencing the context rather than reading about it. The pictures shared by participants with the researchers in the interviews reflected the variety of international contexts, and the researcher noted that as the pictures were shared, that the connection formed between the researcher and participant grew and the experiences shared grew richer. For these four participants, studying abroad in a counselor training program meant experiencing new contexts.

Experiencing Emotions

Connected to the experience of being in a new context were the emotions that it produced. Being on a study abroad trip while being a counselor-in-training meant *experiencing emotions*. Experiencing emotions included experiencing life's emotions in a new context, experiencing frustration in a new context, feeling excitement and pride, and being intentionally mindful of emotion and awareness. When interviewing each of the participants it was apparent that their respective trips included a variety of emotional experiences. From getting lost on alone on a bus in Central America to speaking with relatives of Viktor Frankl, the participants described the highs and lows of their international experiences. All the participants described emotions of anxiety and excitement and each expressed a sense of enjoying their experience and wanting to continue having experiences similar in the future. Experiencing emotions included a range of comfortable and uncomfortable feelings, were reflective of the participant's place in life, they were experienced from being in new situations, and all included anxiety and excitement in some form. These emotions included fear, anxiety, frustration, excitement, pride, gratitude, and empathy. The emotions manifested through interactions with the context and from being in completely new and different situations in each country. Navigating language differences in the classroom, listening and talking to people in the culture, exploring places of historical significance to counseling and society, and sleeping in a makeshift tent in the rain forest- all these experiences created emotional and cognitive experiences that provided new learning for participants. The emotions described by the participants provided learning through these critical incidents promoted self-awareness, connections to others, made life long memories, and sparked particular moments of reflection. Experiencing emotion was significant to the participants in their ability to provide a catalyst for learning, spoke to the depth of what they were going through, and made things that they had known or learned about real. In the below quotes, the varied emotions that were experienced on the international trips are shared.

P1: ...[the experience]... was very overwhelming. That would be the major feeling I would identify with. Sometimes chaotic. But definitely rewarding. It was a great experience for me to have.

P3: There was a lot of excitement. Then there was a lot of- I guess you could call it awe would be the best feeling word you could associate with it. When I say that, I mean taking in so many new things at once kind of puts you in the step back. Wow, this is really intense and this is awesome and it's exciting and so you're happy.

P4: So, everything was coming at me, and I just kind of sat there and let it all come at me and just sat and experienced it and just kind of had one of those times, where I thought, “Wow, this is really a moment I need to remember,” because it’s kind of so fresh and so new at once.

P2: and, I guess, there is, some apprehension, I think, for all of us, because we didn’t know exactly what we’d be doing... Yeah, it was the first time that this trip had been put together, and so we had to play a lot of things by ear, we had some things in the works that ended up falling through for whatever reason.

P3: I was like, “This is history, man. Oh my God, this is history.” I mean, he actually grew up with this guy that we were studying. And, he talked about how great Viktor Frankl was, and... I was like, “Wow.” And he was excited to be there with us, and he hung out with us and everything.

Participants expressed that they experienced wide varieties of emotions throughout their international experiences. They described that due to the new environmental contexts, group experiences, and the immersion focus, that the emotions were strong and unavoidable. They experienced fear, anxiety, frustration, excitement, happiness, awe, and being overwhelmed. Experiencing emotions consistently emerged in the rich language used to describe their international counselor training courses.

In particular, participant three shared throughout the interview about his emotions. He used terms like “Oh my God,” “That was awesome,” and “I thought that was phenomenal” to describe different parts of his trip to [country] and [city]. His words, tone of voice, and facial expression shared that this experience was a positive one for him. While coding his transcript, I noticed that I commented on his nonverbal expression more than with the other participants. For example, I probed: “Yeah, talk about that emotion a bit. I can see it all over your face,” “And I notice you’re smiling,” and “Well, your nonverbal is really showing that.... You were so excited,...[and] when you talked about the concentration camps, you were more solemn, so I’m definitely picking up on ups and downs that you went through.” I also responded with “Wow” throughout the hour-long interview, connecting to his expression of excitement and his emotions about his trip. My probes and responses speak to how powerful the trip was for him, how exciting it was, and how much he enjoyed the experience. In summing up the trip he stated:

It was just refreshing, a lot of fun, it was just... oh my goodness, it was awesome.

