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## Chapter 4

# Traveling a Thousand Miles: The Role of Education Diplomacy through Study Abroad in Early Childhood Programs

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Note: Section II includes Chapters 4-14. These chapters use a standardized template to discuss the details of their respective study abroad programs and reference Deardorff's (2012) framework for intercultural competencies. The use of this template and the intercultural competencies framework are described in the Section II introduction. All courses in this section (except for Chapter 6) were taught through Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), a mid-sized state school located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee (USA).

The short-term study abroad course *Administering Early Childhood Programs* (ECE 4360) is conducted in Singapore during the summer academic term. From 2013-2018, a total of 23 students have participated in the four short-term study abroad programs. A unique aspect of this course is its focus on the administrative, professional, and ethical responsibilities of the educator in early childhood settings in a vibrant international environment. The course emphasizes the development of 21st century skills including important global competency skills that are vital in developing early childhood educators.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The growing interest in study abroad programs is a promising development for those who champion education diplomacy. Childhood Education International defines education diplomacy as using “the skills of diplomacy to promote effective cooperation across sectors and among diverse actors to solve education challenges and advance transformational agendas for education” (CE International, n.d.). Teachers who are education diplomats will form strategic partnerships with each other as well as policymakers to support 21st-century skills and global citizenship. To effectively advocate for these practices, a teacher must demonstrate intercultural awareness and appreciation; additionally, they must have a strong knowledge of current professional practices to articulate a vision for curricular progress.

ECE 3460’s curriculum is influenced by widely recognized theoretical frameworks. The two theoretical frameworks used are the Global Citizenship Scale developed by Morais and Ogden (2011) and the Experiential Learning Theory developed by Kolb (2015). Global citizenship is a broad concept that encompasses many aspects that one might consider to be synonymous with the term “cosmopolitan”: an openness toward other cultures and an awareness of the concerns of others around the world. For the global citizen, this respect for the needs of others can promote “understanding complex issues from multiple vantage points, recognizing sources of global independence... and looking beyond distinctions, at least in one’s mind, between insiders and outsiders” (Schattle, 2009, pp. 10-11). To be a global citizen “involves both inward (awareness and commitment) and outward (action) dimensions” (Hanson, 2010, p. 76), and is therefore a complicated concept to impart in a university course. Study abroad programs show great promise in developing global citizenship characteristics among university students

(Hanson, 2010; Morais & Ogden, 2011). The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) developed by Kolb (2015) emphasizes the continual and often circular process the learner takes as they observe, encounter, and undergo circumstances. Kolb (2015) writes that “Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience.” This manner of learning, therefore, stresses modifying ideas over the memorization of facts or concepts. This approach to learning seemed to be a perfect fit for the experience-rich opportunity of a study abroad course such as ECE 4360.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

*Administering Early Childhood Programs* is offered in two formats: the traditional on-campus offering and a study abroad version. The course examines diverse early care and educational settings and their influence on child development with an emphasis on program planning and administration in early childhood settings. The purpose of this course is to examine a variety of early childhood settings and public preschool issues. An understanding of state regulations and national standards is required to assist teacher candidates in planning, administering, and teaching in an early childhood program that will enhance the learning process of all involved.

The course focuses on the administrative, professional, and ethical responsibilities of the educator within early childhood settings. The traditional on-campus class is conducted every semester during the academic year on the university campus. A study abroad version was offered during select summer semesters to create an opportunity for students to experience a different culture and diverse setting for their learning.

For the study abroad program, students examined early childhood settings and public preschool issues in a global setting. *Administering Early Childhood Programs* (Study Abroad - Singapore) provided an understanding of the state regulations, standards, and overall framework that impact early care and education in Singapore. It also examined the various preschool settings in Singapore and the importance of being a community of learners in a professional organization. The text used for this course is *Planning and Administering Early Childhood Programs* by Freeman et. al. (2017).

Through journals, discussions, observations, question prompts, and group presentations, students bridged their understanding regarding the legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities of an educator. Knowledge gained in this study abroad program was linked to the Tennessee Star Quality Child Care Program and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation of programs for young children, as students compared the different state regulations, preschools, and professional communities that impact the growth and development of a young child.

