

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“What’s the middle ground? Am I ever going to be the perfect teacher?:” Self-study of a Doctoral Student’s Acculturation Process

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In higher education, doctoral training has been identified as a process of stewardship development whereby individuals learn the knowledge and skills required to advance their respective disciplines. Self-study of teacher education practices is one approach that has gained the interest of doctoral students to help them understand their own development whilst also forging recommendations for others in publications. In this self-study, we worked to understand the experiences of Shrehan, a teacher from England beginning doctoral study in the USA. Shrehan had no experience teaching at the college level prior to moving to the USA, and she saw self-study as an opportunity to understand her development and acculturation into an unfamiliar system of higher education. Data were collected through journaling, critical-friend discussions, and artefacts, as well as student data in the form of surveys, exit slips, and focus-group interviews. Qualitative data analysis of Shrehan’s experiences was guided by the four stages of acculturation theory—honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment, and recovery. Shrehan’s journey emphasizes the importance of getting to know undergraduate students and building rapport as key aspects of teaching at the college level. Self-study provided Shrehan with a heightened personal-identity awareness that increased her cultural sensitivity and broadened her worldview. Results are discussed with reference to acculturation theory and future directions for research are provided.

Keywords: self-study, doctoral education, teaching, acculturation

SPANISH title abstract and keywords

Born and raised in England, in 2015 Shrehan was teaching physical education in a London secondary school, but in July of that year she resigned from her teaching position to pursue a PhD at a public research institution in the southeast United States in August. Her prior teaching experience included work at the elementary and secondary levels in England, Kenya, Tanzania and Malaysia. A position in a Doctoral Physical Education Teacher Education (D-PETE) program was attractive, as it came with the opportunity to prepare future professionals within Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). Nevertheless, she was nervous that the pedagogical strategies she learned as part of her education in England would not transfer into a new culture, and she wondered if being English would influence the way in which she was able to connect with USA students. Shrehan also felt nervous about teaching college-aged students, something she had never done before, and she wondered whether her andragogy skills (Knowles,

1968) were sufficient. After arriving in the USA, Shrehan met Kevin, a faculty member at her university, and learned about self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP).

Viewing doctoral education as the start of her process in becoming a PETE faculty member (Ovens & Fletcher, 2014), Shrehan believed that S-STEP would be a valuable tool for understanding her experiences transitioning from secondary school teacher to D-PETE student and beginning teacher educator in a foreign country. Toward this end, the self-study explored Shrehan's acculturation experiences as she learned what it meant to be a physical education teacher educator while also adjusting to the challenges of completing a PhD in a new country. Kevin served as Shrehan's critical friend through this process. Colin, a D-PETE student in the same program as Shrehan, was invited into the research team to assist in the collection and analysis of data. In the following sections, we situate the study in relevant literature related to self-study and international doctoral student education, and we subsequently ground our work within acculturation theory.

Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices

Teacher educators who undertake self-study aim to understand their own practice and experience and make recommendations for the teacher education community at large (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015; LaBoskey, 2004). Self-study research does not require one particular method, nor does it have a specific focus or outcome; thus it can be difficult to define and categorize (Ovens & Fletcher, 2014). Nevertheless, a key focus within self-study relates to developing knowledge of practice as a tool for promoting reflective teaching; as practices develop and unfold, teacher educators' identities grow (Dinkelman, 2003; Ritter, 2009; Murphy, McGlynn-Stewart, & Ghafouri, 2014).

There is been growing interest in researching the experiences of doctoral students using self-study methods when becoming teacher educators. In higher education, doctoral training has been identified as a process of stewardship development whereby individuals learn the knowledge and skills required to advance their respective disciplines (Lawson, 2016). Doctoral students conducting self-studies recognize the importance of taking an intentional approach to the process of becoming a teacher educator by examining the development of their own practice during the process of doctoral education (Richards & Ressler, 2016).

Teacher education doctoral students across a variety of disciplines, including science (Wiebke & Park Rogers, 2014), mathematics (Marin, 2014), elementary education (Allen, Park Rogers & Borowski, 2016), and curriculum and instruction (Foot, Alicia, Tollafield, & Allan, 2014; Gregory, Diacopoulos, Branyon, & Butler, 2017; McNulty & Cuenca, 2014) have contributed to the knowledge base on beginning teacher educator doctoral students. Some S-STEP research has also been conducted by interdisciplinary groups of teacher education doctoral students (Murphy, McGlynn-Stewart & Ghafouri, 2014). These studies have illuminated that, although some disciplinary difference may exist in the doctoral student socialization process, there are commonalities related to the challenges doctoral students face in their process of learning to be teacher educators. For example, all doctoral students must balance multiple identities (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, marital status) with their role as an emerging teacher educator (Foot et al., 2014; McNulty & Cuenca, 2014; Allen et al., 2016). This balancing act can lead to challenges, particularly when doctoral students do not take adequate time and opportunity to analyse their educational journey (Murphy et al., 2014; Wiebke & Park Rogers, 2014).