I wish that I could live it all over again, and just go through it again.

We discussed how it was difficult to put the experience into words for someone who was not on the trip:

Because it was so much of a new experience for me, I don’t have words to express the feelings that I had.

Participant two had a different experience with emotions. Alongside excitement and enjoyment, he experienced uncertainty and anxiety that was not overwhelming, but that could at times be described as frustration.

Um, um, I mean, I think part of it was that it was the first time they were doing the trip. And so, um, some of the plans that they had set in place didn't really work out. Um, but, so yeah, we were kind of forced to just kind of go with it. And then some people did better with that than others, I think.

He went on to describe that he felt comfortable with the uncertainty and that he still had an opportunity to experience new contexts. Participant two was able to "roll with it" and still learn from and enjoy the experience, however, at specific times he experienced these feelings. He described that he felt that a lot of the uncertain moments were out of the trip planners' control. The frustrating moments of the trip were moments of uncertainty, where he was placed in front of a classroom without knowing the language or what he was supposed to do with the kids, when the translators were not cooperative in their translation, and when he wanted to connect with the students and was not able to.

There wasn't like, a, right, there wasn't a plan or anything. And so I was just kind of like, well, I don't speak the language and I'm in front of this class or in front of this group of people and, uh, you know, what are we going to do?

How do you connect with people, I mean, I think you can connect with people, but how you know, it just makes it harder to connect with people when you don't speak the language.

Participant two wanted to connect with the community and found that because of the uncertainty in parts of the trip, he was not able to as easily as he had hoped. He felt the trip was a good experience but that there could have been more learning if some of the uncertainty was not present. Also, he described that part of the frustration was with other participants on the trip. He stated that some were open to the uncertainty and others were not as open to the uncertainty. He described that he thought that if there were more opportunities to prepare beforehand for the trip, that it would have been more helpful. He stated that the fact that some people were at the beginning of the program while others were at the end of the program had an influence on the uncertainty and frustration as well. As we continued to discuss this trip, it became apparent that those he traveled with were a part of his emotional experience as a CIT on a study abroad trip.

Each participant experienced a variety of emotions throughout their experience studying abroad as counselor trainees. Some emotions were surprising, some were felt at deep levels, some required flexibility, and all contributed to the deep learning that was taking place on an experiential or "felt-significance" level (Gowin, 1981).

Experiencing New Learning

Participating in a study abroad trip as a CIT meant *experiencing new learning*. This new learning incorporated connecting personal experience to counselor development, influence of environment and culture on counselor training, and experiential learning through experiencing history. Each participant described new learning that took place while studying abroad. The learning was both personal growth and learning that applied directly to counselor training. The aspects of new learning most evident were self-awareness, counselor development, and understandings of their new context. These aspects manifested through being in historical contexts, from their senses when interacting with the environment, from experiencing the emotions involved in being in a new context, from course discussions, assignments, and reflections, and happened often in the moment as well as from being present

focused in the reflective process. The following quotes are the words of the participants that speak to this theme:

P3: Just the fact, I believe that real learning comes when you're taken outside of your comfort zones and I think that all counselors need to be taken out of their comfort zone at some point, to learn about somebody else. And then that's the only way you'll really learn true empathy, when you are immersed in another culture and you're able to empathize with that culture.

P1: It was an eye-opener for me what it's like for a family or an individual to move abroad or being forced to move abroad or whatever the case may be. But being outside of their own comfort zone and how it affects them emotionally, financially, physically, mentally, and psychologically. The list goes on and on and on. It made me a lot more aware of the areas that I need to be sensitive to for my clients.

P3: Just being in the midst of all that and actually I think being there helped to, um, facilitate the learning process better than me just learning about it through lecture and probably some paper that I would have to do and some research.