## Course Objectives

- Formulate a working knowledge of the operation of a childcare facility or public preschool classroom.
- Develop an understanding of current issues and trends in early care and education programs including advocacy.
- Develop an understanding of the principles of professionalism regarding high-quality teachers, professional development, and learning communities.

- Examine the criteria and standards required of early childhood facilities and public preschools.
- Compare diverse settings and types of childcare.
- Design a childcare classroom that illustrates a holistic, diverse, and developmentally appropriate philosophy and meets all standards, regulations, and the needs of all students.
- Summarize and demonstrate professional ethics in early childhood education.
- Expand his/her understanding of the needs and strengths of children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Build a catalyst of coherence in ensuring quality assurance, accountability, and student and leadership achievement.

## Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- a. Identify qualities of an excellent early childhood program regarding the curriculum, environment, quality of teachers, and partnership with parents and community.
- b. Compare and contrast diverse settings and types of preschool programs.
- c. Examine the criteria and standards of Singapore preschool accreditation standards and Tennessee Star Quality Child Care Program and NAEYC accreditation program for young children.
- d. Build partnerships with professional organizations both locally and globally in becoming a collaborative educator in the field.

- e. Be aware of the impact of diversity and cultural makeup of the family and community that shape the learning and development of a child.
- f. Understand developmentally and culturally appropriate practices and approaches to teaching and learning both locally and globally.
- g. Become a reflective global professional through observation, documentation, discussion, and partnership.

## Study Abroad Course Information

*Administering Early Childhood Programs* (ECE 4360) is a study abroad course available from Middle Tennessee State University and conducted in Singapore during the summer academic term. Since 2013, a total of four short-term study abroad programs have been completed. The number of students enrolled each summer has historically been very small, from a low of four students in 2013 to a high of eight students in 2016. In all, a total of N=23 students have participated in this program [2013 (N=4); 2014 (N=4); 2016 (N=8); 2018 (N=7)]. Although the course was conducted annually in 2013 and 2014, the initial slow enrollment rate prompted the faculty leader to subsequently move the course to a biennial offering in order to allow for more marketing and promotion of the program. As a result of this change, positive enrollment gains were realized with the 2016 program enrollment increasing to eight. With the 2016 course offering, a minimum of eight students was required for the class to be made available. The positive feedback and response from the students in the 2013 and 2014 cohorts generated excitement and interest for future course offerings that resulted in 2016 enrollment gains. Although the 2018 course offering was also supported by a strong student enrollment, the

unfortunate world events of 2020 (including the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions in Singapore) forced the program to halt for a few years.

## **Teacher Licensure Standards**

The course also meets the following teacher licensure standards for PreK-3 (NAEYC, 2019):

Standard 1: Child Development and Learning in Context (p. 12)

Standard 2: Family-Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections (p. 12)

Standard 3: Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment (p. 12)

Standard 4: Developmentally, Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices (p. 13)

Standard 6: Professionalism as an Early Childhood (p. 13)

## **COURSE HISTORY**

The faculty leader for this course is a native citizen of Singapore. When she first joined Middle Tennessee State University in 2012, she realized that many people on campus were not familiar with Singapore, as she was often mistaken as a citizen of China. In addition, some students have never ventured or traveled out of Tennessee; many do not even own a passport. The faculty leader felt a need to educate and share knowledge about this as well as the culture of Singapore. Because of this, she approached the Vice Provost for International Affairs in 2012 for assistance in conducting a study abroad course in Singapore. As there were no students from the College of

Education who had participated in prior education abroad programs, the Vice Provost was extremely supportive to make this new Singapore program happen. In addition, consultation with the faculty leader's team of early childhood faculty was crucial in selecting the appropriate course to meet the objectives and licensure requirements. Thus, the study abroad version of the course *Administering Early Childhood Programs* was developed in 2012 and implemented the following summer in 2013.

As a native citizen of Singapore with prior professional connections in the early childhood setting, the faculty leader worked closely with the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) in planning for the study abroad course. Although the number enrolled in the first study abroad trip to Singapore was below the minimum number required to start a class, the faculty leader proceeded to lead the group without summer pay (with the support of the Vice Provost). Cost was the main barrier for education students to enroll in the study abroad course. The faculty leader actively helped to seek funding and support to make it possible for more education students to study abroad. In 2016, an additional scholarship was provided by the Dean of the College of Education, and an Education Abroad scholarship was started up by the faculty leader and the Dean.

