Taylor Bauer

Dr. Miskec

Honors English 150

7 December 2016

To Experience is to Learn

Every career has its challenges and areas of study that must be mastered before one can enter the field. For pre-service teachers, experience and mental flexibility are key. While regular behavior management classes strive to develop some open-mindedness through the introduction of unique problem solving strategies and regular classroom exercises, the average classroom is often not diverse enough to prepare pre-service teachers for the challenges that will be found in their future classrooms. In order to create a truly flexible mindset that will assist future teachers in creating and maintaining an effective learning environment, students should be exposed to a variety of techniques and situations from which they may draw expertise later. Of all the possible ways to expose students to a wide variety of techniques, visiting China to critically examine their world renowned education system will offer the most inclusive experience.

Unlike the United States’ educational system, the Chinese do not consider growing classroom size an issue. In Chinese classrooms, the average “number of students per class reaches the 50 students mark,” with the largest capped at seventy, while American teachers typically have just twenty to twenty-five students to manage ("How Does Class Size Vary Around the World?” 2). Yet, their students consistently perform just as well or better than their American counterparts. These findings lead to the conclusion that teachers in China must be able to maintain order within their enormous classrooms so that learning can take place without behavioral issues which prevent many classrooms within the United States from exceeding forty students in primary and secondary education. Although the two nationalities have varying results, the same behavioral theories can be applied to both in order to explain certain phenomenon. By observing Chinese students in action, students in Behavior Management 305 can better understand the multitude of ways these theories can play out in a real classroom situation making the “strategies for developing positive behavior intervention plans and supports from behavioral, cognitive, ecological, psychoeducational, and psychodynamic theories” studied in the classroom available for practical use in the students’ future careers (Longwood 327). Students can also take this opportunity to note techniques that Chinese teachers use to maintain order in their classrooms that may differ from those used in the United States providing the foundation for larger class sizes.

Within China’s educational system, there are many different types of schools which children may attend. They include: special education, vocational, public, private and religiously affiliated. Each school is tailored to address students’ needs in a specialized way. The Special Schools are a rather recent addition to the landscape of Chinese education. They were created to address the growing needs of students with disabilities whose needs were not adequately accommodated in the normal Chinese classroom. In these schools students can witness how differences in student body composition, class size, and differentiated teaching methods affect how educators manage their classrooms. Vocational schools are also a popular choice for special needs learners who may have trouble acquiring work in the traditional academically competitive sector of the workforce. These schools will emphasize how differences in content affect the practical application of behavioral management. Students should also keep in mind that “while the prevalence of people with disabilities appears to be lower in China than other countries, this may be due to the fact that china still does not recognize all of the categories of disability that other countries do,” so even in non-inclusive public schools, there are likely to be individuals who would qualify for special education in the United States (Kritzer 59). Public schools are generally less competitive than private ones, but also have to contend with large volumes of students in an organized way to prevent chaos. Most religiously affiliated schools are private schools started by various denominations of Christian missionaries and therefore have greater influences in style from western cultures than similar native based institutions. These schools will provide further incite as to how Chinese history and religion affect the educational process and furthermore how they influence the use of behavior management techniques. This wide variety in school type will allow students the luxury of observing different styles of behavioral management which evolve from the differences within the overall operations of the facility.

By observing an abundance of different techniques and the various contexts in which they are used students can begin to critically examine their own techniques. This process will also begin to free themselves of the stigma of “superiority” where students believe their “culture is superior to other cultures” simply because it is theirs through the acknowledgement of similarities and differences between them (Bennet 1). In this case, culture also extends to cover teaching methods and practices that may differ between the United States and China. Through observation, these students can come to their own conclusion as to which methods best suit the needs of their classrooms from an objective point of view because they have thought critically developing the mental flexibility needed to recognize their biases and disregard them. Students will no longer be restricted to their own narrow concept of the world. Exposure to such a plethora of sources will provide students many different ways to examine and solve different problems that may arise in the future because they attack the issue from the multitude of views they have been exposed to.

