

SPA-083

Out of the Comfort Zone: The Learning Experience of International Students in U.S. Music Education

Julie Myung Ok Song
University of Florida, USA

Abstract

Experience is often regarded as the most effective way to learn and to acquire knowledge in education (Dewey, 1938). In particular, exposure to new situations and cultures provides a different level of knowledge, one unobtainable from books. Therefore, people go out of their comfort zone or study abroad to obtain 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. The purpose of this case study was to investigate four 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 US universities. Research questions were related to how the participants in music education described their experiences as international students in the United States; 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 (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018) was used to identify participants who were (a) legal F-1 or J-1 status in the United States, (b) currently enrolled in an advanced graduate program, (c) affiliated with a university, and (d) in music education. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, participant journals, artifacts, and field notes for three months. Through data analysis, three overarching themes emerged: (a) hidden culture, (b) contextual knowledge of subject, and (c) equity and equality, in each case along multiple dimensions. The findings shed light on what music educators should know about the self-construal of 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 support their place in music education. Furthermore, this study sought to provide guidance for prospective student researchers who intend to study abroad in the United States, and international music educators who help those students prepare for success in higher education.

Keywords: diversity, identity, music education, higher education, ethnicity