## **COURSE LOGISTICS**

*Administering Early Childhood Programs* (ECE 4360) is a 3-credit hour upper-division course for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree. This is a major-required course with the prerequisite that students must have been admitted to the teacher education program. Criteria for admission to the teacher education program is rigorous and requires: 45 semester hours of course work, an overall grade point average of 2.75, a background check, three



favorable faculty interviews, and successfully passing the Praxis Core Exam (a test for teacher candidates). For the study abroad version of ECE 4360, students who have not been admitted to the teacher education program are allowed to apply with prerequisite permission granted by the faculty leader.

## **PRE-PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

Several pre-program meetings were scheduled before the trip. The purpose of these meetings was for the students to learn about each other, build a community, and develop a better understanding of the country they would be visiting. As many of the education students had never previously traveled outside of the United States, traveling thousands of miles away for their first international trip was a big adventure. Five pre-program activities were developed to help the students prepare and acclimate to the new country: 1. Knowledge of the country, 2. Building a community, 3. Financial literacy and fundraising, 4. Knowledge of the course, and 5. Pre-departure questionnaire.

### **1. Knowledge of the Country**

This activity utilized a Singapore trivia game. The trivia questions were selected to help students learn aspects of the culture and demographics of Singapore—such as language, mode of transportation, living accommodations, and currency—before arrival. The trivia questions also helped the faculty to pre-assess students for their prior knowledge before departure.

## 2. Building a Community

This activity utilized a game called Buddy Contract. For this game, students were asked to find a partner with whom to share their likes, dislikes, and personal rituals. The activity also stressed cultural norms as students were asked to write down some of the dos and don'ts in Singapore, teaching them about some acceptable and unacceptable practices. Buddies were made accountable for each other during their study abroad in Singapore, signing a contract stipulating this responsibility before departure. Students were required to place their buddy contracts in a visible spot in their room upon arrival. Each buddy contract differed according to their discussion. In the process of this activity, students developed self-awareness and acceptance of different cultural perspectives.

Below is a sample of the buddy contract:

### **Dos**

- Check in with your buddy
- Stay with the group
- Be respectful of the culture
- Dress professionally and appropriate

### **Don'ts**

- Drink alcohol
- Chew gum
- Go out alone
- Misbehave or be irresponsible

### **3. Financial Literacy and Fundraising**

Because only a limited number of scholarships were available and cost was a major concern for most of the education students, it was important to discuss fundraising ideas prior to departure. Financial literacy, strategies for saving for the study abroad program, and daily expected expenditures were discussed.

### **4. Knowledge of the Course**

Students needed to be aware of the course and assignment requirements before leaving for Singapore. Planning for assignment time and reading time was also discussed. In addition to the required textbook, students were advised to print other required readings as if there was no internet access during the trip.

### **5. Pre-departure Questionnaire**

A pre-assessment that consisted of seven questions was developed to understand the students' expectations and knowledge of Singapore before the trip. These questions can be seen in Appendix 4.1.

## **CLASS ACTIVITIES & INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES**

There were several program activities deployed during the time in Singapore; the goal of these activities was to ensure that the syllabus requirements were met and that students were experiencing the culture of a new country. The program itinerary was arranged with seminars, school visitations, class activities or tasks, and excursions to Singapore sites. Thirteen hours were allocated to school visitations. During these school visits, students were assigned

journals/reflections and question prompts to document their expectations, observations, and reflections that promoted the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 2015). Sixteen hours were allocated to in-class activities or seminars. These seminars were assigned alongside an accompanying chapter of the text and often prompted student reflection on the school visitation conducted. These seminars were also held in the dormitory room where the students stayed or in the faculty leader's room. Often during these seminars, students became more self-aware and began to challenge their perceptions of global justice and disparities, as expressed by this student:

“I am also unsure of the fear that seems so blinding in America. The fear of others seems to create a division within our country that cripples or distracts us from pursuing our dreams and visions as individuals, communities, and as a nation. I question the intentions behind the propagation of such fear, especially in our schools.” (Student 1, 2014)

