Assessing the Value of Immersion as a Continuing Education Modality in the Field of Social Work

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Loya and Smith

Abstract

This article describes a continuing education program that included international travel to Costa Rica, staying with host families, visiting social services agencies, and learning about culture and context. An overview of the theoretical framework will be provided, including lifelong learning, transformative learning, cultural humility, global mindedness and intercultural competence. The mixed-methods study was based on the AAC&U Rubrics of Intercultural Knowledge, Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning, and Global Learning, which are also described. Finally, the results of the survey, a discussion of the findings, and limitations are presented. Suggestions for future CE programs will be offered.

Introduction

Professional licensure is the culminating achievement for many professions; it involves a commitment to lifelong learning through engaging in continuing education. Although this article focuses on one CE offering in the United States, other countries also require continuing professional development. For example, in England, social workers must document continuing professional development (Social Work England, 2019); New Zealand requires 20 hours of ongoing education (Social Workers Registration Board, 2020); and Australia requires 30 hours (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020). Continuing education (CE) is mandated by social work licensing boards throughout the United States. Every state has some form of social work licensing, although levels of licensing and how those licenses are titled or labeled varies. The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB; 2020) notes that enhancing competence is the individual responsibility of every social worker. While the number of hours, the format of hours, and the time frame for accumulating those hours varies by jurisdiction, the constant is that all licensed social workers must continue their learning and seek a higher level of competence. Thus, engaging in ongoing education should not just be about ticking off a box on the number of hours accumulated. Rather, the CE should be relevant in order to meet our ethical obligation to social work core values and should also encourage personal and professional growth. Specifically, the ethical obligation to strive for competence is stated in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2017) Code of Ethics as "social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise" (¶ 7).

Continuing education can be defined as the array of opportunities by which professionals augment existing knowledge and skills (Strom-Gottfried, 2008). It includes formalized activities of all types, such as academic courses, lectures, the reading of journal articles, conference attendance, certificate programs, and other forms of independent study (Whitaker & Arrington, 2009). CE is assumed to be essential for professional competence, career development, and compliance with licensing rules and other regulations, yet it is poorly understood, essentially unregulated, and largely unstudied (Congress, 2012). In a study by Ruth, Gianino, and Geron (2014), CE opportunities were found to be focused on trends or on what the instructor wanted to present, instead of on educational content that filled gaps. Some gaps identified in their study included issues of social justice, macro social work, workplace safety, and content specific to social work. In a study by Gianino, Ruth, and Geron (2016), continuing education offered in different formats was seen by participants as a strength of social work focused CE.

This article describes a CE offering sponsored by a public, mid-sized University through the Department of Social Work and the CE office on campus. The program is offered each summer; participants travel to Costa Rica for a week, staying with host families and visiting social services agencies, listening to *charlas* (lectures), and learning about culture and context. The program has been offered twice with a total

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of sixteen participants. The first author has led many student groups to Costa Rica in addition to the two professionals' programs described here. The second author was a participant on the first program and then went on to co-lead a student group the following year. First, an overview of the theoretical framework will be provided, including lifelong learning, transformative learning, cultural humility, global mindedness, and intercultural competence. The survey was based on the AAC&U Rubrics of Intercultural Knowledge, Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning, and Global Learning, which are also described here. Finally, the results of the survey are presented along with a discussion of the findings and the limitations. Suggestions for future CE programs will be offered.

Theoretical Foundations/Literature Review

Lifelong Learning

Embracing the notion of lifelong learning is an expectation of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in preparing future social work practitioners of accredited social work programs. Embedded within the competency of ethical and professional behavior is the commitment to maintain relevance and effectiveness through engaging in lifelong learning (CSWE, 2015). Our earliest learning begins within our family system and then transitions to formal learning in an educational context, but once individuals enter their career learning can cease or become narrowly focused on work, resulting in a routine series of events that happen with the same people (Holmes, 2002). It is doubtful this narrow approach to learning can lead to personal or professional growth. In order to be engaged and effective in one's career and its evolution, professionals must position themselves to use an ongoing process of "acquisition, integration, and application of new knowledge throughout one's lifetime" (Nissen, Pendell, Jivanjee, & Goodluck, p. 386). Lifelong learning is an ethos and a discipline that occurs throughout a person's life that reaches far beyond just our vocation; it also involves soft skills such as emotional intelligence and problem solving. It "requires more than a commitment to learn, it also requires a commitment to unlearn and forget those things we know that are no longer relevant