Recognizing the challenges associated with doctoral education, it has been noted that “encouraging doctoral students to undertake self-study may assist them in uncovering local cultural contexts that influence daily practice and identity development” (Foot et al., 2014, p. 104). Toward this end, S-STEP has a great deal to offer doctoral students who are beginning the journey of transitioning from teacher to teacher educator. As a D-PETE student from England studying in the USA, Shrehan wanted to shed light on her process of becoming a teacher educator in the field while completing a doctorate. There were, however, few examples of self-study research conducted by D-PETE students for Shrehan to use in guiding her own inquiry (Richards & Ressler, 2016, 2017). As a result, she turned to a more general outlook of self-study conducted by teacher education doctoral students (e.g., Allen et al., 2016; Butler & Diacopoulos, 2016; Foot et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2017; McAnulty & Cuenca, 2014; Murphy et al., 2014; Wiebke & Park Rogers, 2014). This highlighted the importance of establishing social connections and the benefits of collaborative relationships built through self-study. Scholars note that S-STEP may have application for doctoral students completing their degrees abroad because it encourages deeper reflection, communication, and collaboration (Hu, van Veen, & Coda, 2016).

International Students in USA Doctoral Programs

In an effort to enhance their own cultural diversity, many doctoral students from around the world pursue PhDs in the USA (Campbell, 2015). From 2014 to 2015, international student enrolment increased by 10% (to 975,000) in the USA; this was the highest rate of growth since 1978 to 1979 (Institute of International Education, 2016). This global expansion in doctoral enrolment is likely to continue as governments increase the pool of doctoral graduates needed to build globally competitive knowledge economies (Halse & Mowbray, 2011). While offering opportunity, international study also presents challenges as students need to reconcile differences between their home and host countries (Hoare, 2012). International students studying in the USA bring with them their cultural values, beliefs, patterns of behavior, and ways of learning and thinking (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). As a result, they face many of the same issues as immigrants, including cultural adjustment issues, but also have additional pressures due to the challenges of doctoral study and unfamiliar teaching practices (Kim, 2012).

While evidence indicates that many international D-PETE students can find employment in the USA after completing their PhDs (Boyce, Lund, & O’Neil, 2015), not all international doctoral students have smooth experiences while completing their degree programs. These challenges include feelings of isolation, lack of integration with host-country students, and cultural adjustment problems (Walsh, 2010; Kim, 2012). Additionally, international students attending USA universities frequently fail to meet personal and academic demands with which they are not accustomed, while also trying to conform to new cultural norms (Burkholder, 2013). Students coming to the USA from an array of countries have noted specific relational challenges associated with the mentoring style of their advisor, peer work collaborations, and the type and frequency of peer social interaction (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).

Given the elevated enrolment of international doctoral students in USA PhD programs, it is critical that all involved in doctoral education acknowledge and dialogue through differences in culture that influence the student experience. Without an enlightened understanding of student diversity, there is a danger of policies being put in place that do not advance the interests of doctoral students (Pearson, Cumming, Evans, Macauley, & Ryland, 2011). For example, in a study exploring Korean students studying in the USA, Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005)

concluded that doctoral programs need to recognize the role of cultural identity and heritage in the lives of international students to provide quality education for all students.

Doctoral students should be viewed as active agents who have multiple identities, diverse backgrounds and culture, and different priorities that can change over the course of their education (Pearson et al., 2011). Without this recognition, the academy is at risk of perpetuating cultural adaptation as the only choice for individuals seeking membership in higher education. If it fails to recognize cultural diversity in programs afforded by the increase of international doctoral students, the academy not only excludes students but misses out on potential innovations of practice and research and neglects inclusive training strategies to best prepare their international students for faculty positions in the USA (Urban & Palmer, 2014). As a result, there is a need for research that prioritizes the cultural aspect of learning to be a faculty member in higher education, particularly when one pursues a doctoral degree at a foreign university. Toward this end, we have adopted acculturation theory (Mukminin, 2012; Oberg, 1954, 1960) to understand Shrehan's perspectives and practices as a first-year D-PETE student.

