Visions in Our Heads: Lived Experiences of US Counsellors-in-Training in Study Abroad Programs
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Aim and Purpose
“One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.” - Henry Miller

Research Question: What is the experience of counselors-in-training (CITs) participating in a study abroad program?

Abstract: The counseling profession is growing increasingly internationalized in response to worldwide globalization (Gerstein and Ægisdóttir, 2007). Many US counseling programs are incorporating international training experiences to address this reality (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, Leung, & Norsworthy, 2009; Kehta, 2011; Platt, 2012). Utilizing van Manen’s phenomenological methodology, the researcher explored experiences of four counselors-in-training participating in international study. Photosharing and photo-elicitation methods were used in two semi-structured online interviews as well as a survey monkey member check for each participant. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes according to van Manen’s holistic and selective approaches. Implications for counselors-in-training and counselor educators are discussed.

Qualitative Methodology and Design
“Can phenomenology, if we concern ourselves deeply with it, do something with us?” - Max van Manen

van Manen’s Hermeneutic Phenomenology
This study used van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of four United States based counselors-in-training participating in study abroad programs. Phenomenology aims to understand the world from the perspectives of those viewing the world (Laverty, 2003).

Visual Methodology
 Reflexive photography (Close, 2007; Schulz, 2007) and Photo elicitation interview techniques, or using photography in interviewing (Harper, 2002), were utilized in this study.

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

Essential Emergent Themes from the Study
Experiencing was the word that highlighted the active nature of each participant’s study abroad trip. The CITs were not passively traveling and having knowledge come to them. Instead, they were actively participating, feeling, learning, and connecting while in the different travel abroad trips. Experiencing was core to each theme. The themes that stood out as essential for each participant in their experience on a CIT on a study abroad trip were (see diagrams):

- Experiencing New Contexts
- Experiencing New Emotions
- Experiencing New Learning

After coding the interviews, the researcher utilized her own pictures to symbolize, share, and describe to participants the overall themes of Experiencing New Contexts, Emotions, and New Learning (see pictures).

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“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. 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.” Participant 1, South America

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“I really put a lot of it into 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... I think that being abroad has given me the chance 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. Furthermore, I feel like I’ve had some of the training that I’ve had on that...” Participant 4, United Kingdom

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Trustingworthiness
Blogging (Memoing)
Translucation
with 2nd researcher
Participant member check

Conceptual Framework for Study

Implications
“‘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

1) Increase CITs’ awareness regarding a Study Abroad experience before they travel:
- Recognition that expectations may look different than experience.
- Awareness of potential positive and challenging emotions
- Impact of experiential learning in cross cultural development
- Importance of intentionality, awareness, respect, and presence in interacting with the culture visiting

2) Intentionality, Planning, and Safety in CIT Course Design:
- Thoughtful reflection for whom, what, where, when, and why when designing a counseling study abroad trip
- Importance of cross cultural collaborators
- Intentional planning for course design
- Importance of pre preparation and post trip integration

Limitations
- Technology difficulties in interviews
- Participants’ study abroad courses differed in length, design, and culture

References