

# **Intrepid Teacher Abroad: Advancing Teacher Knowledge and Professional Achievement through A Short Term, International, Early Field Experience Teaching Place-Based Art in Japan**

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## **Abstract**

*This study describes advancements in teacher knowledge and professional achievement through a short term, early field experience, for preservice teachers who taught place-based art lessons in a community-center in Japan. Eight U.S. undergraduate, pre-credential students participated in this study. The author of this paper, a participant observer, collected and examined pre- and post-questionnaire responses, participant observation field notes, photographs, and one three-years-after reflection, through constant comparison, thematic analysis, and explanatory case study. This study found no negative outcomes for preservice teachers. Findings from this study concur with a growing body of literature that explores how a short-term, international, early field experience can foster the development of teacher knowledge, including pedagogy, subject matter, students and environmental context, and further suggest that short term, international, early field experiences teaching place-based art can foster professional achievement.*

## **Introduction**

Early field experience (EFE) refers to teaching experiences that occur prior to the teaching practicum that is a part of a formal teacher preparation program (Smalley & Retallick, 2012). This qualitative study explores teaching place-based art in a short term, international EFE placement in Japan. EFE teacher questionnaire responses suggest that this experience can influence development of teacher knowledge and a three-years-later reflection from one of the eight teachers who participated further suggests that short term international EFEs can also foster professional achievement. Approval for this study was granted by the Human Subjects Review Committee. Participants gave informed consent.

EFE abroad combines two endeavors for which only the intrepid need apply, teaching without experience and traveling internationally. Place-based art education blends two content areas: place-based and art education. The term, “place-based,” also referred to as, “community-based” (Smith & Sobel, 2010) and “place-conscious” (Budge, 2016 and Gruenewald, 2003), includes cultural, social, natural and built environments, and the flora, fauna and minerals that exist in environments. Place-based can also include past, present and future contexts of a place.

Current research in place-based art education supports curricula that combine location, current issues and the arts (see Bequette, 2014; Bertling, 2015; Paatela-Nieman et al, 2016; Powell, 2008 and 2010, Power &

Bennett, 2015; Rex & Woywod, 2014; and Rolling, 2012). Naturalist Gary Snyder writes about the “commons,” or a, “locally held in common place” (pp. 27-51), and its relationship to its inhabitants and to the larger regions of which it is a part. Snyder writes, “To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are a part of a part, and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole. You start with the part you are whole in” (Snyder, 1990, p. 41). For Snyder the importance of gaining deeper understandings of the self and the local supersedes understandings of the other or the distant.

The environmental context of a place may include many cultural perspectives. Cultural perspective facilitates recognition of the complexities of what is understood as culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and includes perspectives that draw from and/or contribute to knowledge and experience (Handa & Tippins, 2012). EFEs can provide future teachers with understandings of the teaching profession including teacher knowledge (Egeland, 2016, Smalley & Retallick, 2012 and Ingersoll *et al.* 2014), professional identity (Fletcher & Luft, 2011 and Welsh & Schaffer, 2017), and the role of culture in teaching and learning (Coffey, 2010; Fitts & Grossel, 2012; Handa & Tippins, 2012; McCadden & Rose, 2008 and Richards *et al.*, 1994). Teacher knowledge, is an active, rather than static set of understandings that teachers have and continually develop that include, “knowledge of pedagogy, subject matter, students, and environmental context” (Cochran *et al.* [1993] as cited in Ingersoll *et al.* 2014).

In the arts, international EFEs can be particularly robust because the arts themselves are languages that have distinct characteristics from spoken and written languages and, therefore, teaching and learning in the arts can transcend some spoken and written language barriers; however, there is little research on international EFE *in the arts* (Henry & Costantino, 2015). Emmanuel (2005) studied pre-service music teachers in a short-term, intercultural, culturally diverse immersion and found that, though brief (3 weeks), the experiences had dramatic effects on future teacher participants’ cultural and pedagogical attitudes and beliefs. Power (2013) conducted a case study of one pre-service music teacher in a long-term (one year) international EFE placement in Malaysia and found, “growing self-confidence with cultural interactions” (p. 69), as well as understandings of teaching and learning barriers, such as a limited role of music in the school setting and a predominance of musical influences on the students from YouTube. Building on a framework of visual art as a language that can transcend and bridge some language barriers, Henry and Costantino (2015) studied a cohort of future visual art teachers in a semester-long international EFE in Italy. They found long-term effects for the future teacher participants in terms of their re-examination of taken-for-granted cultural beliefs and of second language learners in the art classroom.