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation theory seeks to understand situations in which individuals with different cultural backgrounds come into continuous, first-hand contact, resulting in changes in the cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Four general stages of acculturation have been identified in the literature: the honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment, and recovery (Oberg, 1954, 1960; Winkelman, 1994). The *honeymoon* is characterized by general excitement and wonder as the individual is still viewing the new environment from the perspective of a tourist. The *culture shock*, sometimes known as the aggressive stage, is characterized by feelings of distress and unhappiness. Individuals often begin to miss their home environment and feel as if they are merely trying to survive in their surroundings. *Adjustment* occurs as the individual begins to positively adapt to the culture of the new environment. Finally, *recovery* is characterized by acceptance of the new culture and its integration into the individual's cultural identity. The acculturation model has been widely used in research since the 1960s. While updated and revised versions of the model have been proposed (Berry, 2004), in this study we draw upon the four stages initially proposed by Oberg (1960) as they align well with, and serve to help frame, Shrehan's personal acculturation experiences.

While acculturation is presented in a series of stages, progression through these stages does not occur in a lock-step fashion (Oberg, 1960). Instead, the process occurs in a dialectical fashion whereby individuals can use their sense of agency to *reject* or *regress* elements of their acculturation. Individuals could, for example, resist acculturation if they start to feel discomfort towards the host country or take a trip back home, which can lead them to reminisce and reconnect with their previous culture (Oberg, 1960). As a result, the process of progression through the stages, sometimes moving backward to previous stages, is specific to each individual (Berry, 1987) and is a profoundly personal experience (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). Individuals should not, therefore, be rushed through stages or made to feel as if they are not progressing quickly enough.

The acculturation framework has been used to examine migrant experiences of a wide variety of people and social groups moving to different countries (Campbell, 2015). For international students, differences between the host culture and the home culture mean that there will be a need for cultural adaptation (Zhou & Todman, 2009). Urban and Palmer (2014) suggest international students would like to be engaged as cultural resources and have the opportunity to

share their own culture with USA natives. When university educators engage their students in ways that incorporate and respect local knowledge and mutual learning through a two-way relationship, universities can simultaneously reap the sociocultural and reputational benefits that individuals coming to the university embrace (Hoare, 2012).

While the literature on international doctoral education provides some insight into the acculturation and socialization processes (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Zhou & Todman, 2009), the perspectives of international doctoral student authors are underrepresented (Brodin, 2016). There is also an incomplete body of literature investigating acculturation experiences across diverse nationalities at the doctoral level; both longitudinal (Kim, 2012) and empirical studies are needed (Campbell, 2015). Undertaking self-study has the potential to help fill this void by providing international doctoral students an avenue through which they can explore their experiences, discuss their challenges, and provide recommendations for others coming to study in the USA (Foot et al., 2014; Hu, van Veen, & Coda, 2016). However, doctoral education has underrepresented international student perspectives (Boyce et al., 2015) and, more generally, D-PETE students have not become as active in the S-STEP community as their peers in teacher education (Richards & Ressler, 2016, 2017). Toward this end, the purpose of this study was to understand the acculturation experience of Shrehan, an English doctoral student studying and teaching in an American university, through self-study using interpretivist methods. The research questions included: (1) How did Shrehan perceive her experiences in the D-PETE program in relation to preparing her for the role of a higher education faculty member with a focus on the three university missions of research, teaching, and service? and (2) How did Shrehan's daily experiences in the USA and practices as a doctoral student influence her identity as a doctoral student and emerging scholar?

Methodology

Context of the Study

In the fall of 2015, Shrehan began her doctoral education in a D-PETE program at the University of Alabama. Before moving from England to begin the program, Shrehan had only visited the east coast of the USA for short periods of time and had never been to the Deep South. Moving to the state of Alabama put her in a cultural context that was drastically different to her upbringing and prior teaching experience in England. To help fund her education, Shrehan received a graduate teaching assistantship that provided her opportunities to teach general Physical Education courses offered to college-aged students along with teacher education courses for Physical Education majors.

During her first semester, Shrehan taught aerobics ($n=16$), tennis ($n=22$), intermediate swimming ($n=13$), and water aerobics ($n=9$), and she co-taught a course on women's self-defence ($n=25$). Also in the first semester, Shrehan assisted a faculty member by mentoring first semester Physical Education majors ($n=17$) during their first methods course and early field experience. Shrehan's teaching assignment in the second semester included beginning tennis ($n=14$), intermediate swimming ($n=18$), water aerobics ($n=6$), and a swimming course for Physical Education majors ($n=16$) that included a field experience teaching elementary children how to swim.

As Shrehan became situated in her new surroundings, she met and developed a professional relationship with Kevin Richards, a first-year faculty member in the PETE program. Kevin had previous experience with self-study and, after hearing that Shrehan had completed practitioner-focused research as part of her undergraduate education in England, he

recommended that she consider using self-study research methods to document and analyse her experiences integrating into the D-PETE program and learning to become a teacher educator. Shrehan agreed and, after reviewing some of the S-STEP literature (LaBoskey, 2004; Ovens & Fletcher, 2014), asked Kevin to serve as her critical friend in her self-study.