One of the major program activities, “Excursion to Singapore,” was an important part of the study abroad for students to know and experience the country and culture. Many of the places visited were suggested by students during the pre-program session. Since Singapore is a multicultural Asian society, the faculty leader intentionally arranged several excursions that reflected this diversity. The range of experiences helped students gain knowledge of the cultural makeup of the family and community of the local children. These excursions were arranged during the day and night, so students had an opportunity to see the community at different times. Places visited included: a zoo, botanical gardens, a duck tour, the Singapore Flyer, a night

tour, Sentosa, East Coast Park, and cultural sites such as a museum and Chinatown. Most of the excursions were over the weekend since there were no seminars scheduled during that time.

With this arrangement, students could focus on coursework during the week and leisure over the weekend. Grocery shopping and moving around in local transportation were also included in the itinerary. Appendix 4.2 shows a sample itinerary of the study abroad in Singapore.

## **Seminar Discussion**

The seminar discussions took about 16 hours and were held daily except for weekends. The seminars were conducted on the following topics:

- a. Singapore preschool accreditation standards, Tennessee Star Quality Child Care Program, and NAEYC accreditation for young children.
- b. Comparison of preschool/elementary school visitations.
- c. Professional organizations and building partnerships.

The focus was on building content knowledge of Singapore preschool accreditation standards, the Tennessee Star Quality Child Care Program, and NAEYC accreditation for young children. Students were also required to reflect and compare similarities and differences of the school visitations; this activity helped them to learn about different professional organizations, build partnerships, and network. Seminars used an assigned text and a study guide for facilitation and discussion. Case studies incorporating role play and think-pair-share were utilized to generate discussion. Each seminar started with strength-building activities in which each pair of buddies were asked to highlight positive insights; these were followed by questions

and reflections on the school visits and the topic of discussion for the day. These seminars encourage intercultural competencies shown in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1. Intercultural Competencies for Seminar Discussion**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic content</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emerging professionalism</li><li>• Global transfer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Critical thinking and reflection</li></ul>

## School Visitations

School visitations took about 13 hours total and were conducted almost daily except on weekends. The schools visited included public and private schools as well as professional organizations. During the visit, students were introduced to the school's mission, vision, and schedule; this was followed by assigning the students to different rooms for observation. This activity usually took about 2-3 hours per school. The experience of visiting schools helped in building the students' global competence, which is having an open mind while actively seeking to understand the cultural norms and expectations of others and leveraging this knowledge to interact, communicate, and work effectively outside one's environment (Hanson, 2010; Schattle, 2009). Through school visitations, students could bridge the theory of what they discussed during the seminar to actual practices as well as test their preconceived notions of what they thought the schools would look like. As aptly stated by one student at the end of the trip:

“I see the world in a whole new light. I see that places I’ve only dreamed about aren’t that different from America. I’ve found that the typical stereotypes aren’t relevant.”

(Student 2, 2014)

Additional intercultural competencies gained by the students are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2. Intercultural Competencies for School Visitations**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic content</li><li>• Culturally specific knowledge and understanding host culture's traditions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intercultural communications</li><li>• Interpersonal relationship</li><li>• Listen and observe</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emerging professionalism</li></ul>

## Tasks

### *Grocery Shopping and Dining Out*

Grocery shopping and dining out allowed the students to learn about the diversity and cultural makeup of the children and families in Singapore. Although this was not part of the syllabus assignment, students gained the most intercultural competency skills and intercultural perspective through these two activities.

On the first day of arrival, students were taken to a nearby grocery store to purchase needed essential items. With this task, students began to use the local currency, compare prices of items to their cost in the United States, and experience new cultural foods they had never previously seen. Although they had already completed the pre-departure discussion on budgeting, students tended to overspend on the first grocery trip. Students needed to be reminded not to overspend as they were often excited to see all the novel items. Dining out in the new cultural setting of Singapore was another new experience for them. Students needed to problem solve to order from the menu and try new foods. The intercultural competencies gained are shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3. Intercultural Competencies for Grocery Shopping & Eating Out**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Global knowledge</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intercultural communications</li><li>• Interpersonal relationship</li><li>• Decision making</li><li>• Awareness of safety</li><li>• Problem solving</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-discovery</li><li>• Tolerating and engaging ambiguity</li></ul>

