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NYU dance education study abroad program to Uganda: impact on work experiences of study abroad alumni in New York City

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Study abroad programs in dance education have played a key role in equipping students with globally and culturally diverse academic, pedagogic and professional knowledge, aptitudes and experiences. For this study, I interviewed six subjects who participated in New York University dance education study abroad program to Uganda from 2007 to 2010 to interrogate and establish what motivated them to participate in the program, their pre-departure preparations for the program and the observed and embodied cross-cultural learning encounters that they had during the program. The article further reveals the different modalities that these study abroad alumni have used to integrate the skills, knowledge, and competences that they acquired through the program into their work experiences in New York City.

Keywords: dance education; study abroad; experiential learning; pedagogy; cultural translation; learning; Uganda; experiences

Introduction

Study abroad programs are one of the ways through which higher education has been internationalized to enable students explore and expand their transcultural and global experiences. In the United States of America, studying abroad is increasingly becoming a key component of universities, in their effort to create and solidify their commitment to international education (Dolby 2007; Doyle et al. 2010; Stroud 2010; Tarrant 2010). ‘Study abroad’ is an educational program, which enables students travel and study overseas as part of their degree training and for which they receive credits toward their scheme of study (Woolf 2007).

In order to expose and broaden students’ worldview to new cultural and academic encounters, the Dance Education Program at New York University (NYU) introduced a study abroad program to Uganda in 2007. Running every January, the program lasts between 2 and 3 weeks. In addition to students from the Dance in Education Program at NYU, students from other programs are allowed to take part in the cultural exchange between Makerere University, Uganda and NYU. The program is a dance-making cultural exchange program that aims to promote community building through the arts by exposing students to practical experiences (Pribyl and Johnstone 2011).

During the exchange, study abroad students collaborate with professional dancers, educators, and students from the Kampala Ballet and modern Dance

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School, and Makerere University. Students take classes in traditional Ugandan dances, and drumming and teaching methodology with dance faculty from NYU Steinhardt and Makerere University. Following this experience, students are required to draw from theory of dance education and apply it to practice by developing and implementing lesson plans, which they teach to children from local community-based children’s centers and Kampala Ballet and Modern Dance School, aged between 7 and 16 years. The objective of the lesson plans is to allow participants (NYU study abroad students, children, dance teachers, and students from Uganda) to explore cross-cultural teaching, learning, and artistic experiences through dance education and performance (http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/study_abroad/programs/Dance_Uganda).

**Purpose of the study**

Study abroad and exchange programs in dance are meant to foster, among other things, dance skills and knowledge to participants. Specifically for dance education, study abroad programs are meant to equip learners with practical skills and knowledge that they can apply in different areas of practice. As study abroad and exchange programs establish their position within the academy and dance practice, there is need to examine how the knowledge, skills, and competences acquired by study abroad students/participants have impacted their working experiences. Building on experiences of study abroad alumni, who have benefited from the NYU study abroad program and are now working as professionals in different sectors, I examine ways in which study abroad skills, knowledge, and experiences have been integrated into the work experiences of study abroad alumni in New York City. Moreover, as Woolf (2007) has conceded there ‘is meager research about study abroad programs in comparison to other areas of research within higher education’ (143).

To address the research gap, I developed the following research question to guide this inquiry: How have the research subjects applied the experiences, knowledge, and skills acquired through the study abroad program in their work? Other sub-questions that emerged to expand the perspectives of the study included: (1) what skills and knowledge did the subjects acquire through the program? (2) What kind of preparation did the subjects go through before going to Uganda to participate in the program? (3) How did the subjects acquire skills and knowledge through the program?

**Literature review**

The popularity of study abroad programs has attracted extensive research interest. Research has been conducted on the students’ interest and motivation (Allen 2010); personal development (Gmelch 1997); experiential learning (Long et al. 2010); challenges and opportunities in study abroad (Brustein 2007); student participation (Loorparlog et al. 2010); student transformation (Hanson 2010); and learning (Berg 2007).