Teacher educators using self-study methods embrace critical friendships in which the investigator partners with a confidant who pushes the researcher to think more critically about their experiences (Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). Shrehan felt that Kevin would be a good critical friend because he had experience with self-study and was committed to helping her understand and improve her practice (Richards & Ressler, 2016, 2017). Like Shrehan, Kevin had recently moved to Alabama, which helped him to empathize with some of the challenges Shrehan was experiencing as she transitioned into the academic and cultural contexts of Alabama. Following the conceptualization of the study, Colin, a D-PETE student in the same program as Shrehan, joined the project to assist with data collection and analysis.

Data Gathering

The primary data source for the current study was a journal in which Shrehan made regular entries discussing her process of learning to become a teacher educator and how it related to the cultural experience of being a D-PETE student in a foreign country. Shrehan began writing her journal on August 28, 2015, three weeks after her arrival in Alabama, and she made regular entries through July 27, 2016. During this period, she made 39 entries. Entries were free written and responsive to Shrehan's experiences in the PhD program, focusing particularly on her acculturation into the USA context. Kevin and Shrehan met once a month for Critical Friend Discussions (CFD). In total, there were seven discussions lasting from 30 to 60 minutes, producing approximately six hours of audio-recording that were later transcribed. Kevin would provoke Shrehan to consider why and how she felt a certain way about a situation and how her teaching was changing to suit a different culture and different age of students. Throughout the year, Shrehan took field notes after teaching, in meetings, and after significant events. These field notes, along with a variety of documents, supplemented events discussed in the journal and comprise over 90 pieces of data collected.

In the interest of maintaining fidelity to the interactive nature of self-study (LaBoskey, 1994), we also sought to include the perspectives of students taking courses with Shrehan. Specifically, students in Shrehan's classes were invited to contribute data through online surveys, exit slips, and focus-group interviews. The online surveys were anonymous, included open-ended questions focused on Shrehan's teaching methods, student-teacher interactions, and availability outside of class, and were administered around midterm and at the end of each semester. Students from all of Shrehan's classes were invited to participate, with 86 providing responses. In the swimming class for PE majors (spring 2016), Shrehan also asked students to complete exit slips once a week. These exit slips asked students to consider the most important thing they learned in class and encouraged them to provide feedback related to how Shrehan could better teach them. In total, 128 exit slips were collected from 16 students in the class and these were added to the dataset.

Finally, in the spring of 2016, Colin led two focus groups with Shrehan's students. The first focus group consisted of students enrolled in one of Shrehan's activity classes ($n=3$), and the second consisted of the Physical Education majors in the swimming class ($n=6$). Both focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide that included a standard set of questions and flexibility to explore the group's cultural portrait (Creswell, 2013). Questions focused on

Shrehan's instructional effectiveness, her ability to develop student-teacher relationships, and the perceived cultural differences between Shrehan and the students. The focus groups lasted between 50 and 80 minutes and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and made anonymous by Colin before being incorporated into the dataset. Shrehan reviewed all student data formatively and wrote journal entries about her affective and pedagogical reactions. Her analysis of these data also influenced critical-friend discussions and led her to make immediate changes to her teaching.

The Role of the Researchers and Data Analysis

As a research team, the three of us worked together to qualitatively analyse study data using both inductive and deductive analysis (Patton, 2015). We framed our analytic approach through Miles and Huberman's (1994) three activities of data reduction, data display, and conclusion/drawing verification. First, Shrehan and Colin coded all data sources into a codebook where they assigned each piece of text to the research question. This ensured the aims and purpose of the study had been met. Subsequently, after several lengthy meetings and through re-reading the data sources multiple times, themes emerged from the data. By looking inductively for themes and making analytic memos, they linked the data to the conceptual framework of acculturation theory (Oberg, 1954, 1960). Finally, Shrehan and Colin deductively selected supporting evidence to complement each theme: honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment and recovery. These were put into the final data display set of the codebook. Kevin, as Shrehan's critical friend, reviewed the themes for confirmability and consistency and questioned the primary coders on their decisions to enhance consistency and trustworthiness.

In line with recommendations in the literature (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015), several methodological decisions were made to enhance the trustworthiness of the research design. Firstly, Shrehan was frequently debriefed by Kevin in their critical friend discussions. Kevin provided an external check on Shrehan's research process and often provoked Shrehan to consider alternative teaching perspectives. Secondly, through the use of a journal, rich and thick descriptions of places, events, and lessons were identifiable so that people could assess whether the findings are transferable to them. Thirdly, data triangulation occurred throughout the use of multiple data sources, leaving an audit trail of research activities. Lastly, researcher triangulation occurred as multiple coders were involved in the data analysis process. These various methods reduced potential biases (Patton, 2015) brought into the project by Shrehan as she was particularly close to the research topic.

