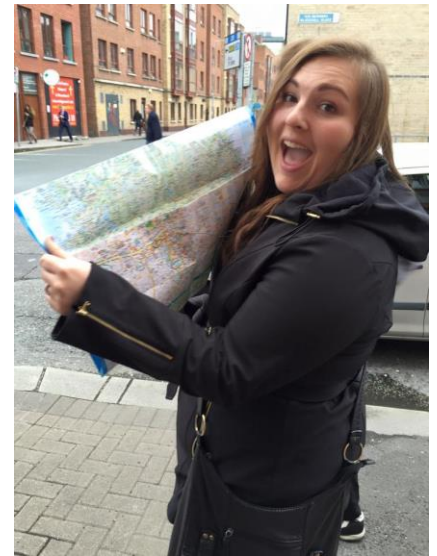


Picture this, being a 21-year-old college student and deciding that you want to do something new and exciting in your life, what would you want to do? For me, it was traveling abroad to Dublin, Ireland. As an Elementary Education major getting ready to start my student teaching in the Fall, I thought, how would it be possible for me to still do this program? Working with both my COE advisor and my Study Abroad advisor, I was able to find a way to do the program and benefit from learning about another country's educational system.

## **What has Studying Abroad Taught Me?**

Studying abroad in a different country has taught me many things about both others and myself. During my first two years at Illinois State, I was terrified to step out of my comfort zone and try something new. Taking this step out of my comfort zone was one of the best things I could have done for myself. Studying abroad teaches many people about independence. Although I was on an instructor led program, there were still many times that I was doing things on my own. Whether it was learning the transportation system in Europe, using a different currency, or even just getting around the area, I found a new confidence and independence I didn't know existed. Finding this independence and confidence during this trip has not only helped me feel prepared for my future career, but also for the challenges I may face during my life.



## **What are the Schools in Ireland Like?**



While in Ireland, our group was fortunate enough to be allowed to enter different schools and meet the staff and some students. It was very interesting to see what the schools looked like in person and to hear the similarities and differences between our educational systems. Students in Ireland typically begin school around the age of six and finish around the age of sixteen, or until the students have finished at least three years of secondary education. This, in comparison to the United States, is very similar to our students beginning Kindergarten around the age of five and remaining in school until the student is sixteen, or until they graduate high school.

Similar to schools in the United States, Ireland schools consist of Primary, Second-Level, and Third-Level education. The “Primary schools are generally privately owned by religious communities (or boards of governors) but are State-funded” and the general goals are to “enable

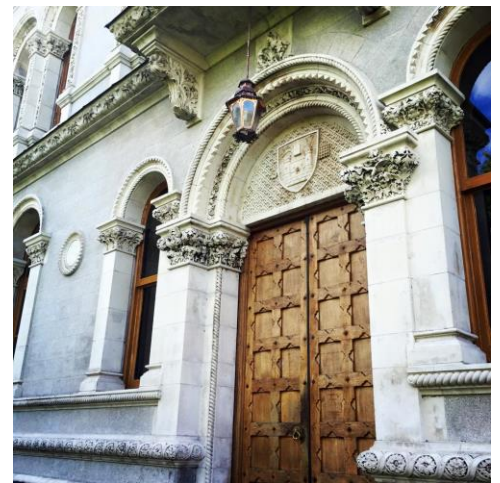
the child to live a full life as a child, realize his or her potential as a unique individual, develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others, and to prepare for a continuum of learning” (Overview). As of now, the United States focuses on the Common Core and integration in the classroom to develop and meet the needs of diverse learners in order to help them meet a common goal and be prepared for higher education. Both Ireland and the United States have common curriculum focusing on key areas such as Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Physical Education, and Visual Arts (Overview & Corsi-Bunker).

The Second-Level education in Ireland is “provided by different types of post-primary schools”, specifically, “vocational, community and comprehensive schools” (Overview). The Secondary schools in Ireland are typically “privately owned and managed” by “religious communities or boards of governors” (Overview).

In Ireland, “Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two-year or three-year senior cycle depending on whether an optional Transition Year is taken following the Junior Certificate examination” (Overview). The Junior Certificate is taken after three years of Second Level education, similar to our ACT during junior year of high school. While visiting one of the schools, a few of us spoke to a group of students leaving school for the day and they mentioned that they were taking the Junior Certificate soon. We learned that the preparation for this test is very vigorous and most of the time in the classroom is spent preparing for this exam. The students receive a number score after this examination which tells them which third level school, a.k.a college in the U.S., they will be able to join and what fields they will be able to study.

Once the Junior Certificate has been completed, students will then make their decisions on where to attend school and what field to study based on their scores. A few students may try to retake the examination or may even go against their results and pursue the field they truly want to study.

Also similar to the United States, Ireland has a strong educational program for students with special needs, which “ranges from additional support in mainstream schools to specialist support in special schools” (Overview). In Ireland, “a student with a disability may be enrolled in a mainstream class with additional support, special class in a mainstream school, or a special school which caters for the students with his or her category of disability” (Overview).



## **How Did Studying Abroad Benefit Me as a Future Teacher?**

Looking back on my overall experience of Ireland, I can clearly see how this trip will benefit me as a future teacher. The students, faculty, and schools of Ireland have opened my eyes to new experiences and ideas for my future classroom. Being able to interact with the students in



Ireland has shown me how diversity is a wonderful thing that students grow from each and every day. It also showed me how many students who come to school truly look up to their teacher and view their school as their “safe place”, so as a future teacher, I need to remember that I may be a child’s only sense of security and I need to do my best to fulfill their needs. The faculty, both principals and teachers, showed me how important it is to work as a team, because at the end of the day, you are impacting the lives of each and every child in your building. They also provided me with different ideas, such as incorporating movement activities into the daily routine or classroom management styles, which I will hold onto for the rest of my teaching career.

\*If you are a student considering studying abroad, I absolutely encourage you to do it! It was a live changing experience that will forever be a part of me.



Ireland, 2015





Sources:

Corsi-Bunker, A. (n.d.). Retrieved May 9, 2015, from <http://www.issu.umn.edu/publications/useducation/4.pdf>

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