or which are preventing us from accepting new ideas," (Holmes, 2002, p. 13), thus leading to transformation.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning involves the process of critically reflecting on our own assumptions that emerge individually or collectively. In order to challenge any pre-existing assumptions and promote autonomous thought, transformative learning is a vital pedagogical tool (Lorenzetti et al., 2019). As an adult, engaging in critical dialogue requires critical self-reflection and reflective judgment (Mezirow, 2003). To develop these skills, insights, and dispositions critical to practice, educators are expected to help adult learners realize these capabilities. Creating a space for critical reflection, dialectical dialogue, and transformative learning is at the core of adult education. Moreover, it defines the role of the educator as a facilitator of learning but also as a cultural advocate for open participation among all adults engaging in critical reflection and conversations. This type of learning transforms existing assumptions and expectations to make them more open and able to change on an emotional level (Mezirow, 2003). This pedagogy aligns with the social work profession's core values as it implores social workers to have critical conversations which address social justice issues (Lorenzetti et al., 2019; NASW, 2017).

Cultural Humility, Global Mindedness, and Intercultural Competence

The constructs of cultural humility, global mindedness, and intercultural competence are extremely important within the context of a study abroad program. Cultural humility is a concept that has evolved from early understanding of the influence of culture; for a time, practitioners focused on "cultural competence," which implies that an endpoint (I am now competent!) is possible. Cultural humility, global mindedness, and intercultural competence are interrelated, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to have one without the others. Cultural humility was first introduced by Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) after the riots surrounding the acquittal of the police officers involved in the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1991 (Ungvarsky, 2020). It involves self-reflection, but

also embodies a willingness to change. In order to be culturally humble, one must examine personal biases and the impact of stereotypes on thinking, which may be difficult, as implicit biases may underlie our interactions with others. At the core of the goal of deepening the understanding of these interrelated constructs is the recognition that one must be able to engage in reflective practice and critical reflection. As stated by Fook (2015), "information gathered from observation may be quite different from that gained through a conversation...knowledge is also interactional - it is shaped by historical and structural contexts" (p. 444). By learning and experiencing within a different environment, Freire's (1970/2005) concept of praxis, which combines reflection with action, can occur. Freire also stressed that we should be learners on the journey; none of us can be culturally humble if we feel we know everything. As with learning about culture, we must approach experiences with an attitude of "becoming" instead of "I have arrived." Freire (1970/2005) stated, "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogues is the logical consequence" (p. 91). Engaging in dialogue, stepping outside our comfort zone, and expanding our experiences are essential components of transformation.

Global mindedness acknowledges and emphasizes the interconnectedness of our world; it also implies a willingness to work toward change. Hanvey (1982) outlined five dimensions of a global perspective. These included perspective consciousness, state of the planet awareness, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge of global dynamics, and awareness of human choices. The concept of perspective consciousness aligns with Tervalon and Murray-García's (1998) view of cultural humility. According to Hanvey (1982), perspective consciousness is the recognition that other people are shaped by their own experiences and that their view of the world might not be universally shared. State of the planet awareness involves "awareness of prevailing world conditions and developments" (Hanvey, p. 163), while cross-cultural awareness allows for a deeper understanding of "how the ideas and ways of one's own society might be viewed from other vantage points" (p. 164). An important component of the program outlined here is a

focus on understanding the political influences and the history of U.S. involvement in Central America. Nair and Herring (2017) stated that a global mindset indicates "a quest to work on shared problems, issues, and interests" (p. 3). It is a cooperative approach to solving issues that affect us all. Just as we are all interconnected, so are the issues impacting our global community. Understanding the interrelatedness of social justice with environmental justice; the global economy and immigration; and the effect of climate change on the economy and thus on migration patterns are just a few examples illustrating the importance of having a global mindset. These dimensions of global perspective should be encouraged in social work students; thus, it is important for educators and supervisors of practitioners to develop their own knowledge and competence.