Results

Shrehan's experiences followed a progression through acculturation theory. Her acculturation journey started in the *honeymoon* stage (August to October 2015). After being in the country for three months, the novelty of living as an outsider wore off and Shrehan entered into the *culture shock* stage (September 2015 to January 2016), overlapping slightly with her honeymoon experiences. After four months in Alabama, Shrehan entered the *adjustment* stage and began to accept her new surroundings (December 2015 to May 2016). Shrehan is yet to fully enter the *recovery* stage; however, her last journal entry showed signs of transition, as she was adapting to her new environment.

The Honeymoon Stage: August to October 2015

Shrehan's honeymoon stage experiences were similar to that of a new immigrant or tourist experiencing excitement and euphoria (Oberg, 1960). Students reciprocally supported claims of her enjoyment and encouragement in teaching them. She also reported peer friendships that blossomed during this period.

Shrehan initially found teaching at the university a novel experience. Reviewing her first several weeks, she noted "to start with I felt teaching here was new and novel, I was excited, I was getting to meet everybody and it's almost like I was on holiday but I was working really hard" (CFD 1). When teaching from the outset, she found the language the students used to refer to her as humorous, "being called *ma'am* was interesting, I try not to crack up every time. I just can't imagine the English young people of today picking that up, but it's wonderful to hear their language" (Journal 1). Students acknowledged Shrehan's accent, also commenting in their focus group that her accent helped them in their own learning experiences when learning to teach swimming: "Her accent helps you remember. I'll never forget 'bend, star, pencil'" (PETE focus group). Shrehan reflected that she had intentionally used a lot of motivational feedback in classes to boost student confidence, with one student commenting: "I had never swam on my back before or knew how to breathe while doing front crawl, now I can do it. Your encouragement means a lot" (Midterm feedback, October 2015).

When Shrehan moved to the USA, an English faculty member who supported her move partnered her with another D-PETE student and Shrehan's journal repeatedly mentioned how grateful she was for this: "I couldn't ask more from my host Jackie. She has been wonderful and listened to me go on about how this is different and that is different" (Journal 1). Shrehan was thankful for her new course colleague Jackie for allowing her to live with her and felt she was making friendships with other D-PETE students. One D-PETE student, Katie, invited Shrehan back to her parents' house in a neighbouring state, providing a "great weekend! Katie's dad had a gun cupboard, he let me hold one. I'd never held a gun before. I was shocked at the weight/size of them. Oh, and that he had a gun in the house" (Journal 3). These examples made Shrehan's honeymoon stage more novel through her teaching experiences, students' accents and developing peer relationships.

Culture Shock: September 2014 to January 2015

After the first few months in the USA, Shrehan felt differences between herself and her class colleagues. In one class in particular she regularly mentioned how she found it hard to relate to traditionally conservative individuals: "A typical southern man said this in my class today: 'I thought women didn't do marathons because they would get lost.' WOW, what lens does he view the world from?! Naive or sheltered?" (Journal 22). Navigating her sexual identity, Shrehan also reported feelings of juggling multiple parts of her emotional identity, making her feel isolated. Specifically, school commitments started to take hold and her social commitments decreased, and her parents came for a short visit: "I am snowed under with work trying to catch up and my parents aren't here anymore. I'm all alone again. What am I doing? Is this really worth it?" (Journal 20). An incident occurred in which Shrehan was knocked off her bicycle by a car. When recalling it in a meeting with Kevin, she highlighted afterthoughts of isolation from the experience: "It was horrendous, it was a busy road and not one person stopped. I couldn't believe it. I was shaking. When I got home I couldn't phone anyone because of the time difference. I felt bitterly alone" (CFD 1). Shrehan felt adamant that someone in her home country would have stopped and felt confused towards the lack of care.

While Shrehan was beginning her graduate studies, she snarled throughout her journal that she found taking an examination at the graduate level to be contradictory, an academic difference compared to graduate requirements in schools of education in England. She stated there were better ways to test knowledge where an individual showed their understanding of a topic through alternative assessments. However, despite Shrehan's reluctance to take part in standardized examinations, she showed resilience towards her D-PETE requirements and completed the required tasks: "I studied all weekend for my midterm, it was stressful. I put so much pressure on myself. Is this grad life? Memory recall tests? Is that what a doctorate is? Time? Blood, sweat, tears? Oh well, I did it" (Journal 15).