### *Transportation*

Singapore is a small island state, and most people either own a car or use public transportation such as buses, cabs, or the subway known as the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT). During the study abroad program, the faculty leader chartered buses to transport the students to school visitations in order to save time. On the way back to the accommodations, students were divided into groups to take a cab back. During excursions, students were taken on buses so that they could experience the daily life of living in Singapore. Navigating the various places and planning the route to arrive at those places was quite an experience for the students and provided them with an authentic intercultural engagement opportunity since most students had never previously taken public transportation in the United States. Often just naming the destination to the cab driver was a challenge as the names of the areas and venues were in the local dialect, and the students had little prior experience with the language. The faculty leader sometimes witnessed the students practicing hard the night before to ensure the correct pronunciation of the road name. One of the students stated:



“Some challenges I encountered on this trip was the language barrier between myself and locals. Sometimes it was hard to understand what they were saying or what I was saying.” (Student 3, 2016)

The intercultural competencies gained for transportation are listed in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4. Intercultural Competencies for Transportation**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intercultural communications</li> <li>• Interpersonal relationship</li> <li>• Planning and navigation</li> <li>• Sociolinguistic competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> </ul>

## POST-PROGRAM AND FUTURE CLASS ACTIVITIES

Post-program activities included a questionnaire as well as video and panel presentations. On the flight back to Tennessee, students were encouraged to complete the post-departure questionnaire consisting of six questions. A week after the students returned, they presented a two-hour panel presentation to invited faculty, students, and family members on the study abroad program at the university. All of the pre-program, program, and post-program activities are presented in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5. Table of Activities for ECE 4360**

Pre-Program Activities	Program Activities	Post-Program Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the country: Singapore trivia</li> <li>• Building a community: Buddy contract</li> <li>• Financial literacy and Fundraising</li> <li>• Knowledge of the course</li> <li>• Pre-departure questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School visitations (13 hours)</li> <li>• In-class activities/ seminars (16 hours)</li> <li>• Excursion to different multicultural and historical sites in Singapore</li> <li>• Grocery shopping</li> <li>• Local transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post- departure questionnaire</li> <li>• Video and panel presentation</li> </ul>

Future class activities need to focus more on disposition and intercultural competencies. Disposition includes professional competencies such as punctuality, dress code, and posture. Often attitudes and dispositions are not graded as it can be difficult to assign a numerical grade to them, but using a triangulation of data points including self, peer, and faculty evaluations could help in assigning an accurate grade. The evaluation could be assigned during the pre-program, during the program, and after the program. A proposed assignment is found in Appendix 4.3. Another possible assignment would be to involve the students in planning an authentic project during the pre-departure meeting that would build on intercultural competencies.

## EVALUATION AND ASSIGNMENTS

Assessment of participant learning is determined through an evaluation of student journals, discussions, observations, reflections and group presentations. At the completion of each study abroad session, students completed their major graded assignment for the course by sharing their new knowledge through a video and panel presentation. This final presentation focused on

the impact of the legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities of an educator as the students compared the state regulations, preschools, and professional communities impacting the growth and development of a young child.

The evaluation of the course included both formative and summative assessments. The daily journal and photo documentation and seminar discussions collected the students' observations and reflections in a formative process that was used for their summative final video and panel presentation. All of these assignments were designed with intercultural competencies in mind as the students must work with other individuals, as a group, to build professional connections. The final project had the highest grade weight, as the students demonstrated their competencies by sharing what they learned with an audience who most likely had never been to Singapore. The ability to consider the audience's perspective in this manner was an important development in their professional life as an educator. The evaluation and assignment criteria are listed in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6. Evaluation Breakdown**

Learning Activity	Points [% of Grade]	Type of Assessment
Journal/Photo documentation (8 journals)	80 [24%]	Formative
Seminar discussion	60 [18%]	Formative
Interview	30 [9%]	Summative
Video and panel presentation	160 [49%]	Summative
TOTAL Points Possible	330	

