

STUDENT REFLECTION:

Jennifer Montgomery, Class of 2014

Current M.Ed. student

After taking courses regarding English language learners and teaching English as a second language at TCU, I have gained such a valuable insight into teaching that I would not have otherwise had. The neighborhood I grew up in was not too culturally diverse so I was not exposed to many cultures before going to college and traveling. After re-visiting the schools I attended growing up, I have seen how they are now significantly more culturally diverse and how a knowledge of different cultures and strategies to teaching students whose first language is not English is critical. Without the curriculum at TCU that stresses the importance of understanding and getting to know students' cultures, I would not have thought to do so and I would not have learned that some cultures are very different than the United States when it comes to school (e.g. some cultures find it unacceptable not to help a peer if they ask for help at any time, while we would consider doing this on a test cheating). I now see the importance of learning about the cultures of my students so that I am more knowledgeable about what to expect and so that I can also try to include these cultures in my classroom. I also think it is very important to teach and expose my students to cultures that are not even represented in my classroom, as it is important for students to learn to be accepting of cultures that are different from their own and to be able to understand why some cultures have certain traditions. In order to promote a more peaceful and accepting classroom, community, and world, I think it is important to start with educating students about other cultures in the classroom so they can learn to be more accepting of others at an early age. TCU has given me this mindset through my education classes, and I am so thankful for being able to recognize how important it is for me as a teacher to take the extra time to be more culturally-aware. It has been very helpful to see how the teachers in my field placement managed being ESL teachers, as I was able to identify practices from these teachers that I want to incorporate in my future classroom in addition to critiquing and making note of what could have been done in a better manner.

I was really able to become more culturally-aware during my two study abroad experiences with the TCU College of Education. During a summer session, I was able to travel to four different countries, learn about the educational systems in those countries, and immerse myself in those various cultures. I got to visit a school in Holland, take a Montessori course in Amsterdam, and receive a talk on Reggio Children in Reggio Emilia, Italy. I was able to visit the Anne Frank museum, travel to the D-Day beaches and museum in Normandy, visit several museums in Paris, and tour the United Nations. By visiting these historic and important sites, I was able to gain an additional perspective on some topics I might actually be teaching in school. For example, visiting the Anne Frank museum was an incredible and indescribable experience, walking through the same room Anne Frank lived in and really beginning to understand how she had to live in almost complete darkness in her room for so long. Student teaching in Europe during February of my senior year was also an amazing experience. I visited five different countries during that time period, learning more about the points of interest in each country than I ever could have through a textbook. Visiting Stonehenge was surreal; Stonehenge is such a well-known historical site that I have learned about through many classes and seeing the actual stone formation in person was unbelievable. I loved receiving tours at each of the places



we visited and learning additional information through the tours and the supplemental brochures we got to keep. I loved immersing myself in each of the different cultures and learning what was truly unique about each place and its culture. Ever since going on these trips, I have been just overcome with wanderlust and wanting to see the world, experience different cultures, and learn about different historical and cultural sites. Teaching and living in Leuven, Belgium during the weekdays in February was truly an incredible experience. I got to observe the teaching practices in the international school that I helped out in and compare these practices to those in the United States. I was able to learn about what the schools valued and how they ensured that students were learning the curriculum in a meaningful way. I mainly helped out in a preschool classroom while student teaching, which I am very thankful for. Some of these students were very young, so they were still somewhat acquiring English. Since English was used in the classroom, it was very much like a classroom in the United States supporting ESL students. The students were very culturally diverse, and I loved trying to not only learn about some of their cultures but also watching how they interacted with one another. I loved how the school really incorporated the students' cultures into the curriculum and allowed for the lessons to not only address the main teaching objective but also an international objective that helped the students to learn more about their classmates' cultures and background. Living in a region of Belgium that spoke primarily Dutch, I got a taste of what it was like to be immersed into a culture you do not know much about. This point was true in a lot of my weekend travels as well. I do not in any way speak Dutch, and I found myself learning and recognizing some words that were essential to my getting around and living in Belgium in addition to relying on visual supports. After returning to the United States, I was able to really reflect on my experience and relate it to how an immigrant or someone who does not speak English would feel like living in the United States; this allowed for me to develop empathy and an understanding for these people and my future students. I would not trade my abroad experiences for anything, and I believe especially that my student teaching experience was so valuable and that I grew as a person and as a teacher through that experience. I have not heard of any other schools that my friends go to that allow for them to student teach in a foreign country, and I am so grateful that TCU has incorporated this opportunity into its education program. I find that I am more culturally-aware as a person, quicker to defend others when people may make culturally (or non-culturally) insensitive comments, and filled with a greater desire to learn.