At the beginning of her second semester, Shrehan shared her disappointment when she found out the faculty member who assisted in her move to the USA was leaving for a year-long sabbatical. This increased her feelings of isolation and her journal (26) reflected this: "I'm gutted; I came all this way for his expertise. I'm really worried, he's my only English contingent; he knows what I am going through, who will I turn to when I need help?" Shrehan repeatedly said that she felt that this faculty member was instrumental and invaluable in her decision to come to the USA

Additionally, Shrehan felt frustration when she started teaching in the spring. She was teaching from a syllabus she had not created. The institution had asked that the course not be changed because of an upcoming assessment. She found she was rushing through material and, by doing so, her teaching affected students negatively. Several students commented on this in their exit slips early in her movement analysis class: "Let us have more fun in class" (Exit slip, week 2). Shrehan remarked in her journal: "Exit slips are frustrating, the feedback is immature; of course, 'having fun' along with 'don't give us exams' in an undergraduate degree is a common theme among the students" (Journal 27). Shrehan considered this further in her journal entry, noting that:

I'd love to let students permanently have fun but I have to teach the content set for the course. I need to get to know them more and understand what they consider to be fun, in order for them to enjoy the content. (Journal 27)

Shrehan experienced many difficulties and identity crises during her culture shock stage, involving emotions, sexual identity, teaching, and academic demands, making her feel isolated and alone. While negative experiences dominated the data, there were instances in which Shrehan expressed joy and excitement, primarily related to her teaching. For example, when she noticed her students improving on a skill she had taught them, she commented that it was "amazing news, my beginner swimmers can now dive! I got in the water with them today and I think that really helped them gain confidence" (Journal 15). Teaching and being able to connect with students represented one experience that helped Shrehan persist through the challenges and stressors of culture shock.

Adjustment Stage: December 2015 to May 2016

Shrehan started to adjust to her new environments as a D-PETE student in December. She commented that she started to know better the institution and people in it. Regarding teaching, she refocused her responsibilities on the aim of building student relationships and creating student rapport. Shrehan did this to show students her own culture, but also with the aim to understand the students' cultures and connect with them. When she did this she felt more relaxed about her teaching and recorded: "Classes are easier now I've made the relationships, I'm less

formal and I've built a rapport with my students" (Journal 36). One student noticed this on behalf of her swim class:

It was very impressive how she could take note of everybody's progress and not just say "y'all are doin' well as a group" but she would point out people every class and say "I like how you're improving or I've noticed this about you and how you've changed." She got to know each person. That was cool. (Activity Class Focus Group)

An email from a PETE student in Shrehan's movement analysis class supported Shrehan's claims to improving her pedagogy and her commitment to building student rapport: "I must say that I really appreciate all you do. I've never had a teacher that cares as much as you do. I don't like getting in the water, but I love your class" (Artefact 68, March 2016). Shrehan felt the important factor in teaching undergraduate students was showing them as a teacher that you truly care about them as individuals: "The process of building rapport and getting to know each of my students, I think, is the key to getting to know them culturally and understanding our human differences" (Journal 26). One student commented: "I missed class for an interview. When I got back Shrehan was interested in how it went and wanted to hear more about it. It really speaks to her character that she cares about each person outside of class" (Activity Focus Group).

During the adjustment stage a change occurred in Shrehan's reflections. She felt an increased awareness that learning about each individual was important in her teaching in a different country where she was unfamiliar with students' own acculturation experiences, and furthermore, generic teaching methods did not work for everyone. This was a key turning point in Shrehan's pedagogical approach and she described to Kevin how she began to have an increased self-awareness from her experiences: "I view things differently now. I am learning as a person. Maybe it's a cultural thing, people have all been brought up so differently and I just think, 'Oh well, that's okay. I'm more accepting.'" (CFD 3). With this self-awareness and acceptance of individual differences, Shrehan made strides towards bi-culturally adjusting her teaching in alternative contexts. She became more culturally responsive and sensitive towards her student's needs.

Furthermore, when considering distinct changes in pedagogy at the university level, Shrehan mentioned an increased and conscious awareness in giving student feedback regarding the age of students she was now teaching: "I've had to change how I give feedback so I don't sound sarcastic. I've learned not to change my tone of voice, especially the pitch. Middle school gets pumped when you change your tones" (CFD 6). She also explained how she had taken a more relaxed approach towards teaching and became more flexible at the collegiate level by changing her activity course syllabi as the semester went on: "I've become laid back, [but] I don't mean lazy, I am still doing the things I was taught to be an effective teacher like feedback, demonstrations, etc., but I teach to the students in front of me now" (CFD 6). This was Shrehan's attempt to make her lessons less rigid and more enjoyable. Students' comments on making classes more fun during the culture shock stage had prompted Shrehan to take action on their requests.