AAC&U VALUE Rubrics

The Association of American Colleges & Universities led the development of the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to assess sixteen student learning outcome areas deemed essential by employers and faculty members (Rhodes, 2010). Developed by faculty experts and educational professionals from across the United States, the VALUE rubrics have highlighted the learning outcomes necessary for students to be successful in their careers, communities, and lives. These tools have also been useful from an institutional perspective in assessing students' ability to demonstrate a higher level of integrated learning. Campuses across the United States and internationally have used the VALUE rubrics extensively for assessment and they have been embraced by all regional accrediting organizations (Rhodes, 2010). By using a VALUE rubric, a faculty member's expertise and autonomy is maintained by applying one of the rubrics to assess an existing course assignment rather than creating new assessment measures within programs. Aligned with the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), a reference point of what students should be able to know, learn, and do in any field, the sixteen VALUE rubrics include problem solving, teamwork, information literacy, quantitative literacy, reading, oral communication, written communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, inquiry and analysis,

civic engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning, foundations and skills for lifelong learning, global learning, and integrated learning (Rhodes, 2010). The authors chose to use several AAC&U rubrics to develop the questions for the survey. The rubrics used included: Intercultural Knowledge, Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning, and Global Learning. A brief discussion of each of these follows.

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence

Knowing that we ourselves are members of a world community with a shared future, the integration of intercultural knowledge is at the core of education (AAC&U, 2009c). Exposure to different cultures is not merely enough; it requires meaningful engagement, positioning social justice in historical and political frameworks, and holding culture at the foundation of transformational learning. The Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric assesses one's ability to identify their own culture, compare it to others' cultures, and be able to flexibly adapt with empathy to unfamiliarity. This assessment rubric captures the categories of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (AAC&U, 2009c). Within the knowledge domain, it focuses on the assessment of cultural self-awareness and cultural worldview frameworks. Using empathy and verbal and nonverbal communication that demonstrates a multifaceted respect and understanding of cultural differences comprise the category of skills. In the attitudes category, curiosity of asking complex questions about other cultures and an openness to develop contacts with others who are culturally different are distinguished (AAC&U, 2009c).

Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning

Consistent, meaningful learning on an intentional basis with the intent to grow in knowledge, skills, and proficiency comprises the notion of lifelong learning (AAC&U, 2009a). A goal of higher education is to ready students to be this type of learner through developing specific dispositions and skills. The Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning VALUE Rubric aims to assess the specific dispositions and skills that are vital to lifelong learning, which include curiosity of a topic, initiative to expand learning, independence of learning beyond the classroom, a transfer of learning to new situations, and reflection to reveal new and modified perspectives (AAC&U, 2009a).

Global Learning

When students are afforded meaningful opportunities to explore and analyze complex global challenges, then collaborate with others and apply that learning in contemporary global contexts alongside an evaluative process, it can offer transformative global learning (AAC&U, 2009b). Global learning affords the opportunity to be informed and responsible in an open-minded manner about diversity of differences, offers guidance on ways our actions impact both local and global contexts, and secures a space to tackle the world's most complex issues by working with others equitably. The Global Learning VALUE Rubric encompasses the assessment of an individual's global awareness, their ability to discern and apply diverse perspectives, the level of understanding of cultural diversity, their actions toward personal and social responsibility, and their knowledge of global systems and its application to contemporary global problems (AAC&U, 2009b).

Overview of the Program

The Costa Rica for Professionals program grew out of a short term faculty-led study abroad for students developed by the first author. Costa Rica became the focus of study abroad for students by default; she was "handed" an academic program to Costa Rica when she taught an honors seminar at a university. She had no input into the itinerary or the activities. After a somewhat mixed experience, she was determined to build a program for students that would focus on best practices in study abroad and would put learning, but also social justice, at the forefront of the program's activities. After interviewing several providers, she selected one that would provide a truly customized experience built on the foundation of social justice and "do no harm" within the communities visited. The *Instituto de Estudios de Desarrollo Centroamericano* (Institute for Central American Development and Studies [ICADS]) has provided semester-long internships, Spanish immersion programs, and custom short-term programs for over thirty years. They have always had a focus on social justice and providing benefits (not dependence) to the agencies and communities that host their

participants. While leading student programs over several years, the first author reflected on how much she learned alongside her students on these programs, and how much she would have enjoyed and embraced this type of learning when she was a social work practitioner. Thus, the idea of creating a custom program focused on the opportunity to engage in CE was born. Continuing education credit for professionals including social workers and counselors (LMFT, LPC) was offered, although thus far, only social workers have opted to participate in the program.