EFE gained acceptance as a component of teacher education in the 1980s (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). To be effective, EFE programs must provide supervision, structural organization and classroom contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Myers, 1996; Ziechner, 2010 as cited in Heafner & Plaisance, 2012). EFE is required in most teacher education programs although the duration of time, the amount of supervision and the types of teaching locals vary (Darling-Hammond, 2006). EFE experiences are recognized as supporting growth of teacher knowledge, for example,

“developing pedagogical skills, a sense of self as teacher, and positive dispositions towards different groups of children” (National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008, as cited in Fitts & Gross, 2012).

For EFE placements to benefit pre-service teachers, they should be well-planned and take place in positive learning environments with quality educational professionals” (Freeman, 2009-2010, p. 20 and Goodman, 1988). The EFE teacher participants in this study worked closely with U. S. art educator supervisors in preparation for their travels, including selecting and planning their place-based art lessons. The participants designed lessons that utilized themes, techniques and arts media with which they felt comfortable. The supervising art educators and members of a Japanese non-profit organization (NPO) prepared the site and materials and supervised the lessons. International EFE teachers face challenges posed by both their relative lack of teaching experience and by challenges that accompany international travel including culturally and linguistically unfamiliar settings (Coffey, 2010 and Fitts & Gross, 2012). However, through traveling abroad, one gains first-hand experience with different cultures that cannot be gained through secondary sources.

Research on EFE and teacher preparation programs in international service-learning placements (King, 2004; Knudson Miller & Gonzalez, 2010 and Talbot, 2011), in urban classroom placements (Richards et al, 1994) and in community-center placements (Case & Traynor, 2016; Handa & Tippins, 2012 and McDonald et al, 2011) suggests that these contexts provide amplified opportunities for future teachers to gain teacher knowledge. While longer-term, international EFEs (a full-term and in some cases over a year) have the obvious advantages of quantity of time (see Mahon, 2007; McCadden & Rose, 2008; and Talbot, 2011), extended travel abroad can be cost prohibitive for students and educational institutions. In studies of short-term, international EFEs (less than a full school term), current research finds that, while brief, they can provide robust learning environments for future teachers (Bonnett, 2015; Campbell & Walta, 2015; King, 2004; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008 and Willard-Holt, 2001).

## **Setting**

The location for this three-summertime-long project that brought 8 American college students to Japan to teach art was an island midway among a string of islands between the Japanese mainland in the north and the island of Okinawa in the south. The population of the town is about 73,000. The director of this project provided Japanese-English translation during each of the art lessons.

The community center where lessons took place provided large, well-lit classrooms with ample sinks, electricity, large tables, etc. The art classes taught by the EFE teachers were free to the students and advertised locally. The students were Japanese, were only fluent in Japanese, and most lived within walking distance of the community center.

Supervision and structural organization of EFE programs is central to the success of the programs (Cruichshank & Armaline, 1986 as cited in Heafner and Plaisance, 2012). While the EFE teachers were ultimately responsible for their own lessons, the U. S. university supervisors provided guidance throughout the process. Teamwork among the supervisors (including this author), community volunteers from Japan, members of the NPO and among the EFE teachers themselves, supported the outcomes of this project.

The NPO provided housing and financial support towards travel for each of the U.S. EFE teachers. Accommodations included staying with a family or staying in a home that was not currently otherwise occupied. These residences were within walking distance of the town center and the community center. In addition to having time to prepare their lessons, the teachers were treated to a variety of local excursions, including nature preserves, beaches and museums, and meal-time gatherings/celebrations in their honor.

The EFE teachers taught seven different art lessons: “Stain Glass” Windows (it was actually translucent plastic sheets on clear glass windows), Paper Lanterns, Painted Tote Bags, Spiral Staircase Mural, Relief Printmaking, Paper Clay Animal Sculptures, and Comic Books (Plates 1-7). Three participants co-taught two lessons and five lessons were taught by one teacher each, thus there were eight EFE teachers and seven lessons.

Plate 1 “Stain Glass” Windows



Plate 2 Paper Lanterns



Plate 3 Painted Tote Bags



Plate 4 Spiral Staircase Mural





Plate 5 Relief Printmaking



Plate 6 Paper Clay Animal Sculptures



Plate 7 Comic Books



## **Participants**

A Japanese NPO supported this project, which took place over three consecutive summers (2012-2014), as a component of the NPO's efforts to increase exposure to culture and English language for residents of a small town on this small island.

The director of this project is a founding member of the NPO and also the EFE teachers' professor in the United States. She participated each summer. This author, also the EFE teachers' professor, co-supervised the EFE teachers' lesson planning in the U.S. and co-supervised the lessons in Japan during the second of the three summers.