P2: But the class time was interesting for somebody who was going into a doctoral program to see the different, I guess, levels of where people were at with their understanding of multiculturalism. And one of the things that I found myself thinking about... let me see if I can put this in a way that makes sense... I guess one of the things I was wondering was when does something start becoming a deficiency? When you're working with people, or in a faculty position or whatever, when do you start identifying students' inabilities, or I don't know...

Participant three described how experiencing history brought the history of counseling alive for him. After spending time with a relative of a prominent counseling historical figure, he described the impact:

This is history, man. Oh my God, this is history." I mean, he actually grew up with this guy that we were studying. And, he talked about how great Viktor Frankl was, and... I was like, "Wow." And he was excited to be there with us, and he hung out with us and everything.

This was exciting for him and led to a deeper appreciation for the counseling field and a deeper understanding of its history and growth.

Participant four described how interacting with self and others, and reflection were essential to his CIT study abroad experience and to experiencing new learning. One of the most powerful things that participant four said and that connected all these aspects together was that he felt that the counseling skills he had gained as a part of his program were essential to his new learning experience while there:

I think a lot of it, for me had to do with being a counselor... Because you mentioned being present and that a lot of the things that we study and things that we're talking about in class and discussions that we're having centered around these ideas.

But I really put a lot of it to the training that I've had and the schooling that I've had, where I've really taken time to work on those aspects of me. That then going on that trip, it amplified my experience because I was able to use some of those techniques on myself and really kind of let it all in and be aware of doing that, rather than by chance hoping that you have a great time. I was able to kind of put stuff in motion that made it happen. ... whereas before I might have known what I would get out of it, but I don't think I would've been equipped with tools that make that happen.

Participant four spoke about the counseling "tools" he had acquired that helped him engage in his trip:

Yeah. A lot of counseling techniques that I'm drawn to are very much about being present and the current emotions, and allowing yourself to really sit in those emotions and feel them. Kind of realize their effect on you, but realize your effect on them, and just kind of how you're interacting with these emotions and things like that. Because I had spent some time starting to learn about those things, that presence was easier for me to get to and to remind myself of.

Because sitting in those moments, rather than feeling the emotion and then pursuing it to the side or not even realizing it's there until later, I like to feel the emotion and then keep myself in that presence. The way I would try and do with a client and kind of observe that emotion and let it sit there, "What is this like? How is this interplaying with me and my environment and how it is effecting what I'm doing."

These counseling skills helped him to experience the moments he had on his trip.

So, I wasn't just seeing and hearing and smelling. I was also feeling things and interacting with and really being a part of this new culture.

Three overall essential themes connect the participants' as well as the researcher's understanding of experiences as CIT's on a study abroad trip. Experiencing was described as the foundation for all of the themes. Experiencing meant being open and aware of thoughts and emotions that were happening in the moments of the trip. These four participants described experiencing new contexts, emotions, and new learning as essential components of their study abroad experience in the framework of counselor training. The experience of being a counselor-in-training who participated in a study abroad program as a part of their training encompassed experiencing new contexts, handling a variety of emotions, and learning about oneself, others, and counseling skills with a deeper understanding, both cognitive and affective.

Discussion

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." - Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

In van Manen's (1990) approach, the purpose of human research is not to generalize results, disseminate findings, or to provide a rubric for what makes up a certain experience. Instead, the purpose is to describe the depth of an experience and to provide an understanding

for the reader of what it was like for the participants to be a part of a specific phenomenon. Again, it is not about what one does with qualitative research; it is about what one gains from the experience of reading qualitative research. Therefore, there are implications for this study that are intangible and specific to each individual who reads it. There are also implications for the researcher and for the participants involved that can only be guessed at. It is important to understand the purpose of phenomenological research as a foundation. The following is a discussion of ideas and potential implications resulting from an understanding of these four participants' lived experience of studying abroad as counselors-in-training.