Costa Rica has a unique history within Central America. They have a long history of democracy (democratic socialism) and have "remained more racially and economically homogenous than their neighbors" (Booth, Wade, & Walker, 2015, p. 72). Costa Rica is the self-appointed "happiest place on earth," but this developed nation is not without challenges. Costa Rica's neighbors, Nicaragua and Panama, have been greatly affected by the influences of their history of colonialism as well as U.S. involvement in their politics (Booth et al., 2015). This dynamic has created challenges for Costa Rica, which has been known as the "Switzerland of Central America" with the abolishment of their army in 1948. A focus on education and providing healthcare raised their standard of living significantly. However, political unrest, poverty, and growing inequality in Nicaragua have created a south-south migration into Costa Rica (Booth et al., 2015). Similar to the attitudes toward immigrants from Central America in the United States, tensions surrounding Nicaraguan migration are evident in Costa Rica. Malone (2019) discussed how immigrants to Costa Rica "are often convenient scapegoats for the fears and worries generated by these broader economic trends" (p. 2). Nicaraguans are most frequently blamed for increases in crime and economic instability, although there is no evidence that this is true (Malone). Anti-Nicaraguan sentiments have long been a part of Costa Rican culture, and may be seen as criminals and as degrading the quality of society (Malone). On this program, participants are given an opportunity to learn more about U.S. influence and explore immigration from a different viewpoint. Listening to the stories directly from Nicaraguan women who have migrated, hearing about lessons learned from grassroots organizations, and gaining

perspective on how the U.S. is viewed by other countries is part of the learning. For example, during one of the professional groups we arranged to meet with faculty from the *Universidad de Costa Rica* who teach in the social work program. Our goal was to learn about social work education in Costa Rica in order to compare theoretical foundations, class offerings, and the process of becoming a social worker with our system. However, the meeting became uncomfortable and contentious when several Costa Rican faculty members questioned our motives. They thought we were there to "steal" their research and kept insisting we tell them what "was in it for them" since their perception was that we would take their ideas and profit from them. Even though the discomfort was real, it was a humbling experience and a lesson on perspective that could not have been learned in the classroom.

The one-week itinerary on each program included *charlas* and agency visits relating to healthcare and women and children's issues, with an overarching theme of immigration. Costa Rica has numerous Nicaraguan migrants who are frequently irregular. Both programs were similar in content, with minor changes due to scheduling issues. Following the day-to-day itineraries is a brief description of agencies and activities. A day-to-day itinerary of year one is below:

- Day 1: Pick up at central location; taken to host families
- Day 2: Welcome and orientation; tour of San José; *charla* - "The Many Faces of Costa Rica"
- Day 3: Meeting with Social Work faculty at the Universidad de Costa Rica; MUSADE
- Day 4: Visit to Casita San José; visit to COOPSAIN - a primary healthcare clinic; charla over Costa Rica healthcare
- Day 5: Visit to *Volcan Irazú* and *Basilica de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* (Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels)
- Day 6: Visit to CENDEROS; visit to a Nicaraguan community
- Day 7: Self-care day; visit to a beach

The itinerary for the second year was similar:

- Day 1: Pick up at central location; taken to host families
- Day 2: Welcome and orientation; tour of San

José; *charla* - "The Many Faces of Costa Rica"

♦ Day 3: Visit to COOPSAIN - a primary healthcare clinic; *charla* over healthcare; visit to the *Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales*

♦ Day 4: Visit to *Volcan Irazú*; *Basilica de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* (Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels)

