Creating Culturally Responsive Learning Experiences from International Students in U.S. Music Education

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We often emphasize that “experience” is the most effective way to teach in education and one of the most important ways to acquire knowledge (Dewey, 1938). In particular, exposure to new situations and cultures provides a different level of knowledge, one unobtainable from books. People go out of their comfort zone or study abroad to acquire such experiences. In some cases, a family migrates to a distant land so that their children can have a meaningful and educational experience, and higher education is no exception. While we support culturally responsive teaching (Lind & McKoy, 2016), the researcher wonders whether we can create a culturally responsive learning environment with those students. Learning music from non-American students can provide us with a unique musical experience. Moreover, their lives and their diverse musicianship are easily accessible resources for us. Perhaps, this may help us to create a culturally responsive teaching and learning environment.

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate three international students representing diverse cultures in the United States. Exploring the life of future researchers and practitioners in U.S. music education provided a sense of their self-perceptions as international students at a large southern university. Research questions were related to how the participants in music education described their experiences as international students in the U.S. Specifically, they indicated how they represented their culture, how they would benefit the diverse music education field, and how they maintained their identities while acclimating to American culture. Purposeful sampling was used (Patton, 2002; Parker, 2016) to identify participants who were (a) legal F-1 or J-
status in the U.S., (b) currently enrolled in an advanced graduate program, (c) affiliated with the university, and (d) in music education. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, participant journals, artifacts, and field notes for three months. Through data analysis, 12 codes emerged and were associated with two themes, (a) identity (Styker & Burker, 2000) and (b) equity (Roberts & Campbell, 2015), in each case along multiple dimensions. The findings shed light on what music educators should know about international students and what challenges these students face in higher education. This study was needed to understand the perspective of current international students and to enhance social justice in music education. Furthermore, this study sought to provide guidance for perspective student researchers who intend to study abroad in the U.S., and global music educators who advise those students for their successful preparation in higher education.