Implications for Counselors-in-Training

The experiences of the CITs in this study offer insight to other CITs who are planning on participating in study abroad experiences. Reading the overall themes, CITs can gain perspective on what to expect when traveling internationally. According to these participants' experiences, CITs may be in new contexts, put in situations that may evoke emotions, and most likely will gain new learning. Being aware of the potential cognitive and affective factors that could accompany an international counseling experience can help in the preparation and decision making phase for counselors-in-training. CITs can think about what support systems they may need to have in place, identify times that are most appropriate for travel, and expect to "experience" a variety of emotion and learning. Having these expectations and reading about others who have had a similar experience can normalize and provide perspective on their personal reactions when faced with them on their own. With the movement toward the internationalization of counseling growing (Leung et al., 2009), more and more students in counselor training programs will be collaborating abroad. Reading a study about the essence of experiences abroad can be both empowering and enlightening in the preparation phase as well as the reflection phase of an international sojourn for counseling students.

Implications for Counselor Educators

As more programs began to embrace international study abroad experiences and integrate intercultural learning into their curriculum, the essentiality for counselor educators to understand what their students are experiencing, learning, and gaining from these trips expands. The findings of this study add to the research body describing the impact of cultural immersion programs for counseling students. It supports earlier studies describing experiential learning as a key part of studying abroad (McDowell et al., 2012; Mehta, 2011) as well as reinforces multicultural development through this experiential learning process (Canfield et al., 2009; Fawcett et al., 2010; Platt, 2012; West-Olatunji et al., 2011). Gaining insight on these students' perspectives can be helpful for educators as they take on planning a trip, designing a course, and bringing together a group of students; a hefty task and definitely more work than planning a course without the added details of travel and intercultural communication. Counselor educators need to reflect the importance of being intentional in course design and learning goals, as it becomes obvious in this study that there are a variety of different avenues an international experience for a CIT can take. Participants' reactions and learning abilities may be impacted by the type of course, the stage in program, age, length of trip, and difference in culture contexts. Considerations including whether or not international courses are encouraged outside of the program or incorporated into the counseling program are integral as well. Reflected in the participants' experiences are the many different types of CIT study abroad trips. Counselor educators can use this research in planning how they want to incorporate the internationalization of counseling into their prospective programs.

Implications for Curriculum and Course Design

Other factors to consider from the research are group dynamics in CIT study abroad trips and the pre and post trip preparation. Participants had various reactions to group experiences with those they traveled. Counselor educators will want to be aware of the potential effects of these dynamics. One of the participants spent time before and after the trip reflecting, writing, and discussing the experience. For this participant, preparation, reentry awareness, and outlets for expression allowed him to gain long lasting learning. He also has plans to take his awareness and use it in the future as he continues his CIT training. Most of the participants stated that participating in the study and reflecting on their trip with me had been helpful for them in understanding how the trip impacted their personal lives and experience as a CIT. This speaks to the importance and value of pre and post trip processing. Counselor educators will want to reflect on the structure of CIT international courses and design effective opportunities to prepare students for potential shifts in perspective before arriving in their new context as well as before returning to their old context. They will also want to include reflective opportunities for students before, during, and after the trip.

Also of note is the impact of personal interactions, intentional experiences, and mindful reflections in the course design. This study pointed to experiential learning as a catalyst for growth and connection. In this study, the participant who had the most intentionality in reflecting was most able to discuss how he connected the learning from the international experience to his current CIT training. Counselor educators may want to develop courses that build upon the basic counseling skills class to help student utilize these skills in interacting with their new contexts. This would speak to intentional timing and planning of the course to provide an effective means for developing intercultural competency. Counselor educators may also want to consider incorporating mindfulness practices for students before they embark on a CIT trip in order to enhance their ability to be present in the moment, to reflect, to manage anxiety, and to experience their context.

Educators developing international courses for CITs can use the themes found in this research for reflection while planning trips. Counselor educators may want to reflect on the appropriate counselor developmental stage of trip participants in regards to the purpose of their trip. Intentionality in curriculum is vital for educators aiming to meet particular learning goals and/or CACREP standards. Participants' reactions and learning abilities may be impacted by the type of course, the stage in program, age, length of trip, and difference in culture contexts. Considerations including whether or not international courses are encouraged outside of the program or incorporated into the counseling program are integral as well. Reflected in the participants' experiences are the many different types of CIT study abroad trips. Counselor educators can use this research in planning how they want to incorporate the internationalization of counseling into their prospective programs. Counselor educators will want to reflect on the structure of CIT international courses and design effective opportunities to prepare students for potential shifts in perspective before arriving in their new context as well as before returning to their old context. They will also want to include reflective opportunities for students before, during, and after the trip.

