

Stan Gillespie
8/23/2015
Taiwan
Dr. Lin, TCH 265

I encourage all students thinking about traveling abroad to branch out and go for it. I traveled abroad to Taiwan with five wonderful education majors and it was the smartest decision I have ever made. I promise you no matter which program you apply for it will be worth it. The friends I made abroad are now going to be lifelong companions. The scenes I witnessed were views I had only seen in calendars. The clinical experience I gained in a foreign classroom will have a positive lasting impression on my future. My advisor understood our group's situation and made the transition to Taiwan simple. Once I arrived, the most caring and thoughtful host family welcomed me at the airport. You might think that all the excursions will enhance your teaching abilities, and they will, but living with a host family was extremely beneficial as well. There were countless nights as I ate the freshest seafood and vegetables that I learned about some other person's culture. You cannot simply get that knowledge in Illinois. What I learned from my host family over those three weeks was never taught to me in any class or written in any textbook. I was able to process why certain cultures value aspects of life because I saw and heard them in person. There were numerous occurrences with my host family that I can implement in my future classroom. For example, I learned from my host mother that I need to set a firm stance on classroom discipline from the beginning of the school year or else students will begin to notice variations in discipline and take advantage of that. I grasped this concept while asking my host mother how her children were so behaved. She explained that the two younger children modeled their actions based on the eldest and my host mother taught her eldest daughter to follow Confucius ideals.

Aside from the fabulous atmosphere with my host family, my reason for coming to another country was to grasp new teaching concepts as well as strategies. Going to another country let me easily see the stark and subtle variations in school structure, lesson planning, curriculum, motivation, and classroom management. Over the three weeks, the classes I taught and observed in did prepare me for my student teaching experience in numerous ways. First of all, I realized how it feels to teach an entire classroom of limited language proficient students. I have had experience in the past with non-fluent English students but it was minimal and involved one or two students. When we taught our collaborative lesson on the topic of "space" to the sixth grade class, a limited amount of students understood full English sentences. At first I expected the students to understand everything I said and remember it for later. About twenty seconds in when I asked students to repeat the first vocabulary word to me, I realized that I had to adjust my teaching on the spot and implement extra modeling examples. I am deeply grateful for that moment, because when I got back home I thought as well as researched ways to effectively teach and handle ELL students. Furthermore, during the lesson, I stopped my original approach and slowed down my instruction. This is a technique I learned

during my time at ISU. A concept is not fully learned until the people do it themselves, that saying is so true! Thankfully I had incorporated multiple visual images and videos to promote each vocabulary word so the students would be able to effectively access their background knowledge and connect one topic to the other. Another technique I will use in the future from this lesson was the importance of hand gestures and facial expressions. I cannot stress enough how well the students understood the concept of a spaceship after I motioned my hands together going up, while opening my eyes wide and making a loud car engine sound.

Every day during the week we were learning Chinese, tasting various foods, and traveling around Taipei. On the weekends, we joined other local college students on trips to different parts of the country. For example, we traveled three hours by train to Beinan Township in the district of Taitung. There, we mingled with aboriginals, traveled through mountains, and ate freshly caught fish. On a separate trip, our group drove to a local harbor and visited three different schools to see how they function. Experiences like these allowed me to realize the vast contrast of people in our world. All the trips we took prepared me to deal with the ever-changing diversity of cultures and people I will interact with in my future classroom. Another common forgotten feature of international studies is how it drastically improves a participant's management and patience. If someone travels to another country there are so many boxes that need to be checked in order to just lift off in the plane. The process of getting to Taiwan and back to Chicago was not as simple as closing my eyes. It took planning, support from others, accepting complications and moving past those problems, and an open-mind for what is to come. All of these and more will be learned if you study abroad and will improve your teaching abilities.

This trip was definitely well worth the amount of time and effort I put in throughout the whole year. I will never forget the lasting memories that I made with the people I met, the excursions I experienced, and of course the food I ate. Of course the main reason I choose Taiwan was to learn about their education system, how it functions, what the government values, the teaching techniques used, and Confucius ideals. I witnessed a variety of educational institutions from elementary schools to college level education classes. From each its own, I gained valuable knowledge that I will take with me as I begin a long and successful career in the education field.