Katie Brandon

Dr. Miskec

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Young Adult Culture in New Zealand

Longwood University has one of the strongest Children’s Literature minor programs in the state of Virginia. As a part of the minor program students are required to take a few extra classes that enhance their knowledge of children’s literature and culture. While the Children’s Literature minor offered at Longwood University is already a very strong minor program, studying abroad with our faculty further benefits our students. Not only is New Zealand is the prime place to study because of their wealth of Young Adult Culture in their society, study abroad allows students to practice their skills in new situations, promotes the idea that Longwood Students are “Citizen Leaders,” and allows students to step outside of their comfort zone, which lets them grow personally.

The Children’s Literature minor program is led by three dedicated Longwood professors: “Dr. Rhonda Brock-Servais, Dr. Christopher McGee, and Dr. Jennifer Miskec” (Faculty & Staff). This program is like no other, and can only be participated in at Longwood because the classes are not able to be transferred in from community college or any other school because of the prestige the Longwood staff has to offer the students enrolled in the minor program. As a part of the program students are required to take an extra 18 credit hours to complete the required courses. These courses include; “English 209: Introduction to Literary Analysis, English 380: Children’s Literature, English 381: Literature for Young Adults, English 383: History of Literature for Young Readers, English 384: Diversity in Literature for Young Readers,” as well as one elective. This study abroad is focused around the modified English 446: Young Adult Culture course, which is best, served as a short-term study abroad with one of Longwood’s Children’s Literature Faculty members (Children’s Literature Minor). These courses benefit students because they are taught about all ages of children’s literature. Traveling abroad allows them to experience things they are studying in a classroom-setting take on a life of its own, and it enlightens them to cultures that are different than the one they grew up in. Allowing them to step outside of their comfort zone solidifies the experience in their mind.

While abroad students will be put in situations that might make them feel uncomfortable. Study abroad theory explains the different stages students will go through and why it happens. Dr. Milton J. Bennet, Director and CEO at the Intercultural Development Research Institute stated that, “Cross- cultural contact usually has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide… - it is self- destructive. Yet to in seeking a different way, we inherit no model from history to guide us” (Bennet 21). While long-term study abroad has been the preferred method in order to fully experience immersion that was mostly because it previously had been the most studied method. Short- term study abroad programs are starting to gain credibility and popularity among students and faculty alike. These programs are cheaper and take less time out of a student’s program at school or out of the students’ and faculty’s break. According to Penelope Caldwell Clinical Assistant Professor at Oregon Health and Science University, and Mary Anne Purtzer Associate Professor, Master Nurse Educator, and Nurse Leader program director at The University of Wyoming, “Four themes emerged revealing evidence of longterm learning” (579). These themes were, “Embracing Other, Gaining Cultural Competencies, and Experiencing an Ethnocentric Shift,” and “Negotiating Ethical Dilemmas.” (Caldwell and Purtzer 579-580). These themes are all ways of experiencing long-term learning, which this article says is the major goal of study abroad. This is completely true, and the themes really back up how this effects students for their lives. Embracing others is to take in the “culture shock” and keep going (Caldwell and Purtzer 580). This is essential to everyday life because often students will be put in unfamiliar situations, and expected to stay calm and do their job. Gaining Cultural Competencies is realizing the differences between another culture and the students’ own. One student remarked while abroad, “It made me appreciate all of the luxuries and privileges I have in the United States. On the flip side, I also felt ashamed of some of my guilty pleasures” (Caldwell and Purtzer 580). Experiencing an Ethnocentric Shift is taking what the students have experienced while abroad, and relating it to their own life. This is the portion that will remain with them after they have left the country. Negotiating Ethical Dilemmas is part of the mental review students should go through. This is a time for them to do self-reflection and ask themselves, “did I cause more harm than good?” (Caldwell and Purtzer 581). This is a critical part of the thought process because it allows the student to completely evaluate the situation and their impact on their time in that place. While students are studying abroad they will feel these same themes. The idea is to force them outside of their comfort zone and get them to interact with local people as much as possible.