## Daily Journal/Photo Reflection and Documentation

Students were required to compile a daily journal/photo reflection and documentation describing their expectations of the day, observations, reflections, and one learning point each day (see Appendix 4.4 for assignment description and grading criteria). The photograph taken should support the daily journal content. Specific questions were written to guide the students in their reflections. This was an individual assignment and showcased the self-awareness and growth of the student as the journal progressed from the first entry to the last. One student stated in her journal entry:

“I was very pleasantly surprised by the state of the center and what materials they did have... It is a government-based program... I honestly thought that we would be going to a center where they had little to nothing in the center. I did not realize how much the government provided in trying to make sure that their children get the best education regardless of what their parents make. This is how it should be; we should give each student an equal chance to succeed in life.” (Student 4, 2018)

Intercultural competencies gained for the daily journal/photo reflection is listed in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7. Intercultural Competencies for Daily Journal/ Photo Reflection and Documentation**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic content</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intercultural communications</li><li>• Interpersonal relationship</li><li>• Global transfer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emerging professionalism</li><li>• Self-discovery</li></ul>

## Final Group Project: Video and Panel Presentation

The final assignment was group-based and provided opportunities for participants to build a professional learning community as they engaged with the community through their presentations (see Appendix 4.5 for assignment description and grading criteria). In addition, students were required to compile background information on Singapore consisting of its history, geography, demographic makeup, infrastructure, and culture with an emphasis on how these factors impact early childhood education in Singapore. This information was shared during the presentation day as an introduction to the country of Singapore. Students were also required to compile the guest list consisting of family, friends, and faculty and generate an invitation note and a thank you note after the presentation. This assignment helped in preparing the students to become global ambassadors for Singapore in addition to the cultural competencies gained as shown in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8. Intercultural Competencies for Final Group Project**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic content</li><li>• Global knowledge</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intercultural communications</li><li>• Interpersonal relationship</li><li>• Global interconnectedness</li><li>• Global competence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emerging professionalism</li></ul>

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

To understand the collective experience of the study abroad participants, a pre- and post-departure questionnaire was collected. The faculty leader used IRB-approved consent procedures utilizing a convenience sample of 19 students who enrolled in the summer study abroad program in the university's College of Education. Data were collected from three separate years (2014, 2016, and 2018), excluding the first year 2013, where students stayed in Singapore for a duration of 13 days during each study abroad. Of these 19 students consenting to the study, four students were in the 2014 cohort, eight students were in the 2016 cohort, and seven students were in the 2018 cohort. All participants were females in their junior and/or senior year of college. Almost all the students were enrolled in the university's Early Childhood program, with only two participants enrolled in the Child Development and Family Studies program. As for the ethnicity of the participants, there were 14 Caucasians, four African Americans, and one Hispanic student. Of the 19 participants, three were considered non-traditional students, and one was born outside of the United States. Data collected for this study consisted of students' pre- and post-surveys, as well as their completed journals.

From the data, the greatest gains were in the participants' personal and professional growth from the study abroad experiences. Participants in this study abroad learned to build partnerships with schools and professionals from a different culture, thus broadening their perspective and equipping them to later share this information with others in their home country who did not have the opportunity to study abroad in Singapore. The study abroad program helped in building the participants' competencies in both professionalism and as an early childhood educator; it also developed the participants' global citizenship skills of global

competency, social responsibility, and global civic engagement. Besides achieving the course goal of improving student knowledge regarding cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship, the study abroad experience boosted the individual students' skill mastery towards professionalism in the early childhood education profession. Some of the students' reflections are included below. Following each quote, the program year and the intercultural competencies gained by the students are listed.