The eight EFE teacher were selected by volunteer committees who reviewed and ranked their written statements of interest. Five of the EFE teacher participants were female and three were male. Each was in her or his early-to-mid-twenties. Seven were of European descent and one was of African descent. Each participant was an undergraduate senior with little or no prior teaching experience. Six were art education majors (BA), (one of these was also a BFA Studio major), one was a BFA Studio major, and one was an Anthropology major.

Twenty to 25 local residents of the Japanese town participated as students in each lesson. These students' ages ranged from elementary school age (ages 7-13), to adults (18-49), to older adults (50 and older). Each lesson had one to three teen, adult or older adult participants and the rest were elementary school age.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Place-based art lessons were central to the EFEs described in this study. Critical social theory posits that humanity shares responsibility for the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants. Critical social theory prioritizes social justice over individual goals (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, pp. 59-61). Place-based education is a form of social justice as the curricula focus on the wellbeing of a particular place and its inhabitants towards the wellbeing of contiguous places and peoples, and, ultimately, beyond. Place-based education begins with the familiar and works its way to the less-familiar and to the non-familiar.

International travel provides first-hand experiences with different cultures. The arts (in school and outside of school) can provide insights, including insights into different cultures, that are different from those that can occur through other disciplines and other human endeavors. The level of creative engagement and open-ended endeavors with the arts are, in many ways, unique to the arts (Eisner, 2002). In this spirit of open-ended endeavors, inductive analysis (Patton, 1990, p. 40) in this study allowed for an open-ended approach to arriving at new understandings about the experiences future teachers can have when they teach place-based art lessons in a short term, international EFE.

## Methodology

Pre- and post-EFE questionnaire responses, a three-years-later reflection, participant observation field notes, and photographs of events provided data for this study. The data collection and analysis in this study were guided by the above-mentioned paradigms of critical social theory and inductive inquiry, and by the existing body of research on place-based education, place-based arts education, EFE and international EFE reviewed above. Current research on EFE in community center placements, EFE in urban placements and EFE in international placements (reviewed above) has used the following data sources: participant observation field notes, questionnaires, reflections, interviews, journals, post EFE lessons taught and one-or-more-years-later interviews or reflections.

Photographs provided visual references to the EFE lessons. In art education research, photographs serve to inform or remind us of details about teachers, students, art projects and classroom settings. Photographs can help us to see and better understand complex experiences, such as those found in classroom settings (Keats, 2009, as cited in Snyder, 2012 and Rose, 2007, as cited in Powell, 2010). Photographs can vividly capture dynamic settings and events (Creswell, 2003, pp. 181-188, Eisner, 1991, p.187, and Patton, 1990, p. 247).

Participant observation field notes included notes from meetings with the EFE teachers during initial lesson planning, from their final planning and preparation on site, and from observations of two lessons taught in the second of the three summers.

The pre- and post-questionnaire responses and the three-years-later reflection comprise the primary body of data used in this study. One participant, Jackson<sup>1</sup>, provided a three-years-later reflection. He was asked to reflect upon his experience in Japan and his original responses to the pre- and post-questions. He was also asked to describe how the EFE had influenced subsequent events in his life. An explanatory case study explores a pattern that is noted in a given context (Yin as cited in Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 156). In this study, the explanatory case study of Jackson compares patterns found in the questionnaire responses from all of the EFE teachers with Jackson's responses three years after his EFE experience.

The pre- and post-questionnaire responses comprise the primary body of data used in this study. Coffey (2010) found that EFE teacher reflections provided the most powerful narrative of the experiences they had. The questionnaire responses, while not narratives, embody participants' reflections on the EFE in Japan. Each novice teacher completed a pre-EFE and a post-EFE questionnaire via email. Six questions were posed in the present or future tense for the pre-EFE and in the past tense in the post-EFE.

### Pre- and Post-Questions

1. In what ways is/was your event relevant to culture?

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<sup>1</sup> Names of participants, groups and places in this study are pseudonyms.



2. In what ways is/was your event relevant to community?
3. In what ways is/was your event relevant to place?
4. In what ways will/did your students become better inhabitants, better stewards, of their community and region through this event?
5. In what ways will/did your students have opportunities to look inside themselves and learn about themselves in this event?
6. In what ways will/did the concept (literally and figuratively) of, “the classroom” come into play in or be removed from your event?

Questionnaire response coding included: Pre- or Post-, initials of the participant, the year in which the participant taught, and the question number (1-6). A response to one question often presented more than one idea, therefore each discrete idea received its own designation. Constant Comparison and Thematic Analysis guided inductive coding and analysis. Constant comparison, “codes text for words or phrases that stand out while constantly comparing codes with each other in search for concepts and themes. . . Thematic analysis involves reading and rereading text and searching holistically for themes” (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, pp. 43-4). Constant comparison and thematic analysis provided an approach for identifying and examining themes inductively, as they emerged in the data.