♦ Day 5: Visit to Casa Viva; visit to Casita San José

♦ Day 6: Self-care day; visit to La Paz Waterfall and Gardens

Prior to travel, participants are provided with readings that focus on the planned learning, as well as videos over the "nuts and bolts" of the program, what to expect upon arrival, and living with a Costa Rican family. Once in Costa Rica, after having spent our first night with our host families, a *charla* titled The Many Faces of Costa Rica sets the stage for understanding the contrasts and contradictions in Costa Rica. A favorite agency is *Mujeres Unides en Salud y Desarrollo* (MUSADE), which translates to "Women United in Health and Development." This agency was founded by a hospital social worker who wanted to find a way to help women who were in situations of domestic violence. The concept of a "hospital without borders" led to the creation of an agency that would provide learning opportunities for women but which actually focused on empowerment. Women could come to the agency to learn to cook, or sew (how could a husband argue with his wife learning to be a better wife?), but in the end, become empowered to address their circumstances. Visiting agencies focused on children and adolescents (Casa Viva and Casita San José) gave us the opportunity to learn about the developing foster care system in Costa Rica and also one approach to working with adolescent mothers. Costa Rica has universal healthcare, so a visit to COOPSAIN along with a lecture over the healthcare system provided some context and insight into their system. On one program we visited with the *Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales,* which is the Costa Rican equivalent of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). A visit to the agency, *Centro de Derechos Sociales del Imigrantes,* or CENDEROS, is always a favorite. This grassroots agency developed to meet the needs of Nicaraguan migrants. We hear the history of the agency and an overview of services and then travel to a community of primarily Nicaraguan migrants to hear the stories from the women. This is always a powerful and humbling day, as we listen to the stories of survival but also the reasons for migration, which often center on lack of opportunity but also situations of violence in Nicaragua. A visit to an active volcano, *Volcán Irazú,* along with a visit to Cartago serves two purposes: self-care, but also a deeper understanding of culture and context. Cartago houses the *Basilica de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* (Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels), which is the site of the annual pilgrimage of Ticos to honor their patron saint, the *Virgen de los Angeles*, also known as *La Negrita*, which takes place in early August. During the first year of the program, we overlapped with the annual pilgrimage and four intrepid travelers (including the second author) embraced the opportunity to walk the twelve kilometers from Curridabat (the suburb of San José where ICADS is located) to Cartago. Finally, the week is capped off with a day of self-care, whether that is to the beach or to La Paz Waterfall and Gardens, which is located in the rain forest and is a tourist attraction but also serves as an animal rescue center.

Every day ends with a debriefing of the day's activities. Using reflective questions and encouraging processing and application, we discuss emotions felt, lessons learned, and what we hope to take with us. A final dinner wraps up our experiences with a discussion of the interconnectedness we have developed due to our shared experiences during the week. During an exercise using yarn tossed from person to person, participants share what they wish to take with them and what they wish to leave behind. The end result of the interwoven yarn, a visual representation of our web of connections, is discussed as participants have gained new knowledge and made new friends. Each participant is awarded with a "Most Likely to" colorful certificate, usually humorous, that is based upon things that have happened during the week. The sense of friendship and camaraderie is evident in the final gathering and lifelong connections have been forged through these programs.

Participants earned 21 Continuing Education

credits (hours, or units). As noted above, daily group reflections, or process groups, were part of our itinerary as were frequent dinners together where the conversation could continue. Additionally, all participants were housed with host families, giving them a small taste of Costa Rican life. Families are screened by our provider, ICADS, who also employs a host family coordinator. Most participants were placed singly in a host family, which is ICADS' preference so that travelers truly engage with their hosts. We travel with a bilingual facilitator, who schedules all activities, confirms with the agencies, and provides translation as needed.

Methods

This study builds on a smaller, qualitative study completed with the original group of eight travelers. IRB approval was granted for this mixed methods study, adding to the previous research, which included travelers from both cohorts. A survey was developed and disseminated through an online survey platform, and included of 15 quantitative questions and follow-up open-ended questions asking for specific examples. Skip logic was employed to word one question for faculty and for practitioners, but the questions were essentially the same. The survey link was emailed to the 15 participants from the two cohorts (excluding the second author). Questions were grounded in the AAC&U rubrics previously described and also included an opportunity for participants to give specific examples of how they perceived changes in attitudes or behaviors. The scoring of the quantitative questions was based on the concept of the Visual Analog Scale (VAS). The VAS has a long history of use in the behavioral sciences; it consists of a line of a predetermined length that includes anchor words at each end and included reference words along the length of the line. If a printed survey is used, a 10 centimeter line has been popular. In this case, using the online platform, a scale of 0-10 was used with 0 being the lowest, or least, and 10 being the highest, or most, change. Sample questions included "On a scale of 0-10, did the CE program to Costa Rica change any of your behaviors?" and "On a scale of 0-10, did the CE program to Costa Rica change the way you view immigration?"

Results

Of the 16 possible participants, 1 was excluded from the study (she is the second author) and 13 responded to the survey; however, three of those consenting failed to complete the survey. It is important to note that no demographic information was requested; due to the closeness of the researchers with the participants, responses may have been very easily identifiable. In order to encourage participation, the researchers made a conscious decision to only ask whether participants were teaching full-time or were practitioners. The two groups (N = 16) included 15 women and 1 man; across the two programs, full-time faculty (8) and practitioners (8) were evenly split. However, on the first program, six full-time faculty (including the second author) and two practitioners traveled, while on the second program, two full-time faculty and six practitioners formed the group. Travelers represented a range of ages, ethnicities, and races and came from diverse locations. Across the two programs, seven participants were bilingual. While the vast majority claim Texas as their home (n = 13), three came from out-of-state (Colorado, North Dakota, and Utah), although we do not know which participants responded to the survey. Of the survey respondents, four indicated that they taught social work full-time, while six identified as practitioners.