- “The biggest takeaway from this school [is] the focus on dispositions and the idea of embracing multi-racial members of the community. This would be the primary focus of a program I implemented.” (*Student 5, 2014, understanding the value of cultural diversity*)
- “This trip...has helped shape and solidify beliefs and aspects within my personal teaching philosophy that I was unaware of. This self-awareness will help me to know who I am as a teacher instead of trying to emulate teachers I've seen. This trip is an unexpected gift along my path in becoming a teacher (and) lifelong learner.” (*Student 6, 2014, cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment*)

## CAVEATS AND REFLECTIONS

The major strength of this program was taking the students out of their home country to a brand-new culture and allowing them to immerse themselves in that country while achieving the goals set for the course. Some of the students had never previously traveled out of Tennessee and taking this study abroad program was therefore a big step and challenge for them. Their growth and self-discovery were the major highlights of this course as stated by one student:

“I loved this trip so much... I learned languages and more about myself. Through the trip I learned that I’m capable of anything I set my mind to. I am willing to try almost anything.” (Student 7, 2014)

The major challenge for this program was to meet the minimum class enrollment of eight students, as cost was a major difficulty for the students. Many education students work several jobs to pay for their regular tuition and housing, so paying additional money to enroll in the study abroad course could be difficult. While the pre-departure course on financial literacy was also helpful in teaching students how to save for the trip, additional scholarships and funding would help with this challenge in the future.

Future offerings of the study abroad course must be intentional in focusing on intercultural competencies in order to best prepare our students to be emerging professionals in their future careers. One of the posts shared by a student summarizes the importance of this course to student self-development and intercultural understanding:

“My goals include expanding my educational perspectives, becoming more aware of cultural diversity by being immersed in a different culture and making professional connections (and) networks that will serve me as a teacher candidate, hopefully lasting a lifetime.” (Student 8, 2014)

According to the 2020-2021 MTSU International Affairs annual impact report, the College of Education has one of the lowest rates of student participation in study abroad programs at MTSU, with only 45 Education students participating as compared to 641 students participating from Liberal Arts majors (MTSU Impact Report, 2022, p. 6). Since the faculty leader brought the first study abroad group to Singapore in 2013, there has been a growing interest among other



faculty who are interested in starting additional study abroad programs within the College of Education. Study abroad also aligns with the MTSU Quest for Student Success 2025 “Strategic Path 1- enhance the quality of the academic experience” by helping faculty build creative curricula extensively embedded with high-impact learning practices to assist students’ achievement (MTSU, n.d.).

The goal of this chapter is to encourage other faculty to take the leap of traveling thousands of miles in conducting faculty-led, short-term study abroad programs. It aligns with many of the institutions’ goals while also enabling students to gain global experience and understand a new perspective from beyond the classroom doors.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 4.1

### Pre-departure questionnaire

1. Why did you choose to study abroad for ECE 4360?
2. What are your goals/objectives for this study abroad?
3. What are some possible challenges you might encounter on this program?
4. How do you plan to overcome it?
5. What possible outcome do you think this study abroad might impact upon your college degree and future career?
6. What do you know about Singapore and the culture?
7. How will you share your knowledge with others when you get back to Tennessee?  
(Only for 2016 & 2018 cohort)
8. Any other comments?

### Post-departure questionnaire

1. What is your major highlight of this program?
2. Were your goals/objectives of the program met?
3. Reflect on some challenges you encounter in this program, how did you overcome it?
4. How do you think this study abroad might impact your college and future career?
5. What is your knowledge of Singapore and its culture now?
6. What is something you have learnt as a result of this study abroad to Singapore?
7. How and what will you share with others when you get back to Tennessee? (Only for 2016 & 2018 cohort)
8. Any other comments?

## Appendix 4.2

**Sample Itinerary for ECE 4360 Administering Early Childhood Programs in Singapore**

Days	Itinerary	Instructional Hours
Day 1	Depart from Nashville Airport	
Day 2	On flight	
Day 3	Arrive in Singapore Check into Praisehaven Retreat Centre School visit 1 (12 pm – 3 pm) *Grocery Shopping SEMINAR 1: Overview of Early Childhood Education Program Readings: Chapter 1 (Freeman et al., 2013)	3 hours 2 hours
Day 4	School visit 2 (9 am - 12 pm) Excursion: Jurong Bird Park	3 hours
Day 5	SEMINAR 2: Vision, Mission and Program Evaluation Readings: Chapter 2 (Freeman et al., 2013) Excursion: Singapore Zoological Garden	2 hours
Day 6	Visit to local church (11 am) Excursion: Chinatown	
Day 7	School visit 3 (10am-12 pm) Excursion: Singapore Botanical Garden (9 am – 12 pm) Seminar 3: Being a Professional Readings: Chapter 12 & 13 (Freeman et al., 2013)	2 hours 2 hours
Day 8	School visit 4 (9 am - 12 pm) Seminar 4: Accreditation and Policy Readings: Chapters 3 & 4 (Freeman et al., 2013) Excursion: Singapore Night Tour	3 hours 2 hours