Notation of frequency of responses that fit into the emerging categories for each of the six questions in the pre- and post-EFE questionnaires provides a distillation of the content of the participants’ responses.

## Findings

The questionnaire data analysis summaries identify and describe growth in participants’ teacher knowledge through the number of occurrences within a category and by number of emerging categories. An explanatory case study of Jackson, offers further illustration of development of teacher knowledge three years after this EFE experience and also indicates professional achievement that may be attributed to this EFE experience. As stated above, teacher knowledge includes knowledge of pedagogy, subject matter, students, and environmental context, or place. The findings presented below suggest that the EFE art teachers developed teacher knowledge as a result of their experiences in Japan and that a short-term international EFE can foster future professional achievement.

### Teacher Knowledge of Students and Place

Questions 1, 2 and 3 drew participants’ attention to the relevance of culture, community and place in their lessons (Table 1). For each of these questions, the number of responses increased from pre- to post-EFE. Comparison of pre- to post-responses suggests development in knowledge of environmental context. For example, in responses to Question 1 regarding the role of culture in the lesson, the somewhat generic wording of the pre-EFE responses regarding students, such as, “their favorite aspects of culture,” shifts in post-EFE responses to more developed sense of environmental context, referring, in four instances, to the,

“unique qualities of place.” Responses to Question 3, regarding place, indicate development of teacher knowledge about students and environmental context from pre- to post-, for example:

*(Pre-) Students will be encouraged to increase awareness of the “space” they live in, by creating, by hand, an animal sculpture that is found in [their island],*

*(Post-) The participants were also asked to create images of things that were significant in their personal lives. At the end of the workshop, participants shared the images they had created with the rest of the group. The intention was to show the diverse interests, and common elements, that play a part in identity of a community and its members.*

Other examples of development of teacher knowledge of students, from responses to Question 3 include a comparison of pre-questionnaire responses, such as, “increase awareness of place,” to more developed ideas found in the post-questionnaire responses to Question 3, including noting specific aspects of the natural environment, noting features that are considered unique to this environment, noting students’ love of particular aspects of the environment, and noting that members of this community have commonly shared knowledge of their local environment (Table 1).

Table 1

Questions	Pre-EFE	Post-EFE	Summarizing Interpretation
1. In what ways is your lesson relevant to culture?	5 culture as a component of place 2 compare/contrast cultures 1 favorite aspects of culture 1 traditional materials 1 religion 1 participant-driven choice	4 culture as a component of place 4 unique qualities of place 4 compare/contrast cultures 4 religion 2 historical context 1 community coming together as a culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of responses from pre- to post- increased from 11 to 19</li> <li>• 3 categories appear in both pre- &amp; post-</li> <li>• from pre- to post-, novice-level teacher knowledge such as “favorite aspects of culture” are replaced by more developed-level teacher knowledge such as, “community coming together”</li> </ul>
2. In what ways is your lesson relevant to community?	5 teaching and learning about place 4 people coming together 1 not taking place for granted 1 pride of place 1 not sure	8 teaching and learning <i>in</i> and about place 7 people coming together 2 learning English 1 pride of place 1 learning and sharing about oneself in the community 1 local community welcomed the foreigners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of responses from pre- to post- increased from 12 to 20</li> <li>• 3 categories appear in both pre- &amp; post-</li> <li>• from pre- to post-, novice-level teacher knowledge of teaching and learning about place grew in frequency and became more developed-level teacher knowledge of learning <i>in</i> place</li> </ul>

<p>3. In what ways is your lesson relevant to place?</p>	<p>2 natural surroundings                  2 images to be created in artwork                  1 participants' opportunities to reflect on their time in place environment                  1 increased awareness of place                  1 group-driven decisions                  1 not sure</p>	<p>4 natural surroundings                  1 images to be created in artwork                  4 unique features of place                  1 participants' love of particular aspects of place                  1 aspects of place that are commonly known among participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of responses from pre- to post- increased from 8 to 11</li> <li>• 2 categories appear in both pre- &amp; post-</li> <li>• "nature" and "place" are strongly featured regarding "place"</li> <li>• from pre- to post-, one mention of novice-level teacher knowledge, "increase awareness of place," became a more developed-level, specifying participants' "love of particular aspects of place" and recognizing what is "commonly known" to participants about place</li> </ul>
<p>4. In what ways will participants become better inhabitants, better stewards of their community and region through this lesson?</p>	<p>5 people coming together and learning about one another                  3 artwork as a way of expressing understandings and learning new understandings of place                  2 learning more about place                  1 not taking place for granted, 1 continued practice of sharing new perspectives on place                  1 refers to developing a desire to protect place natural habitat                  1 refers to not being sure</p>	<p>11 people coming together and learning about one another                  4 artwork as a way of expressing understandings and learning new understandings of place                  4 desire to protect the natural habitat                  2 project as a gift to place community                  1 learning English                  1 art project as a continuing reminder of the beauty of place                  1 art project as a celebration of place                  1 creating a new role for place among neighboring locals                  1 reinforcing respect for place                  1 meeting foreigners (the EFE teachers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of responses from pre- to post- increased from 13 to 27</li> <li>• 2 categories appear in both pre- &amp; post-</li> <li>• number of categories increases from pre- to post- from 6 to 10</li> <li>• increased attention from pre- to post- on community members getting to know each other and to art as catalyst for teaching &amp; learning</li> </ul>