Available literature has revealed that universities have developed strategic international alliances through cross-border partnerships in both teaching and research (Altbach and Knight 2007; Chan 2004 as cited in Hamza 2010). According to Dolby, ‘Universities often promote study abroad as part of an effort to expand students’ worldview and to improve American students’ ability to negotiate a global
workplace in a world that is in the throes of the multiple, conflictual forces of globalization’ (2007, 141–142). Many studies have found positive effects of studying abroad, such as increased self-efficacy and self-confidence (Milstein 2005); intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al. 2006); cultural competence (Greatrex-White 2008); personal growth (Gonyea 2008); and impact on field experience (Pence and Macgillivray 2008). Through study abroad programs, students are able to nurture their own experiences, establish cultural and academic connections, advance their own competencies, and discern how to translate the experiences, skills, and knowledge acquired into their career goals and practical work.

The intended outcome of study abroad experience is to allow students to ‘significantly be more open with regard to career choice than those staying home and view study abroad as a critical factor in their career development’ (Goldstein and Kim 2006, 508), and to apply skills and knowledge that can add to their competitiveness and performance in the practical world. Upon their return, students are expected ‘to translate their study abroad experiences into a framework recognizable to employers and to draw the connection between study abroad and the world of work’ (Steglitz and Gross 2009, 20). For students returning from dance education-related study abroad programs, there is a span of a career opportunities to their disposal, one which varies greatly with the type of art (e.g. dance vs. creative writing), with the subsector of each art world (classical dance vs. contemporary dance), with the nature of the occupation in it (performing vs. creative work), and with the organizational and market features of each world (Menger 1999).

Literature reviewed underscores the need to conduct research to ascertain the impact of study abroad programs on the work of study abroad returnees. This is more so because dance has always had an international focus, and now more so than ever before (Stock 2004). Moreover, even within this existing literature, no attempts have been made to carry out studies on how students benefit from their dance-related study abroad experiences personally and professionally, and how other people benefit from these experiences (Bodycott and Walker 2000 as cited in Hamza 2010, 53). It is against this background that I attempt to address this research gap in the existing body of literature about dance education.

Research methodology

The approach taken to assess potential changes in international understanding accruing from the study abroad experience in particular requires a systematic, long-term research commitment (Carlson and Widaman 1998). This study was based on qualitative research methodology, which specifically centered on data gathered from oral interviews that I conducted with the subjects from July 2012 to January 2013 in New York City. Using qualitative research interviews allowed me to deeply interrogate the social, cultural, pedagogic, artistic, academic, professional, and personal experiences that subjects encountered through the study abroad program, and how they have integrated them into their work. Since the subjects had varying individual experiences, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews to allow a possibility for further questions to emerge during the interview processes. The semi-structured in-depth interviews provided a personal encounter in which I used open, direct, and verbal questions to elicit detailed narratives and stories from research subjects.

The use of purposive sampling to select research respondents enabled me to interview subjects that participated in the program. It also allowed me to maximize
the depth and richness of the research topic to address the research question. The sample population for this study consisted of a total of six subjects. Out of six subjects, five were graduates of dance education program, while one was a graduate from the international education program, all at NYU. By the time the study was conducted, three subjects were working as dance educators in private studios and public school system (elementary, middle, and high school) in New York City. One subject was working as a freelance dance teacher in private studios. Another subject was working as an education and arts outreach manager at an arts organization in New York City. I also engaged a subject who was working as director of enrichment programs at a non-profit organization that creates opportunities for international students to share their cultural experiences in New York City. I specifically selected subjects who participated in the program from 2007 to 2010 because they had 2–4 years of working experience by the time this research was conducted. I believe with this experience, subjects would provide this study with insights into their own work experiences in relation to the impact of their study abroad experience in Uganda.

I drew from Creswell (1998), also cited in Edmonds (2010), to understand the phenomenological meaning of the lived experiences of the subjects and how such experiences were translated into the work environment of previous benefactors of the NYU dance education study abroad program. With a phenomenological lens to the study, a deeper understanding of how the subjects interfaced with new cultural, social, academic, and professional encounters through the program, and how this has influenced their work came to realization. Moreover, a phenomenological lens enabled me to come to terms with multiple experiences shared by individual subjects.

After I collected interview data, I transcribed and coded these data using the common approach that relies on ‘using codes from a codebook for tagging segments of text and then sorting text segments with similar content into separate categories for a final distillation into major themes’ as exemplified in Miles and Hiberman (1994) among others. Sixteen emerging themes were compressed into three: (1) pre-departure preparations, (2) cross-cultural experiential learning during the program, and (3) application of the skills and knowledge acquired through the program by subjects on their return to the US.