STUDENT REFLECTION:
Shawna Williams, Class of 2014
Current M.Ed. student



I taught in Wavre which is about a 30 min train ride from where I stayed in Leuven, Belgium. Leuven is Dutch speaking but Wavre is on the other side of the language border so they speak French. My school was part of an English immersion program so the students are taught in English half the week and French the other half. There is an English and French teacher for each grade that work together. I got to be a part of a second grade, third grade, and a kindergarten classroom. In Belgium the teacher stands at the front of the room and lectures while the students sit in rows and do their work. They also have a coat room outside the classroom where they hang their coats and leave their backpacks. This strict structure was in second and third grade and very different from the interactive learning that I am used to in the U.S. In kindergarten it was more of what I would see back home like singing songs, calendar work, and centers. I really enjoyed the younger children because they were eager to play and talk with me. The young ones are just learning English so they spoke French to me a lot. When I would shake my head not understanding, they would mime for me or rack their brains for the English words they needed. It was really neat to see them thinking this way. I got to read books to each class so they could hear words spoken in a different accent.



I really like the way the immersion program works, it makes a lot of sense to me and goes along with how my own brain functions. I noticed that the children in Belgium are a lot more affectionate towards each other and their teachers. At home children might greet each other with a "hey" or high five. At my school in Belgium, everyone is greeted with a kiss on the cheek and an embrace. It was interesting for me to see this difference in customs and having been there for almost a month I found myself participating as well, not even thinking about it being "different" from what I'd been taught. I had to remind myself how to act "properly" when I got home. I also noticed that the children tend to take risks more and are more creative in Belgium. At home students receive rubrics for everything, even art and are told exactly what to do. The result is a lot of projects that just reach the surface of what is taught but don't delve deeper, as well as cookie cutter "art" that all look the same. In Belgium the teacher says make a drawing or a poster and the students get to work. If they leave out something or are off track, the teacher steers them to the main idea and lets them go from there. The end result is artwork simply from their own minds, as well as a deeper understanding of the material because the process of making the final product is what's important, where the learning happened, not just the final product.

This difference has a lot to do with teaching. In Belgium the teachers purposely let the students work things out on their own. I found it hard to not just tell the students how to do something, especially when I knew an easier way than what they were doing. However, I discovered that by letting them work things out on their own, they often came up with solutions I had never thought of and or a developed a more conceptual understanding of the concept. I think if I were to teach my students in the U.S. in this manner they would freak out at the lack of structure, but I would still like to work some of this style into my own classroom. Overall, the English teachers and students were very welcoming to me and my fellow TCU students. It was really interesting for me to see the differences and similarities in the elementary classrooms. I am definitely taking what I learned and will implement it in my future classrooms.

STUDENT REFLECTION:

Janekka Colbert, Class of 2014

Current M.Ed. student

Excerpts from Janekka's blog "MRS. COLBERT's ADVENTURE: My teaching journey in Holland"

My First Week Teaching

February 19, 2014

I have been blessed to be placed at the International School of The Hague in Holland. The school is a twenty minute walk from the bungalow that I am staying in. The path that I walk down each day is about one mile. One thing about this trip I have been walking a lot. The first day that I arrived at the school, I was astonished by the excellence. The staff, the curriculum, and the students instantly made me want to go home pack up my family and move to Holland. I quickly returned to reality and told myself to be in the moment and enjoy the journey. The school has an international focus and celebrates diversity. The class that I am assigned to is equivalent to 3rd grade in the States. My cooperating teacher, Mrs. Bradley is from South Africa and she has a British accent. I find myself emulating her unconsciously and by the end of the day, I have a British accent;)



The first lesson that I taught was on the second and third that I arrived. The first lesson was All About Me and my culture. I had to explain my heritage and how I was not 100% African. It was a very interesting lesson. The second lesson that I taught was on the celebration of Black History Month. The students were exposed to the late and great Nelson Mandela and I tied their prior knowledge to the Civil Rights Movement that took place in the U.S. Then I introduced them to Martin Luther King Jr. I could not believe that I was able to teach the students about Black History and tie it to the apartheid movement that took place in South Africa. That was the best lesson that I have taught to date.

My teacher has allowed me to teach about the United States, Flat Stanley, and a wrap up lesson about Ft. Worth. I have been so blessed to have a wonderful teacher as Mrs. Bradley. She has allowed me access to her beautiful students and I am so grateful for her. I am teaching my last lesson tomorrow and I am going to Skype my students in the United States with my class in Holland. I feel the tears about to flow.

The Last Week at the ISH;(

March 2, 2014

The last week that I taught at the ISH was a very emotional week, but I managed to get through it. When I first began my journey at the ISH, a few of the teachers informed me that my name sounded Dutch. I did not believe them at first until several other teachers told me the same thing. Then I came across this cup in the teacher's lounge and I was like no way, what are the odds that my name is very similar to the name on the cup. Jip and Janneke is a series of books that began in the Netherlands. Well, my name is very close to this name, and I have concluded that my name is more Dutch than anything else.

The students in Mrs. Bradley's class blessed me with gifts and hugs on the last day. I attempted to Skype the students in the United States on the last day, and due to technical difficulties we were not able to speak.

Mrs. Bradley my cooperating teacher was brave enough to allow me to be apart of her classroom. On the last day she told me that I brought a light hearted aspect to her classroom. I was so touched by her love for her students and I feel that I have a friend for life. The receptionist at the ISH was a pure blessing each day we walked in. I will always remember her.