Implication for Counseling Research

Finally, this study provides insight for using creative methodologies in counselor education research. The use of photo sharing in research is an area of focus that could lead to an understanding of new ways to build rapport and depth in participants' experiences. Specific research on the use photo elicitation for accessing meaning and experience can be expanded, especially in the counseling field. In this research I noted that photo sharing with the

participants helped build rapport, allowed for multiple connections that might not have been gained otherwise, and provided a means for co-construction of essential themes. Counselor educators can utilize these approaches in their own research to continue to build its acceptance and power in our field.

Limitations

The technology incorporated in the interview process provided a learning curve for the researcher and participants. This potentially led to time constraints that did not allow for as in-depth of exploration as could have taken place with two of the participants in particular. Also, the varied participants had different types of study abroad trips as a part of their program. Some traveled individually and some in a group, one attended a counseling conference while another two went as part of a structured course. The number of days abroad, living arrangements, and levels of interaction also differed among participants. The varied types of courses led to very different experiences, which were at times difficult to assimilate during the coding process. The researcher also notes that with the nature of qualitative research and van Manen's methodology, that the findings are not generalizable to all counselors-in-training

Future Research

It is imperative that counseling research reflects and supports the movement of internationalization in counseling (Leung et al., 2009; Ng & Noonan, 2012). How a student processes a trip after taking it can impact how he or she integrates it into learning that makes a lasting difference in their counseling and personal development. Measuring the long-term impact of study abroad trips is a vital step for understanding how immersion trips operationalize multicultural and counselor development in counseling practice after graduation. Research studies exploring how these experiences as students develop into skills after time would give insight on course design as well as potential re-entry support. Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) could be used as a foundation for these studies, as this research speaks to the experiential nature of the courses and the importance of reflection in understanding and applying the new learning. Quantitative studies comparing the multicultural competencies of CITs who have traveled abroad as a part of their program with those who have not traveled abroad as a part of their program would be interesting as well and speak to the differences that these types of experience may or may not make for counseling students.

After recognizing the variety of study abroad experiences available to CIT students while doing this research, an area for future research includes studies, both qualitative and quantitative, that explore best practices for counselor educators leading trips in regards to curriculum, travel itineraries, pedagogy, and course design. In particular, a grounded theory study on counselor educators' processes of designing and implementing an international course as well as a phenomenological study on their experiences of implementing and leading an international course are also needed. This type of study would provide understanding for counselor educators of the thoughts, emotions, and processes involved in undertaking this type of international endeavor. Qualitative studies on international counseling students who have international experiences in other countries besides the United States would provide new and exciting perspectives to the internationalization of counseling as well. The participants in this study described positive and negative experiences, shared challenges, and discussed high points of their trips. More specifically focused research built around the positive and negative experiences of CIT international trips and their contexts could provide counselor educators with insight into providing the most beneficial circumstances for growth. However, reflection on a negative international experience may provide positive growth for CITs and vice versa,

which is important for counselor educators to note. There is much more work to do in researching the internationalization of counselor training. With the globalization of our society and the growing mental health needs around the world, this research study is timely and will provide readers with an in depth look at four lived experiences of studying abroad as a counselor-in-training.

“Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again; we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life.” – Jack Kerouac

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Author Note

Cristen C. Wathen is an Assistant Professor and Counselor Educator at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. She is a licensed counselor in Montana. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Dr. Cristen C. Wathen at Email: christen.wathen@montana.edu

David M. Kleist is a Professor and Department Chair at Idaho State University in Pocatello, ID. He is a licensed counselor in Idaho. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: Dr. David M. Kleist at Email: kleidavi@isu.edu

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