**Theoretical framework**

Because study abroad education foregrounds the learner at the center of the new learning experience, any knowledge is constructed in experiential forms. Experiential sensibilities manifest themselves in the processes, whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb 1984, 41), which provides ‘a holistic process of adaptation to the world’ (31). Since dance learning in the context of this study abroad program entails a learner’s active participation, learning in this sense is not just the result of cognition; it involves the integrated functioning of the total person – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving (Kolb and Kolb 2005, 194). The vocabulary, techniques and pedagogies of Ugandan musics and dances, which the subjects got exposed to, nurtured their comprehension of ‘two dialectically related modes of grasping experience – concrete experience and abstract conceptualization and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience – reflective observation and active experimentation’ (Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis 2001).
The subjects immersed themselves in new artistic and cultural experiences within a new geographical and cultural space. In this case, transformative experiences were an outgrowth of the contacts that subjects made with the dance and music material, the methods through which this material was delivered, and the environment and cultural nuances that constitute the contexts in which learning occurred. Learning contexts in these study abroad situations were not only physical places but also cognitive and cultural constructs of the person’s experience in the social environment (Kolb and Kolb 2005, 199–200). These constructs were deepened by the sociocultural, communal, collaborative, flexible, instinctual, and interactive ways in which the activities of the program, including taking classes by subjects, teaching the children, developing lesson plans, and performing dances, were conducted. The environment in which the study abroad teaching and learning occurred was critical to learning itself, and learning was viewed as culturally and contextually specific in the same way Palincsar (1998, 354) understands it to be.

Culturally and contextually based dance education invited learners to actively engage in learning processes, hence creating a range of possibilities for learners to experience situated learning. Situated learning was centered on the whole person, resulting from the interaction of three areas of influence: agent, activity, and world (Lave and Wenger 1991). By agent, Lave and Wenger mean the individual partaking in an activity. With activity, they mean practical engagement in a task, and with world, they mean the real or imagined environment in which the individual engages in a task. Situated learning within the realm of the study abroad program embodied a comprehensive set of skills – including valuing, thinking, deciding, and acting – which were necessary for activities related to the program. These humanistic values emphasized the ability to learn and develop in the face of cross-cultural experiences, thereby placing the learner at the center of the cross-cultural learning process as Kayes (2002) has previously noted.

In trying to locate the link between experiential and situated learning in cross-cultural study abroad dance experiences, questions that relate to how learners lend themselves to the learning processes emerge. From this study, it is evident that the participatory nature of the program precipitated the convergence between experiential learning notions and situated learning sensibilities. Yamazaki and Kaye’s (2004) study has revealed that the participatory approach to cross-cultural study abroad learning not only sheds new light on distinctive cultural taxonomies, but also enhances the description of individual learning as a process of adaptation to various cultures. In adapting to new cultural taxonomies and making contextual reflections, learners experienced illuminated activities of the exchange; access to expert performances and the modeling of processes; collaborative construction of knowledge; reflection to enable abstractions to be formed; integrated assessment of learning within the tasks among other things (Herrington and Oliver 1995).

The transformational nature of learning encounters allowed learners to nurture their own experiences. Dewey has observed that the relevance of any form of education should be situated in ‘the cultivation of more experiences’ (1897, 79). In line with Dewey, the concern of this study is how these experiences undergo continuous reconstruction. In other words, are there possibilities that the skills and knowledge acquired through the study abroad program are applied in the work experience of the subjects? Is this application of skills and knowledge the continuing reconstruction of the original study abroad experience?
In trying to find answers to the aforementioned questions, I was cognizant of the fact that to expropriate study abroad material from the host country – Uganda and appropriate it in their work – in the US, subjects may have subjected the dance material to cultural translation. Cultural translation in this case is, perhaps, the ultimate form of foreignizing translation, since the material translated emerges in a form that bears just resemblance to its original (Young 2012). Because the environment of appropriation in the US was alien to the dance material expropriated, adaptation of this material and pedagogy in a different environment was bound to render these cross-cultural experiences to alternations and dislocations. In other words, not only the dances are translated, but also the form of the content, the way the dances are taught, the contexts in which the dances are performed, as well as the interpretation of their meaning. The concern of this study was to interrogate the ways in which ‘cultures are circulated, transmitted, reinterpreted and re-aligned in local contexts’ (Young 2012, 156). This entails, as Young (2012) has noted, articulating the realities of how individuals experience and interpret such encounters in the ‘contact zones’ and how these encounters are redeployed in new environments.