Question 4 drew participants' attention to how their lesson might affect students' future engagement as stewards of the place where they live (Table 1). The number of responses more than doubled from pre- to post-, 13 to 27, and the number of categories increased from 6 to 10. These increases suggest that the EFE

teachers gained knowledge of students and of environmental context in terms of how the art lesson could have a positive influence on students as future inhabitants of a place.

In addition to quantity, the quality of teacher knowledge of students and place increased as noted in pre- to post-responses to Question 4 that include references to the “importance” of natural elements and the “understanding” of students, for example:

*(Pre-) Hopefully, through the investigation and discussion of important natural elements . . . , participants can better understand what things need to be safeguarded in their cities and rural areas.*

*(Post-) [My] students will become better inhabitants, better stewards . . . because they will have this constant reminder of how beautiful [the city that they live in] is. Every time they see the windows, it will remind them of the wonderful plants and animals that they share their island with, and what a wonderful gift that alone is. They are blessed with living in such a beautiful city and hopefully they can appreciate all the little plants and animals that they live with.*

Responses to Questions 1-4 regarding culture, community, place and stewardship show development in quantity and quality of teacher knowledge of students and environmental context, or place.

**Teacher Knowledge of Subject Matter and Pedagogy**

Question 5 (Table 2) drew participants’ attention to what the Japanese students might learn about themselves as a result of participating in the lesson. Responses to Question 5 describe a variety of ways in which the EFE teachers’ thought that their students could and did learn about themselves through making art. While Question 5 did not specifically ask for art subject matter-specific responses, in the pre-EFE responses there are 2 references to art content in terms of creative self-expression and in the post- there are 5 references to art and making art and 2 to comparing and contrasting different cultures, culture being recognized here as a potentially thematic and aesthetic component of art.

Table 2

Question	Pre-EFE	Post-EFE	Summarizing Interpretation
5. In what ways will participants have opportunities to look inside themselves and learn about themselves in this lesson?	<p>3 through awareness of what they love about their city</p> <p>3 through awareness of themselves as viable members of place</p> <p>2 through awareness of creative self-expression</p>	<p>5 through art and art making</p> <p>3 in juxtaposition with the uniqueness of place</p> <p>2 through collaboration</p> <p>2 through compare/contrast of their culture with other cultures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of responses from pre- to post- remained the same, 12</li> <li>• categories in pre- &amp; post- are different from each other, with exception of attention to “group setting”</li> </ul>

	<p>2 through awareness of how they work in a group setting</p> <p>1 through awareness of being a product of place</p> <p>1 through compare and contrast of themselves and other people</p>		<p>and "collaboration," which appear in both</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of categories decreases from pre- to post- from 12 to 4</li> <li>• pre- &amp; post- responses, are strongly tuned in to the role of art and creativity-5 responses in post- and 2 in pre-</li> <li>• place is strongly featured in pre-</li> <li>• collaboration is strongly featured in post-</li> </ul>
<p>6. In what ways will the concept (literally and figuratively) of "the classroom" come into or be removed from your lesson?</p>	<p><b>Classroom:</b></p> <p>2 the concept of classroom as less pertinent in art education</p> <p>1 each (total 13): the city being the classroom, the finished project as a classroom for those who walk by and see it, not wanting students to think of the space they work together in as a classroom, not expecting students to think of the space as a classroom, classroom as lecture, Power Point, inside, assigning, organizing, opening to new ideas, structure, strict confining, introduction to conceptual realm</p> <p><b>Not Classroom:</b></p> <p>1 each (total 10): fun, having some freedom, a little step-by-step, exploration encouraged, using tools, not instruction, students will be the teachers, guiding not teaching, collaborating, moving freely in the space</p>	<p>1 need for balance between classroom and not classroom</p> <p>2 classroom/not classroom is a conceptual idea</p> <p><b>Classroom:</b></p> <p>7 lecture about art</p> <p>5 organized/structured activities</p> <p>2 each (total 20): controlled art making, Power Point, lesson begins, lesson ends, traditional/typical, group critiques, teacher/aids authoritative, groups assigned w/open-ended discussion topic, time limits, is a conceptual idea</p> <p>1 each (total 22): teacher encourages students to ask questions, students are asked and expected to answer questions, teacher gives prizes for correct answers, teacher has students' attention, project overviews, distribute supplies, be on task, has a podium, vocabulary, instruction, guidance, language barriers are a problem, language barriers are identified, possibilities are introduced, teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of responses in pre- and post- are more numerous than in Qs1-6</li> <li>• number of responses increased from pre- to post- from 25 to 96</li> <li>• noting many single instance responses in pre- and in post-, the number of categories increases from pre- to post- from 24 to 57</li> <li>• in pre- and post- there are more descriptions of classroom than not classroom</li> <li>• post- responses include richer descriptors than pre- to describe effective environments for teaching and learning, such as, possibilities, feeling comfortable, lighten-up and reflection</li> </ul>