Questions asked in the survey were tied to the VALUE Rubrics, which provided a guide when developing the questions. For example, the Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning VALUE Rubric lists "Curiosity" as one of the foundational concepts of lifelong learning. Participants were asked, "On a scale of 0-10, did the CE program to Costa Rica enhance your curiosity about social work in other contexts?" The Global Learning VALUE Rubric lists "Personal and Social Responsibility," so participants were asked about specific changes in personal views and values, while other questions focused on the construct of "perspective taking" from this same rubric. Finally, the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric focuses on cultural self-awareness, empathy, and openness, which formed the foundation for other questions.

On most questions, participants responded that the program had, indeed, changed their perspective and their behaviors, with most

providing specific examples. There were two exceptions that led to lower means. On a question about immigration, one participant noted that they "live on the border so [they are] very aware of the immigration issues" and went on to note "[they are] saddened by our leadership and their views." On another question about changes in practice, the minimum of .80 was entered by someone that noted they were retired, and thus no longer actively practicing (although they maintain an active license). Previous experiences and current status obviously already impacted these participants, thus lowering the overall scores. A list of the questions asked, the n the minimum and maximum scores, and the SD are included in Table 1 in the appendix. Figure 1 presents the results of the VAS-based scoring; qualitative questions asking for specific examples followed each question.

See Figure 1

Qualitative Overview

Participants were asked to give specific examples following the VAS-based scaling that is reported in Figure 1. Qualitative responses were grouped by the VALUE rubrics used to guide the development of the survey. Since the constructs in the three rubrics that were selected overlapped, some of the responses also overlapped between the categories. In that case, the qualitative responses were placed in both categories for consideration of themes.

Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning

One could surmise that participants were already committed to lifelong learning simply because they chose to travel to earn CEs and explore another culture. In this rubric, feedback from participants demonstrated the integration of explicit connections between prior learning to this new experience. The passion and pursuit of continual learning was shared. Participants offered several comments that seem to indicate that their curiosity was enhanced, and that they were able to transfer knowledge and experiences but also engage in reflection.

♦ "Areas there were raised for me included the types of agencies, funding sources, approaches to service delivery." (enhance curiosity of social work in other contexts)

♦ "I really enjoyed the program Sanderos [sic]

offered to female clients escaping domestic violence (DV). I even shared those ideas with my local DV shelter." (change of behaviors)

♦ "As a teacher, I am talking about what I saw, encouraging students to be more open to other cultures, to take chances (in a safe manner) and to respect and understand that different does not mean bad." (change your teaching)

♦ "My dream is to one day write a book about social work across the globe and what social workers look like in different countries." (enhance curiosity of social work in other contexts)

Global Learning

There was the most overlap between this rubric and the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence rubric. Feedback highlighted an overall change in participants' behaviors with regard to global learning. Participants indicated a deeper understanding and awareness of social issues and global perspectives. Discussion surrounded behavioral changes with eco-conscious choices such as single-use plastics, recycling, and avoiding waste. Conveying empathy, practicing humility, ensuring inclusivity, and listening to individuals from another country were skills emphasized by participants in this area. Participants highlighted the value of the immersion in the global learning experiences of living with families, listening to clients' experiences, and visiting social service organizations. Participants noted their present pursuit to stay in touch with their Tico families in Costa Rica and continue their pursuit of global learning. Examples of responses reflecting this particular area are as follows:

♦ "I also learned more about being responsible as to the impact I might make when traveling with students to other countries - not just dropping in from the outside in 'savior' mode." (change of behaviors)

♦ "I no longer say America, I say the United States and understand how there are numerous Americas." (change of behaviors)

♦ "I now view immigration as a global issue and not an 'America-only' or a Mexico-border issue. I always knew immigration is a global issue since the

beginning of time but I wasn't conceptualizing it or actively aware of it." (change in view of immigration)

♦ "I have chosen to read and listen to podcasts regarding globalization." (change in view of globalization)