Data presentation

This section will focus on the three central themes that emerged from the data. These themes include pre-departure preparations, cross-cultural experiential learning during the program, and application of the skills and knowledge acquired through the program by subjects after their return to the US. The last theme is the core since it is the only one that attempts to answer the research question of the study. According to research data, pre-departure stage prepared students, both psychologically, mentally, culturally, and academically; cross-cultural experiential learning allowed the subjects to immerse themselves into new culture, dance and music traditions, and pedagogy, with the aim of acquiring and generating new experiences and knowledge, and applying such acquired knowledge and skills to their work environments in New York City.

Pre-departure preparations

Research data indicated that subjects started engaging in study abroad long before making the actual trip to Uganda. The pre-departure experience prepared students for the actual study abroad atmosphere. This included among other things, gathering of information about the study abroad program and its host country – Uganda – from several sources: online search engines, books and articles about Uganda, NYU university website, newspapers in Uganda, study abroad alumni brochures, and from the directors of the program at NYU. Data from the interviews indicated that subjects carried out extensive individual research regarding the cost of the program, the syllabus of the program, and the culture, history, political environment, and economic situation in Uganda: For his pre-departure, one of the subjects remarked that:

I was trying to familiarize myself with the history of the country, how it became a country itself, how it is broken up ethnically like with the tribal communities how they came together. So I had some working knowledge of the overall deal of how Uganda came to be Uganda as a country.
Relatedly, students attended formal orientation sessions that were organized by university study abroad office to get more details about travel, housing, availability of financial resources, medication and immunization, and medical and security emergencies, among others. Through the pre-departure orientation, subjects not only prepared themselves physically, intellectually, and socially, but also mentally to render clarity to their study abroad objectives.

**Cross-cultural experiential learning**

During this time, students learned traditional dances, music, and other cultural traditions from different ethnic communities in Uganda. During interviews, they described their learning experiences as cross-cultural, experiential, communal, imaginative, collaborative, interactive, and participatory, with music and dance being taught as one. Commenting on the assemblage of performing arts into one collage, a subject remarked that: ‘everything was so interconnected. You cannot separate the music from the drum and dance. It all has to go together, it almost happens simultaneously.’ Subjects noted differences in pedagogy and used this as a gateway into expanding their learning experience:

Pedagogically, there were things that were different. 1) There were no mirrors. 2) We were not lined up as we were being taught. The teachers were coming around whoever was instructing at a time … In fact the teacher was the mirror, they would come and mirror you and not only that the other students or the other Ugandans would also come and assist us as well so it started to create a community where people were moving or travelling around the room doing the movements and doing it with you.

In addition to the communal approach of teaching, the dances and music traditions that subjects learned were deeply rooted in indigenous cultural history and traditions of the local communities that created them and the environment in which they are typically taught, learned, and performed. As one subject indicated, the classes included ‘lots of information about the origins of the dance, who created them, where and what they wear for costume, the nature of the climate and the people and how such information informs what I am going to learn … That idea of why things are being done and where they came from being just as important as what is being done of the steps.’ To deliver this information, Ugandan teachers used different strategies to deliver the material as one subject noted:

One prime example for me was that there was heavy emphasis on oral learning and oral tradition and we were coming from the Western civilization of writing and seeing things so there was a moment where there was a dialogue and a compromise on how can we take what you [Ugandans] have, and put it into a definitive form.

In the interviews, subjects also made reference to the experience that they had collaborating with Ugandan teachers and students while teaching dance to children in Uganda. The lessons that students co-taught with Ugandan counterparts were a product of a process that included collaborative planning, role-playing, teaching, and evaluation. One subject observed: ‘We worked together to put together our lesson plan and our curriculum.’ In their teaching groups, the subjects developed themes for their lesson plans that covered culturally, pedagogically, cross-culturally diverse issues:

My lesson focused on comparing Uganda’s environment to New York and its tall buildings and shapes. I showed them a map and showed them pictures and then we
were looking at pictures of Uganda – just the more natural side of it and we came up with different movement themes for these things.

Engaging in collaborative teaching was a point of departure for subjects to interface with the teaching and learning culture, student–teacher relationship, classroom management strategies, organization of material, and evaluation of classes in Uganda.