		<p>introduces herself, place where students make art, place where students make presentations, place where students feel comfortable with creative expression, place where students feel comfortable talking about art/artmaking, place to spend less time in, place that feels restrictive, place defined as classroom</p> <p><b>Not Classroom:</b></p> <p><b>3 each (total 6):</b> up-to-students art making place, place where class session ends up</p> <p><b>2 each (total 8):</b> art making place, is a conceptual idea, place where teacher/aid is not authoritative, a place for individual problem-solving</p> <p><b>1 each (total 25):</b> the community center lobby, the community center library, a place that is like a classroom, a place the classroom transforms into, teacher moves freely, students move freely, integrated, freestyle, student decision making, feels unrestrictive, a place in which to lighten-up, nontraditional, a place successful teachers bring students to, a place where you want to spend more time, artistic freedom, reflection, more collaborative place, more self-directed place, a more open place, a place where you are resourceful, a sandbox, a place of discovery, a place of exploration, a place of creativity, a place to decide how to express</p>	
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Both pre- and post- sets of responses to Question 5 allude to some form of group dynamic: membership in a place (3 instances in pre-), group setting (2 instances in pre-) and collaboration (2 instances in post-). These indicate awareness on the part of EFE teachers of pedagogy in terms of group versus individual

classroom practices. While there are 5 such references in pre-EFE responses and only 2 in post-EFE responses, the unsolicited attention to group dynamic as art pedagogy that diminishes in quantity from pre- to post-EFE responses may point out that the EFE teachers had anticipated but had not achieved collaborative pedagogical practices during their art lessons. In formal education, pre-service teachers are encouraged to plan for and practice groupwork, for example, peer group critique, but this can be among the most difficult aspects of teaching art. Further, art students usually do their own creative work. Group projects can be difficult for art teachers to plan for in comparison to the more traditional individual art projects. Perhaps the EFE teachers learned that collaboration pedagogy is not as easy to achieve as they had thought before the EFE.

Question 6 (Table 2) drew participants' attention to their concept of the classroom itself. While pre-EFE responses attend to specifics of what art classrooms are like and are not like, post-EFE responses suggest that participants saw the art classroom as one physical space that changes when classroom practices shift:

*When it was time to work, we worked right in front and on the windows in the front, first floor lobby and library areas. The classroom came back into play when we asked each group to talk about their work.*

The art classroom is further described in post-EFE data in terms of shifting perspective:

*The event took place in, quite literally, a classroom. The event began when I gave a lecture and a Power Point. Participants were encouraged to participate in the form of asking questions, answering them, and even competing for free leftover materials if they got questions from my lecture correct. In the end, each participant presented their project and their animal, one by one, much like a classroom setting.*

and,

*In the middle of the exercise, however, the project transformed from a typical classroom setting into an open sandbox setting of exploration and discovery. Each individual had to figure out, in their own way, exactly how to make their animal. They also had to use their own resources and creativity to design the platform completely, themselves.*

The number of pre- and post-EFE responses to Question 6 is notably higher than the number of responses to the other questions, 25 in the pre- and 96 in the post-. It is strongly suggested from this increase in the number of responses and in the increase in the number of categories of responses from pre- to post- (from 3 in pre- to 9 in post-) that the EFE teachers acquired knowledge of new and numerous forms of pedagogy in terms of the classroom itself as a malleable pedagogical agent. With few exceptions, they thought of lectures/instruction, classroom management, and indoor spaces, etc., as classroom environments; and, they thought of a variety of unstructured experiences, such as, self-direction, exploration, and choices, as non-classroom environments, or at least as non-traditional classroom environments. The number of post-responses to Question 6 is more than triple the amount of any other set of pre- or post-EFE responses and they included many rich descriptions. One teacher wrote:

*In the middle of the exercise, however, the project transformed from a typical classroom setting into an open sandbox setting of exploration and discovery.*

The participants left the EFE experience with many ideas about the successful art teacher's responsibility as one of designing learning experiences that gradually lead students from a passive and structured experience to an active, unfettered, self-directed, exploratory and playful experience as learners.