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence

Feedback from the open-ended questions related to this rubric again emphasized the ability to be immersed in the cultural experience through living with Costa Rican families, visiting social service organizations, and interacting with clients. References were made about the impact of perspective, worldview, and language. With regard to participants' roles as educators or practitioners, approaches to show more compassion, to promote opportunities to expand knowledge, and to practice with self-awareness and cultural humility were harnessed as a result of the experience. Examples of responses reflecting this particular area include:

♦ "Living in another county and listening to other views, offers a lived awareness of differences. Offers an attuned ear." (cultural humility)

♦ "Being exposed to a family -- different religious views, different ways they conduct themselves, different language and food." (cultural worldview)

♦ "Living with families made me realize the value of togetherness and less is more, materialism is overrated." (personal life)

♦ "I was encouraged and reminded to listen more and not assume because I had heard something before, it would be the same here." (change in behaviors)

♦ "Also the language barrier and the issue that came along with translating and how it frustrated some non-Spanish speakers." (cultural humility)

One advantage to technology is the ability to visualize data in different ways. In addition to the quotes provided above, a word cloud can demonstrate the integration of the constructs upon which this study was founded. Using a tool in Google™, a word cloud was created using all of the qualitative responses given by participants. Word clouds can be generated using a number of online platforms, but the common denominator is

that the word cloud layout focuses on the most used, or most prevalent, words being depicted as larger. Entering all of the qualitative responses resulted in the word cloud presented below. The platform filters out filler words, leaving us with a visualization of the qualitative responses. The word cloud, shown below in Figure 2, demonstrates the connections from the elements of the AAC&U Value Rubrics that were addressed in the participants' qualitative comments. Connections to the experience, connections to our discipline of social work, the transfer of skills and abilities, and increasing self-awareness seem to have created transformative experiences for the participants who responded, and they seem to have developed a deeper understanding of country, immigration, their worldview, and their global connections.
See Figure 2

Discussion

The results of this small study seem to indicate that, for these participants, the opportunity to travel outside of the United States, stay with host families, and learn about agencies through site visits was beneficial even as mature adults with well-established careers, whether in practice or in higher education. Each cohort developed strong bonds and some lifelong friendships were forged in addition to the transformative learning that occurred. Several participants have stayed in touch with their Costa Rican families and value those relationships. Although the program is open to several professions that need to earn continuing education, these groups represented already committed social workers who were "up" for adventure. They agreed to participate fully in the learning, engaged in pre-travel education, and threw themselves enthusiastically into each experience. Thus, their transformation was made easier because of their whole-hearted participation in the learning that was offered.

The agency site visits appeared to be very impactful, as did the experience of living with a Tico family. Gaining an enhanced global view was one of the aims of the program, and that appears to have occurred for these participants, and they seemed to integrate their experiences in Costa Rica identifying similarities, differences, and making new connections. Several noted a change in their behaviors regarding becoming

more eco-conscious (moving away from single- use straws, for example). One area that seemed to stand out for several participants was that around language, and the use of "American" versus "United Statesian." These participants were already invested in lifelong learning since they chose to travel, but they still came away with an increased commitment to continue learning through resources such as podcasts, but also through a commitment to bring their experiences into the classroom. Hearing the stories from migrants in a different context reinforced understanding for some, but opened doors to new understanding for others. In fact, the visit to a community of Nicaraguan migrants, after learning about the grassroots agency that serves them, may have had the most impact overall. The sense of global (environmental) responsibility was enhanced with a deeper understanding of both the positive and negative sides of ecotourism.

Overall, it does seem that even within this population of seasoned professionals, new knowledge and new perspectives were gained as evidenced by the quotes and the word cloud provided earlier. Participants enthusiastically share their experiences and have actively encouraged other faculty and practitioners to join the next group.

Limitations

There are, of course, limitations to this study. The number of participants was very small, so no generalizations can be made based on their responses. The sample consisted of participants who chose to leave the country, live with families, and participate in professional learning activities. These faculty and practitioners may be fundamentally different from the general population, from licensed social workers, or from other faculty in social work programs. These participants, all of whom have a master's degree or above in social work, would have had coursework and ongoing continuing education in the area of cultural humility, cultural awareness, and diverse populations.