The students also identified attending local artistic performances, family visits, shopping, sightseeing, and attending performances, and informal conversations with Ugandan counterparts as learning spaces:

We were talking to Ugandans, constantly seeing different shows whether it was a comedy show, a play … We went to the museum and like every time I could stop and look at something someone was slightly next to me and they were like ‘do you know? This is an instrument of this tribe’. There was always somebody there to guide you, to give you a little more information.

Challenges encountered during the study abroad experience

Throughout the interviews, subjects emphasized that they encountered challenges stemming from cultural, social, and pedagogic differences. A subject mentioned that: ‘The other cultural difference that I noticed was the proximity in space. That we like personal space … but the Ugandans that I was in touch with do not have a sense of personal space’, a sign that study abroad programs are sites where issues of ethnocentrism are negotiated. Besides cultural differences, subjects noted that coping up with a different pedagogic paradigm was a challenge:

I had lots of challenges with playing music and drumming and keeping rhythms and the beat and singing and making sure I was hitting it on the right count and not speeding up. For me that was hard, that was very hard to be able to access another area with my brain.

There were also cases of inadequate preparedness to work in a new cultural and teaching environment as one subject noted: ‘children coming from the backgrounds that they did – [orphanages], not knowing what their personal experiences had been and not knowing the cultural boundaries, and the social norms’ was a big challenge. Since the program required the subjects to teach classes to Ugandan children, lack of background information about children slowed the teaching processes to the extent that some aims and objectives of lessons were not fully achieved. Subjects of color indicated a feeling of lack of acceptance as another challenge:

To be honest, the challenge was going to Uganda and expect that I would blend in more with Ugandans because I am of the same color and realizing that Ugandans looked at whites more as being much more resourceful.

Back to New York City: integrating study abroad experiences into professional work

The integration of study abroad experiences into professional work is the core of this research project. On the over all, subjects indicated that the study abroad experience impacted their professional work when they returned to New York City. Subjects mentioned how difficult it was to deal with reverse culture shock as they tried to re-enter and re-adjust to original culture when they returned to the US. As one student
revealed: ‘The day we came back was probably one of the most pivotal life changing days for me because it signified the end of many things,’ while another observed:

And it was startling, to just be back in the city and the noise and the people, the speed and the pace, I was almost in tears because it was so different, yet this is where I live. There was a stark contrast to where I had just been and all the beauty that I had just witnessed.

Once fully settled, subjects embarked on finding ways to make their study abroad experiences relevant to their work. One of the aspects that this exposure impacted was their profession philosophy. A subject observed that the study abroad experience taught her that: ‘you can learn from everybody regardless of whether they are older or younger or more experienced or less experienced.’ For subjects who are dance educators, the program invited them to reflect more on their work as teachers:

It made me think about who I am as an educator and who I want to be. I want to be an educator that allows my students to be free even within structure, to be free and not be judged by who they are whether they are this awesome ballet dancer, or a salsa dancer or … let them own that and enjoy that. That’s what going there made me realize that not everyone is going to really be the same and it is okay if they are not. Just be open with your students and allow them to be themselves.

From the interviews conducted, it emerged that the program also enabled subjects who are dance educators to develop cross-culturally encompassing curriculum that covered the history, culture, and artistry of Uganda in addition to other Western forms of dance that they were already teaching:

When I taught Ugandan dances for the first time in my previous school … I had a short unit that consisted of geography of Eastern Africa where lake Victoria, Nile river, Uganda and the surrounding countries so that was information they needed to know, to offer some context to what they were learning, where it came from, and what East Africa was.

Other subjects have made music as an integral part of their teaching philosophy and pedagogy: ‘Pedagogically, I start with the rhythm, I think it is important for them to get the rhythm and then we go to the lower body, the feet before adding the upper half of the body.’

Some subjects revealed that they used different materials that they go through the program as teaching aids:

One of the sections is just pictures and I just let them [students] explore on their own and try to figure out things for themselves … I even do a museum where I set different sections around the room, different artifacts that I brought back such as drums, toys like the ball with banana leaves and the dole that I got from one of the orphanages …

For subjects who did not have original materials from Uganda to facilitate their teaching, they improvised with the available material within their reach: ‘I did do costume making so we used old plastic trash bags and strings to make these four raffia skirts. So, we would cut the bags into strips and tie the string around, and then tie the strips on to the string so they hang down and looked like raffia, but it was from collected and found materials. So we spent one day making a costume that the students then wore for lecture demonstration performance …’ a subject noted.