During Shrehan's experience of collecting data and adjusting class syllabi in the second semester, she came to a critical teaching realization and concluded: "Last semester students commented there was not enough free play in tennis. This semester they say it was too much. What's the middle ground? Am I ever going to be the perfect teacher? Probably not, not for every student anyway" (CFD 7). As a future teacher educator, this realization was critical and Shrehan commented that this was "the most important thing I can remember for my future and strive towards achieving" (CFD 7). Shrehan's attempt to accommodate and meet the needs of

each student was recognized and appreciated by one PETE major in particular, with them noting that: “Shrehan was constantly asking ‘What can I do to get better? What did I do right for you?’ She always has that childlike mentality of always wanting to learn” (PETE focus group). Shrehan felt she constantly reassured the PETE majors that she would do anything to make them successful in their own personal journey to becoming a teacher.

When considering Shrehan’s D-PETE journey and the program’s influence on her as an emerging scholar, she stated that she learned a lot from conference attendance and presentations. For example, making connections with other faculty in her research area and making research more accessible to teachers was important. She commented on this in CFD 3: “I’ve been thinking of ideas that make research for teachers more accessible to quickly read in the staff room.” She decided to write a paper for a practitioner journal for teachers in her field, giving her advice on curriculum integration (Artefact 77, May 2016). Shrehan found this experience to be highly beneficial in preparing her for a future role as a researcher in the institution and she gained insight into the publication process. Additionally, she felt a sense of accomplishment at having her first D-PETE publication. During the adjustment stage, self-study made Shrehan more aware that she had crossed cultural boundaries, allowing her to form personal relationships and better understand sociocultural surroundings.

Recovery Stage

Near the end of her first year as a doctoral student, Shrehan was showing signs of entering the recovery stage as she was beginning to adapt to her new environment and feel bi-culturally accepted (Oberg, 1960). When the second semester ended, she took a summer holiday back to England where she wrote:

I am in this weird place. I'm home and it kind of feels odd. . . Kind of doesn't feel like my home. Maybe it means I have adjusted to my new environments in the USA. When people ask me where I live now, I talk about the USA and am positive about my experiences. I miss what has become habit and my new life. (Journal 37)

Confirming her bi-cultural feelings, Shrehan mentioned, after being home for a month, that cities in which she used to live felt like “they are no longer my homes anymore. I have grown as a person since I was last here. I want different things in life” (Journal 38). Shrehan interrogated this point further and considered what had changed: “I am more culturally aware, that is why being back in England is difficult and when I go back [to the USA] it’s not like I’ll be on my own, I know people there now, I’ve made friends” (Journal 38).

In July 2016 Shrehan returned to the USA to prepare for the next academic year. On returning she wrote:

I feel like I have returned to familiar grounds. I have a bank account, a car, friends, settled roots. It half feels like home. I have learnt that I am so adaptable; I have to change my persona, the way I act to my audience/where I am in the world to what I even wear. I have and am becoming ‘Americanised’. I am happy about this change, this feeling of having two places to call home, two sets of family and friends, familiarity everywhere I go (Journal 39).

Despite the early stages and realizations, Shrehan was accepting a change in her world, implying that she was happy with the changes that occurred to her throughout her learning journey. This journey evidenced heightened levels of respect towards other cultures, making her more aware and culturally sensitive.

Discussion

The purpose of this S-STEP project was to understand the acculturation experience of Shrehan, an English student, enrolled in an American D-PETE program. Analysis of the data highlights Shrehan's successes as well as the trials and tribulations she faced getting to know students and peers while immersing herself in USA culture. At times, particularly during the culture shock stage, Shrehan felt the challenge of balancing roles and multiple identities, which was influenced by general isolation and a lack of integration with her peers. She expressed frustration with taking examinations, but showed resilience and attempts to adapt to meet the demands of her new environment. She also felt the need to adjust her own pedagogy to better teach and meet the cultural needs of her students, a process described as bridging the cultural distance (Flory & McCaughy, 2011).

As Shrehan became more comfortable with her surroundings, she began to focus on building individual student rapport, getting to know students and understand cultural differences. This self-study increased Shrehan's awareness as she became more understanding of her teaching and developed a more mature professional stance. By learning about students' acculturation experiences and getting to know them as individuals, she adapted her pedagogy to be inclusive and culturally sensitive. Toward the end of the first year, Shrehan started to enter a stage where she felt bi-cultural. Despite the fact that these feelings were just developing, Shrehan recognized them and wrote that she was happy to accept the bi-cultural changes that were occurring by being flexible to adapt to alternative environments.