Days	Itinerary	Instructional Hours
Day 9	School visit 5 (10 am- 12 pm) Excursion: National Museum of Singapore Seminar 5: Operationalizing the Early Childhood Program Readings: Chapters 4,5,6,7 (Freeman et al., 2013)	2 hours  2 hours
Day 10	School visit 6 (9 am – 12 pm) Seminar 6: Planning the Program Readings: Chapters 9 & 10 (Freeman et al., 2013)	3 hours 2 hours
Day 11	Seminar 7: Assessment Readings: Chapter 11 (Freeman et al., 2013) Excursion: Duck Tour Excursion: Singapore Flyer	2 hours
Day 12	Excursion: Sentosa Sea Aquarium Excursion: Sentosa Beach	
Day 13	Depart for Nashville HOME SWEET HOME	
Day 15	Video and panel presentation on 10 am – 12pm @ Walker Library –LT&ITC (3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor)	2 hours

## Appendix 4.3

### Disposition and buddy contract

Students are required to score at least a proficient score according to the performance levels of unsatisfactory, developing, proficient and exemplary for their disposition in all the areas including professional competencies, attitudes, and disposition. In addition, they need to ensure they abide by the buddy contract signed before course departure. The following will be expected during this course:

Attendance, Professionalism, Participation, Collaboration, Dissemination

- a. Attend all pre-trip meetings and attend each field experience and all seminars.
- b. Conduct yourself professionally, dress appropriately, engage ethically, keep an open mind, and be unbiased.
- c. Participate in classroom and school events, participate during seminars and discussions, engage your peers and those with whom we work with in the schools.
- d. Collaborate with the group to obtain consensus, cohesion, and unity. Be prepared to step in and step up.
- e. Disseminate your learning to the instructors, those in the group, and with others when we return.

## Appendix 4.4

### Daily Journal/Photo Reflection and Documentation (80 points)

Ten points can be earned by completing a daily journal reflection/ photo documentation on this study abroad . A total of 8 entries will be compiled. Each entry would consist of:

- a. Expectations before the day's event
- b. Observations
- c. Reflections of the day
- d. One learning point to implement on program planning and administration in early childhood program
- e. Photographs and documentation

The journal/photo documentation will be compiled into a booklet to be submitted and shared during *video/panel presentation day*.

#### Guiding questions for a) Expectations

- What did you want to know before going to the school?

#### Guiding questions for b) Observations

- A brief description of the setting; children; culture; teachers; and any other observations.

#### Guiding questions for c) Reflections

- How is your experience different from what you expected?
- What did you learn about yourself and what changes you plan to make for the next visit?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your challenges?
- What would you do differently the next time?
- What was exciting, surprising, or frustrating about the experience?
- What impacts the way you view the situation/experience?

#### Guiding questions for d) Learning Point

- What did you learn about the center/ culture/ children/ experience now that you did not know before going? Be specific in your description.

#### Guiding questions for Final Journal (8th entry)

- Describe your strengths?



- Describe your challenges?
- Which of your skills will you further develop and what will you do to develop them?
- How does this experience bridge what you learned at MTSU?
- What possible outcome do you think this study abroad might impact upon your college degree and future career?
- How will you share your knowledge with others when you get back to Tennessee?

## Appendix 4.5

### **Video and panel presentation on Administering Early Childhood Programs: Study Abroad Singapore (160 points)**

The video and panel presentation will focus on the following:

- a. Background information of Singapore consisting of its history, geography, demographic makeup, infrastructure, and culture that impact the Early Childhood Education in Singapore.
- b. Similarities and differences between Singapore accreditation system to the Tennessee Star Quality Child Care Program and NAEYC accreditation for young children.
- c. Comparing different preschools/elementary schools in Singapore.
- d. Impact of diversity and culture on the developing child.
- e. Design an ideal developmentally and culturally appropriate classroom.
- f. Overall personal reflection on this trip.