### **Jackson: An Explanatory Case Study of Teacher Knowledge and Professional Achievement**

Jackson is one of the two EFE teachers this author was able to observe teaching in the second summer in Japan and he had also been a student in two of my classes prior to the EFE. The following is a narrative description of Jackson, in the form of an explanatory case study. This case study uses Jackson's three-years-later reflection as a hermeneutic to further explore and illuminate the findings above, by creating a picture of one future teacher that illuminates the teacher knowledge and professional achievement that the EFE fostered.

Jackson started university studies 500 miles from home as an Art Education major after completing his AA degree in community college near his home town. Jackson was the kind of student this author remembers for a variety of reasons, but those that stand out most are that he is a skateboard enthusiast, has a silly sense of humor, and his art media of choice, at the time that he came to university and at the time of his international EFE, were printmaking and fabric (using a sewing machine).

By the time he was nearing completion of his BA in Art Education, Jackson applied and was accepted to the Studio Art BFA. At the time of his EFE, the summer before his last year as an undergraduate, he had not traveled abroad and he had never taught. However, he brought extensive art subject matter knowledge and some ideas about art pedagogy from his undergraduate studies with him to Japan. Jackson had high expectations of his Japanese students, specifically how much they would know about their island, and he hoped that he could inspire them to bring that knowledge to the art lesson, "Painted Tote Bag" project (Plate 3).

*The students will prove to be much more knowledgeable about [the island] than I am, so I hope that by referencing the importance of their cultural identities in the slide show they will want to include imagery and ideas about the pride they have in their island culture within their paintings.*

He also had clear ideas about his pedagogical approach with place-based art.

*This is going to be a classroom assignment, but I'd rather the students didn't think of it in that way. I want them to have fun but at the same time I want them to be open to new techniques, so there will have to be a definite underlying classroom structure. This structure will be something I am aware of, but will be something I don't think that students will notice, or have to worry about.*

Jackson had accurately anticipated his students' vast knowledge of their island, but he learned more about his students through teaching his lesson, for example, their pride.

*If there is one thing the people of [this island] are proud of, it's culture. I was fortunate to have looked up quite a bit about [their] culture before I left for the trip. I wanted to know a little bit about who these people were before I started asking them to paint [place]-specific imagery as one of the guidelines to the exercise. As it turns out, much of the information I learned about beforehand, they chose to use and to create from once the lesson began.*

Jackson clearly recognized that *pride in the natural environment* was an important part of the place in which he taught. As a result of his international EFE experience, Jackson also developed more specific pedagogical ideas about the art classroom atmosphere that he felt supported art subject matter learning.

*What I wanted most for the people in the classroom was for them to feel comfortable expressing themselves through a physical medium [painted images and sewn fabric tote bags (Plate 3)] so that they might feel more comfortable expressing verbally what it is they were thinking while they were at work. By the end of each session it seemed that, for the most part, the students weren't terribly affected by the fact that they were in a classroom setting. It was important for me to see that the students could lighten up nearing the end of the day. It allowed me to feel like I succeeded somewhat in removing some of the more traditional concepts associated with a classroom setting.*

The summer after the EFE Jackson traveled to Mexico as a volunteer art teacher. Some of his classes took place at a community center (as they had in Japan) and, in the case of a public mural project, out in the city.

*Because we were working in one of [the] more impoverished neighborhoods we felt it was necessary to carry out a similar place-based method of teaching that I had used the summer prior in Japan. The students and I painted a mural consisting of imagery that represented their community. . . I also led the same hand painted tote bag lesson. We also brought multiple skateboards to the center so we could give skate lessons. We left the skateboards at the center for the children to use after we left.*

After the trip to Mexico, Jackson was accepted, with full scholarship, to a Studio Art MFA program. As an MFA student, in addition to his coursework he teaches and, "play[s] a major role in helping to maintain a prosperous group of undergrad printmakers through [his] duties as an instructor of record and teacher's assistant."

The summer after completing the short term EFE in Japan as an undergraduate, Jackson independently organized and completed his own international teaching experience in Mexico. He then was awarded a full scholarship for his MFA studies. This case study begins to paint a picture of how an international EFE can promote development of teacher knowledge and can help to foster future professional achievements for art teachers. Jackson's reflection suggests that his experience in Japan prepared him for his subsequent experience in Mexico. Further, both of these international teaching experiences may have helped his

application to graduate school stand out among others, which resulted in a full, three-year scholarship. The enthusiasm he expresses for his teaching in Mexico and, later, as a graduate student, his teaching and leadership with undergraduate art students, may also have been sparked by the EFE in Japan, his first teaching experience.