Many students will likely be surprised by the religious views that have played into the creation and continuous evolution of the Chinese educational system. Despite the homogenous nature of China’s population, many different religions are prevalent throughout the country. The religion of Confucianism was one of the first to speak on the need for special education stating that people should “treat others’ children like their own… handicapped and sick should also be supported” which in today’s society includes an education (Pang and Richey 3). Many of the private religiously affiliated schools were the first to offer a comprehensive education to students with special needs. The Buddhists also encouraged all children to receive an education indiscriminately. These beliefs have also perforated the public educational system in both the classrooms and the teachers themselves. When surveyed on how different educators manage the stress from behavior management “teachers in China reported greater usage of prayer and wishful thinking than did the teachers … sampled in Australia and Israel” which indicates that religion would also play a larger role in the classroom as a whole (Romi et al. 224). By exploring the many religions present in China, students can come to an understanding of how religious values and beliefs factor into various aspects of classroom management. In the United States, separation of church and state is a huge tenant of public education; however, students and faculty alike have religious beliefs. The ability to understand and respect differences that arise from these affiliations will no doubt create a more inviting learning experience. Pre-service teachers can also use their knowledge of religions to aid them in selecting behavioral management methods that will most cohesively blend with students’ preconceived notions of right and wrong derived from religious values which can lend the classroom rules more power than the teacher’s word alone.

Similarly, the history of a country shapes its educational system and current status as a whole. The Chinese were often attacked by various outside groups, so much so that they built a wall to defend themselves. Visiting the Great Wall of China will provide students with insight into the traditions and values of Chinese culture such as independence, loyalty, and honor. Students can then see how different behaviors and methods of management might best fit into this preconceived context built upon centuries of history. This same context applies to other people groups as well. Through the experience of learning Chinese history, students will begin opening their minds to the reality that other people and places have different sociocultural beliefs than them. This understanding and open-mindedness can illuminate why individuals act certain ways and lead to solutions that address the source of the issue which is often influenced by past events. Just as considering one’s religious background while creating rules for the classroom is not intuitive, yet highly effective, looking to history in order to solve a current problem is not obvious. This kind of thinking encourages the development of mental flexibility that will assist in solving future problems.

A unique quality acquired by studying abroad that is not gained through regular classroom instruction is patience. This virtue is extremely important to those who wish to teach as learning is often a frustrating process especially when one considers how everyone learns in different ways. While professors could attempt to recreate this situation in a regular classroom, an activity designed to cause frustration is likely to be contrived and trivial at best. However, students in China will have the chance to authentically experience the other side of the situation as disoriented foreigners in a place where they do not speak the language and are fairly unfamiliar with even the simplest social customs such as how one should slurp soup as a sign of gratitude. While trying to communicate, students can experience the patience or lack thereof shown to them by natives. Once the students become teachers, they can draw on that experience and remember how frustrating it was to be unable to share their ideas and thoughts with others. Then, they can make the conscious decision to be as or more patience with their own students as they are pushed to succeed. Students that study abroad have consistently shown “a strong increase in open-mindedness [and] decrease in stereotyping and ethnocentrism” when compared to the traditional classroom (Tomlinson 35). This process takes a very selfless attitude which is not easily achieved given our predisposition to egocentrism; however, students that study abroad will not have to imagine what it would be like to walk in the shoes of their future students. They will already know what it feels like creating a high level of empathy and have the experiential wisdom to apply that empathy to their classroom in a behaviorally constructive way.

While behavior management could be taught in the traditional classroom through the study of theories, experiencing the application of knowledge in a practical way can only help students as they prepare to teach. Learning within the context of another culture is even better. Exploring a culture other than students own will broaden their view of the world and prepare them to address the inevitable differences in the backgrounds of their future students. As future teachers in the United States, pre-service teachers studying at Longwood University should strive to be prepared to teach students from all kinds of backgrounds including religion, family history, and learning style which a study abroad to China will best fulfill by exposing them to a plethora of variety in and outside of their school system. Through the experience students will not only grow as people, and intellectuals, but also be prepared for their future careers.

Works Cited

Bennett, Milton J. “Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.” *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Ed. R.M. Paige. 2nd edition. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993. 21-71.

"How Does Class Size Vary Around the World?" *Education Indicators in Focus* 9 (2012): n. pag. Web. 19 Nov. 2016.

Kritzer, Jeffrery B., Ph.D. "Special Education in China." *Eastern Education Journal* Spring 2011 40.1 (2011): 57-63.

Lonwood University. *2016-17 Undergraduate Course Catalogue*. Web. 2015.

Pang, Y. and Richey, D. (2006). The development of special education in China. *International* *Journal of Special Education*, 21(1), 77-85.

Romi, Shlomo, Ramon Lewis, and Joel Roache. "Classroom management and teachers’ coping strategies: Inside classrooms in Australia, China and Israel." *Prospects* 43.2 (2013): 215-231.

Thomlison, T. Dean. "Effects of a Study-Abroad Program on University Students: Toward a Predictive Theory of Intercultural Contact." (1991).