Data further indicated that the study abroad experience has inspired subjects to modify their teaching strategies. One subjects stated:
The experience from Uganda has got me out of command style, it has allowed me to trust my students more, and it has allowed me to not always have the answer. It has not only allowed me to be the teacher but also to be a peer mentor among students … And as an educator I think it is important to adjust your styles in how you teach, [and] what you teach. I think it is important to mix it up a little bit just so your kids can always be thinking, always be working and wanting more. That did influence me in that sense. I am a Western educator; I am able to blend the two together.

Subjects further maintained that the study abroad experience advanced their professional profile, competence, and credibility. A subject stated that: ‘It [study abroad experience] also gives me credibility for the people that I work with when they know that I have been to a country or to the region outside of the US.’

Discussion

According to the research data, the study abroad exposure followed sequential stages, which started before subjects left the US for the program and continued after their return from Uganda. These stages partly reflects the college choice theory which focuses on three study abroad decision-making stages that follow each other sequentially: the development of the predisposition or intent to study abroad, the search for an appropriate study abroad program, and the selection of and departure for a particular location and program (Leerburger 1987; Peterson’s 2008; Sullivan 2004; Williamson 2004 cited in Salisbury et al. 2009). However, this study challenges the assumptions of college choice theory to suggest that study abroad stages do extend beyond students’ selection and departure for a particular location and program. The stages also cover the period when students return to their home countries after participating in study abroad activities, and reference is continuously made to their pre-departure aspirations.

Before leaving for the program, the subjects saw venturing into foreign cultures as an opportunity of comprehending the wide diversity in human existence, and finding new options for human relationship as Hess (1997) has also noted about the same process. Through formal information sessions and private research about the program and the host country – Uganda, subjects were able to determine whether the program and the environment in which it was hosted were going to facilitate realization of their objectives that included: broadening of their artistic, pedagogic, scholarly, and cross-cultural competences. Subjects used this preliminary orientation to seek broader perspectives that were intended to prepare them for the new experiences.

While in Uganda, subjects immersed themselves into local forms of dance and music training, and culture that exposed them to new pedagogic and artistic experiences. The dance education and performance experiences were experiential, participatory, interactive, collaborative, and communal. Particularly noteworthy is that the study abroad workshops were convened in an urban setting – Kampala (the capital city of Uganda) – not in rural communities where the dances originate. Because the program was not convened in communities where the dances originate, training did not offer the original cultural pedagogic, artistic and social experience that is characteristic of dance practices in communities from where the dances originate. Nonetheless, the dance workshops ‘represented’ some tenets of traditional community-based pedagogy, which as Ssekamwa has noted ‘is meant to enable each member of that society to be helpful to himself/herself, to his/her family, to the rest of the members
of the society …’ (1997, 2). With this pedagogy, Ssekamwa further notes, the ‘learner is given chance to practice that skill. This is repeated over again until the learner gets it correct’ (4). This approach allowed subjects to reflect upon ways in which they: learn best, participate in setting learning objectives, and take responsibility for their learning process by sharing in the assessment of their learning as Warner (1993) has argued.

Through this new learning experience, subjects encountered challenges that included coping up with new teaching styles, teaching dance in a new cultural and social environment, collaborating with people from different cultural and education background to develop and teach lesson plans, a feeling of nonacceptance by the local community, and lack of background information about the children that respondents taught. These challenges provoked a sense of exclusion, which impeded full immersion of the subjects into the study abroad experience during the early stages of the workshops. This reaction concurs with Allen (2010) who has observed that study abroad participants are not automatically granted access to social networks that afford learning, and Nyaupane, Teye, and Paris (2008) who have noted that initial contact alone will not necessarily provide a positive cross-cultural experience, as other factors often have influence over the environment in which the interaction takes place.

As the program progressed, subjects adapted to the new learning environment and sociocultural sensibilities by seeking support and guidance from Ugandan teachers, students and co-teachers, and developing and applying lesson plans that borrowed from both the local and global experiences. Focus on collaboration with Ugandan teachers, students, and children allowed subjects to ‘explore value systems for the first time; and make discoveries that often led to reexamining the foundation of their own ethical structures’ (Hess 1997, 47) and ethnocentric notions. As Sanford and others have argued (Sanford 1966; Bennett 2003; Lou and Bosley 2008a cited in Berg 2007), students learn most effectively in environments that provide them with a balance of challenge and support. In this case, both situated and experiential learning, which the subjects experienced, required them to recognize existential learning challenges and identify possible learning opportunities. What is more, the subjects used their cross-cultural interaction and experiences outside the formal dance workshops such as field trips, home visits, performance attendance, evening walks, and informal conversations with local people to acquire more in-depth insights of the new cultural environment. Both experiential and situated learning in this sense expanded beyond the formal dance education spaces and activities. Hence, in the context of study abroad programs in dance, experiential and situated learning can be conceived as an experience that can occur in both formal and informal forms of interaction that allow learners to make contact with new cross-cultural experiences.