One way students will be through the first activity they will take part in. While in New Zealand one of the activities on the agenda is visiting a High School and a college to speak with the students about their life as well as their literature. The Students will be visiting Wellington University’s Kelburn Campus. While there they will be meeting with a Creative Writing class, an English Literature class, and a Film class to discuss the similarities and differences between the societies. In the Film class the students will be comparing American film to current, popular New Zealand films. This activity will be part of students understanding the differences in this culture. It is the part of the trip where they will “gain cultural competencies” (Caldwell and Purtzer 580). These differences might seem trivial, but movies and literature are a major part of American culture, and New Zealand culture. This may show why the two countries run in different ways, as well as why they have those differences. It probably stems from what kinds of literature and movies are prevalent to their young adults. Our students will also be visiting Wellington High School while they are in New Zealand. They will speak with an older English class to talk about what they are doing in their free time, what movies they are seeing, and what books they have read that they would consider to be classics, or that every student reads before they graduate. This is just another opportunity for the students to get in contact with people from New Zealand. This activity will open discussion about why New Zealand’s literature is the way it is. This discussion will be based around an article that will be read in class before the students depart for the trip. The article is based on the divergence from English culture in order to show independence, “New Zealand has been increasingly concerned to establish a separate national identity and to define ways in which New Zealanders differ from the English” (Acheson 160). It is shown through a mystery writer, which is not the desired method as is discussed in the article.

The last day on the trip will be a “free” day. This is a day for students to go and reach out to locals on their own after they have started to learn the immediate area around the hostel. It also allows them to do anything they saw while they were walking around doing all of the other activities, and it is a day for them to shop around for the perfect book to do their final paper on. This day may seem insignificant, but this is the day for them to truly live like a young adult in New Zealand, and experience what a normal day off would feel like for them. They should be following the young people to see what they are doing, where they are shopping, and what they are buying. They should try their best to experience both the local and the tourist point of view. This activity is imperative to the students’ understanding of the culture, and their ability to go beyond what they are comfortable with in order to experience new and exciting journeys, and to gain the knowledge needed to gain from the study abroad program.

While the students are in New Zealand they will be required to complete a few tasks as well as some work when they return. While they are in New Zealand they will be responsible for posting a 200 word journal at the end of each day to the group Facebook page that will be set up for the members on the trip. This journal will include their experiences for the day, and a picture of something special they witnessed or something they found particularly interesting and an explanation for the picture. At some point before the end of the trip the students will be required to purchase a New Zealand young adult novel, which they will have to read and write a paper on as their final exam. The paper should connect the book to things the students have seen and experienced while abroad in New Zealand. The last project the students will be responsible for while and after they have gone abroad will be a photo album or scrapbook. They are to be taking pictures of everything that catches their eye and these photos are to be put in a photo album or scrapbook with each photo captioned. This will solidify the trip in their minds and allow them to easily reflect on their journey and the things they learned and experienced while they were there.

When the Students arrive back to Farmville, Virginia, they will see it in a completely new way. The traffic will look different, the Wal- Mart will seem so much more convenient, and the classes will be more meaningful because of the experiences these students will have had in classrooms on the other side of the world. These students will hopefully have gone through the four stages aforementioned: “Embracing Other, Gaining Cultural Competencies, and Experiencing an Ethnocentric Shift” and,” Negotiating Ethical Dilemmas” (Caldwell 579-580). Students will have learned how to and successfully realized their differences between other societies, felt compassion for benefits they have in their culture, had the humanity to imagine themselves in another man’s shoes, and contemplated whether or not that society would benefit from their presence in it. This experience will be valuable for students not only in the classroom, but will offer valuable skills and insight in the workplace later in their life, and will help them to get the jobs they want and deserve.

The Children’s Literature minor program is already excelling beyond any other in the state, but it has the potential to affect so many more people in so many more ways than it currently does. A short- term study abroad program in Wellington, New Zealand would allow the program to extend its’ reach far beyond the Longwood University campus through the dedicated students and faculty at Longwood. Adding study abroad to the students’ resume would make them much more marketable and thus improve the students’ marketability as well as the reputation of the Children’s Literature minor program. According to the Longwood Study Abroad office, “Studying abroad can help you set yourself apart as a student, job candidate, and graduate school applicant, too. While it’s an extraordinary experience to have in your present, it’s also a good investment in your future” (Study). This program would truly promote the idea that Longwood Students are “Citizen Leaders” who are not only capable, but also proficient at leaving their comfort zone: Longwood, and being upstanding examples of a true Longwood Lancer.

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