The overlapping of the constructs as well as the concepts contained in the AAC&U rubrics may make it difficult to clearly delineate the categories where specific growth occurred. The self-report of participants in attitudes or changes

may be subject to response bias; this is a population of participants who could be affected, either consciously or subconsciously, by this phenomenon. Finally, when participants self-report changes in behavior, attitudes, or perceptions, we have no way of knowing whether or not those changes truly occurred since they are not objectively observed.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of this study, for the participants in the program, personal and professional growth appears to have occurred. There is an ongoing need for continuing education that transforms. and plans for future programs are underway. Diversifying the participants to other professionals in similar fields would be beneficial to both the participants' personal and professional lives as well as within the group. Sharing different professional perspectives and experiences would add to the transformative nature of the program as well as contributing to the understanding of our colleagues in related disciplines. Additionally, there is a need for more CE programs beyond a web-based platform or several hours spent in a physical classroom; offerings that go beyond the standard workshop could tap into deeper and richer opportunities for transformation. Making CE more transformative, as well as making it more widely available through experiential learning, could be beneficial. Social work educators should emphasize the importance of lifelong learning, in accordance with the CSWE (2015) EPAS, so that practitioners really invest in gaining new knowledge. Continuing education should include personal and professional growth, and should be much more than just "ticking the box" in case one's license is audited at renewal. Making opportunities more widely available and at a reasonable cost is important to developing competent professionals and lifelong learners, thus securing the future of the social work profession.

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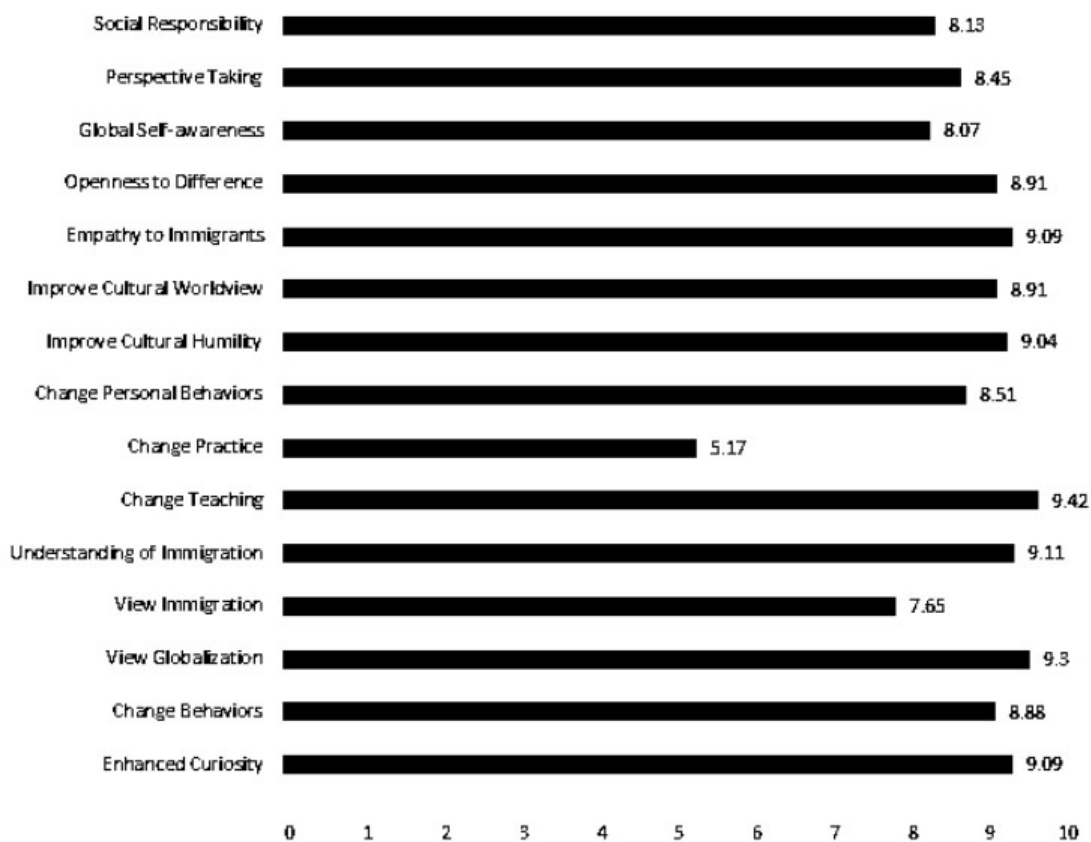
Figure 1: Mean for Survey Questions

Figure 2

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