By exploring new cross-cultural teaching and learning environment, the subjects acquired skills in the following areas: ‘academic/intellectual – problem solving and artistic skills, geographical and historical knowledge, among others; professional – a sense of direction for future career choices, a sense of responsibility, etc.; personal – personal identity, flexibility, creativity, etc.; and intercultural – interest in other cultures, diminished ethnocentrism, cultural sensitivity’ as Anderson et al. (2006) state them. However, these competences differed from one subject to another as the findings showed. This underscores the fact that in study abroad experiences, experiential and situated learning delivers different learning outcomes from one learner to
another, and these outcomes are an outgrowth of individual interests, objectives, curiosities, cultural background and sensibilities, and the different schools of interpretation that each learner applies to the new sociocultural encounters. Variance in experience happens even when learners are exposed to the same learning environment because, as the student-choice theory asserts, students’ decisions are made in ‘situated contexts’ based on the learner’s habits, as shaped by individual background and learning environments (McDonough 1997; St. John and Asker 2001 cited in Salisbury et al. 2009).

Research data indicated that countenance of study abroad nuances was a continuous process that extended after the study abroad students returned to their home country, US. The subjects experienced continuous comprehension and reflection on their study abroad experiences after their return. The process of re-entry became a continuous interaction between the subjects’ original culture and their study abroad encounters. With new cultural, social, and pedagogic perspectives, the perception of some subjects about their original sociocultural setup shifted. These subjects started deploying their study abroad experiences to verify, understand, interrogate, and relate to the values, norms, practices, and procedures of their original culture.

Subjects repatriated not only experiences, but also skills and material that they acquired through the program into their work. For example, subjects who are dance educators developed culturally responsive/culturally respective/culturally sensitive/culturally rooted/culturally relevant/culturally congruent pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1994; Campbell 1997; Yamauchi 2005; Gay 2010), which integrated Ugandan history, culture, music, and dances; classroom management techniques; pedagogy; and teaching philosophies. This enabled these teachers to address what Thomas (1997) lists as the new challenges that educators face in this highly globalized world that include: to decide what the key elements are in the process of globalization that are likely to affect education and schooling, and to assess which of these elements can be used as part of the core strategy for curriculum planning in schools and teacher training; and to decide and deal with the social mores – the fabric of a cultural niche, with teaching and learning that should be more culturally sensitive.

In adjusting curriculum and pedagogy to integrate study abroad experiences, subjects aimed to allow students to broaden their knowledge base about other cultures with hope that this, as Shor (1992) notes, would allow students to relate personal growth to public life, develop strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, and change. However, questions arise about whether the study abroad material, which subjects incorporated into their lesson plans and curriculum is authentic and deep enough to portray, project, and represent the cultures from where the dances and music originate. This is because the subjects have had to re-contextualize, modify, and adapt this material to the new operational environment and working constraints. This translation, as Buden et al. have argued, ‘evokes an act of moving or carrying across from one place or position to another, or of changing from one state of things to another’ (2009, 196) and ‘as it migrates across disciplines, translation is also applied to changing situations.’ (Simon 2009, n.p). In this process of translation, the dances, music, and other artistic experiences cannot attain their original form since teachers subject them to a new artistic, structural, cultural, and social environment that constitute the subjects’ places of work.
Conclusion
Findings demonstrated that subjects have integrated study abroad material and experiences into their professional work in areas such as professional philosophy; professional objectives; understanding the working environment; the pedagogy that they use to teach; curriculum and lesson plans that they developed to guide their teaching; assessment procedures, ways of giving feedback; teacher–student relationship; classroom management; and strategies, which they use to evaluate their performance at educators. In the process of expropriating study abroad material from the host country – Uganda – and appropriating it in their different environs of work, subjects have had to re-contextualize this material to respond to conditions in their working environment.

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