When Jackson wrote his three-years-later reflection, he was still an MFA student and in Japan again, on a grant-funded art research project titled, “Japanese Sidewalks as the Open Road.” As this author put these words to paper, Jackson was experiencing Japan through the lens of an MFA art student/skateboard enthusiast. The opening lines of his application for this grant, which brought him back to Japan, this time as an MFA student researching his own conceptual art, read:

*I am an explorer. My skateboard functions as the vehicle for my expeditions and the sidewalk as the conduit I flow through to become immersed in a myriad of urban settings. Experiencing urbanity through this lens is essential to understanding how both my body and the world around me operate and exist together. . . I propose to return home with observations and drawings that will relate to ways Japan’s symbiotic past has prepared its modern society to be more accepting of environmentally progressive ideas. Paving the way for Japan’s bright future, while also challenging the way of life for billions across the globe.*

Like the other teachers in this study who taught a summer art class in Japan as a pre-service EFE in teaching, Jackson gained knowledge about students, art content, pedagogy and environmental context (place) as a result of his participation. Where earlier studies have seen EFE as vital to transforming theoretical knowledge to pedagogical knowledge (e.g. Heafner & Plaisance, 2012), this study suggests that short term, international EFE can help transform teacher knowledge and bolster professional advancement.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The number of EFE teachers in this study is small. While many people participated in this project in many ways, the focus of this study is restricted to the development of teacher knowledge and fostering of professional achievement. Each of the EFE teachers taught lessons that lasted 3-4 hours, in addition to helping their peers to plan and, in some cases, to teach a lesson. A more extended period of time in an EFE and a larger group of pre-service teacher participants could provide further insight into international EFE.

Explanatory case study, constant comparison and thematic analysis gleaned insights into the questionnaire and years-later data, however, additional data, including interviews, journals, post- EFE lessons observations, and additional “years-later” reflections would strengthen the findings in this study. Analysis was narrowly focused on development of teacher knowledge and professional achievement. Additional data sets and analysis methods could broaden the focus and understandings in further EFE research.



Finally, the EFE teachers and this author were not able to attain competency in the Japanese language prior to the teaching experience. All of the lessons had an interpreter, nevertheless, teacher-student interactions, while enabled through the visual language of art, were limited by language barriers.

## Discussion

The Mechoopda Maidu Indians are the First Nation people from the region where this author lives. One of their elders, Henry Azbil (1899-1973) is noted as saying, "You have to know who you are" (<http://www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/>). Wherever we teach, maintaining some curricular focus on place can help teachers and students to know who they are in new and different ways. This study suggests that the EFE teachers learned that place-based art lessons can help students to developed more complex understandings of the interrelationship between humans and the rest of the environmental context:

*(post-) Relating the artwork to the surrounding area allowed students to start paying particular attention as to what makes their area unique. This allowed people who may have not known or simply forgot about the uniqueness of their environment and made it relevant for them.*

"Place," was considered to mean essentially just, "nature," in this participant reflection and suggests further work to be done on teachers' broader understandings of place-based art education.

Traveling abroad and certainly teaching abroad are challenging and rewarding experiences. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) described disequilibrium as a critical component of learning. He proposed that students must feel disequilibrium in order to desire to return to equilibrium. Novice teachers are in a state of disequilibrium when they teach because they do not yet know who they are as teachers, nor do they know what will and will not work for them in the classroom. They will work hard at teaching in their desire to regain equilibrium. Short term, international EFEs offer *intrepid* future teachers an abundance of opportunities to feel disequilibrium and to regain a new and enhanced equilibrium.

This short-term international EFE experience in a community center setting in Japan invited novice art teachers to think of classroom, in broad terms. Though they planned highly-structured lessons, they also wanted their students to feel freedom in their place-based art explorations. The setting encouraged the teachers to think outside the classroom box. Gandini (1989) examines the Reggio Emilia concept of the classroom itself as third teacher, the first being the teacher and the second, the students. The community center space in Japan proved to be an effective third teacher for the eight American EFE teachers.

This study echoes the old adage, teaching *is* learning. Especially in the arts, where the languages of the arts can transcend spoken language barriers, more international EFE opportunities and further studies are needed. Travel abroad can include many stresses that can inhibit or distract from learning. This study shows that with planning and support, short-term, international EFE teaching place-based art education can enhance teacher knowledge and foster professional achievement. Availability and funding for more short-

term international EFEs and research will benefit future teachers. The best way to get started is to channel the intrepid teacher inside oneself.

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