Acculturation Theory as Beneficial to Understanding Experience

This self-study demonstrates a transactional process embedded within time from an individual perspective. Shrehan's experiences followed the initial acculturation model of Oberg (1954, 1960) as she moved through stages to overcome acculturative challenges, highlighted through her journal entries and student evaluations. However, there were distinct transitional "grey" periods whereby Shrehan oscillated between stages. It is important to recognize that acculturation is not linear, and individuals may find themselves experiencing emotions associated with two stages simultaneously. This is similar to a position of liminality in that the individual appears to have progressed beyond one stage but has not fully entered the subsequent stage (Turner, 1969). While not the case for Shrehan within her first year, it may also be possible for individuals to regress in the model and experience the same stage multiple times or even skip stages. As such, acculturation is better thought of as a series of stages that individuals move in and out of as part of a journey toward recovery and bi-culturalism rather than as a lock-step, linear progression. Acculturation theory helped Shrehan understand how she felt about her D-PETE and USA experiences preparing her for a higher education faculty role and how such experiences influenced her emerging identity.

Recognizing the Need for Social Support through Acculturation

Hanassab and Tidwell (2002) highlighted that English-speaking Europeans will be more involved socially with USA nationals because there is not a language barrier. As Shrehan experienced, however, British English and USA English are quite different. Although language did not present itself as a barrier, Shrehan felt cultural differences, isolation, and a lack of integration with her peers and the students in her classes. Such a finding has been reported in previous international student research (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Campbell, 2015; Walsh, 2010). One of the major factors in delaying initial culture shock was peer and faculty support,

which was found to be a contributing factor in understanding student success (Lyons et al., 1990; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009). With Kevin's assistance, Shrehan immersed herself with other D-PETE students, and began to critically analyse her experiences transitioning into the USA context. Chavajay (2013) has suggested that this type of social support could prove instrumental in the process of adapting to new environments. Specifically, he recommended that those abroad take part as participants in cultural activities and learn the customs and social norms shared by natives. This immersion seemed to have helped delay Shrehan's culture shock as she became immersed in activities that had local cultural value. At times, Shrehan was shocked at cultural norms, such as the reality of individuals owning a gun.

Given that many international doctoral students are likely to have adjustment problems (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998), it is important for faculty members to provide mentorship along with peer collaboration opportunities (Walsh, 2010). Campbell (2015) suggested that academic departments need to encourage faculty members to learn their students' cultures and consider one-to-one mentoring relationships to help bridge cultural distance (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Higher education departments should facilitate time where these relationships can occur, for example, through orientation sessions and scheduled meetings throughout the program. Another way one-to-one relationships can occur between international students and faculty could be through collaborative research projects, including self-study (Hu, van Veen, & Coda, 2016). As in this study, faculty members can serve as critical friends. Such collaborations can eliminate or reduce misunderstandings between faculty members and students (Hu, van Veen, & Coda, 2016).

While it took time, Shrehan successfully navigated the process of building relationships with faculty members, peers, and students in her classes. She made adjustments to her pedagogy by getting to know each student and what made each one successful. In line with Foot and colleagues (2014), we embrace self-study as a process that supports doctoral students in uncovering local cultural concepts that have the potential to influence daily practice and identity development. Getting to know how people do things and what their interests are in a foreign environment can help one become more immersed in new surroundings and can help develop reciprocity in relationships whereby natives become more interested in an international student's cultural background (Chavajay, 2013). This type of exchange is integral to the promise of higher education as a place where individuals can learn about culture and difference (Campbell, 2015). When coordinated intentionally, higher education becomes a platform for dialectical exchange through which international and domestic students learn about and grow to appreciate one another's culture and heritage (Berry, 2005).

Self-reflecting on Experiences to Witness Identity Changes for the Role

Beyond examining their development as teacher educators, self-study can help doctoral students record and analyse their personal journeys to becoming an emerging scholar and researcher (Richards & Ressler, 2016). This approach to self-study of teacher education practices can help PhD students to realize the barriers and accomplishments they have faced, along with how to navigate multiple, interconnected identities as teachers, researchers, and agents of community change (Allen et al., 2016), otherwise known as striking role balance (Ressler & Richards, 2017). Role balance can be achieved in collaborative research projects; faculty can acknowledge the personalities of their students and attempt to build relationships through increased communication methods. Furthermore, we believe that self-study, particularly in group settings (Allen et al., 2016; Butler & Diacopoulos, 2016; Foot et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2017;

McAnulty & Cuenca 2014; Murphy et al., 2014; Wiebke & Park Rogers, 2014) can be an important part of this process and can increase support for one's emotional identity.

Gregory and colleagues (2017) have recognized in self-study research that "connections between theories and practices of teacher education evolved through our reflective activities" (p. 269), and "it is the willingness to learn, reflect and grow that defines our roles as teacher educators and self-study scholars" (p. 272), consequently supporting self-reflective practices for future teacher educators. Self-reflective practices promoted through self-study contributed to Shrehan's intentional approach to the process of becoming a teacher educator (Richards & Ressler, 2016). By analysing the experiences documented in her journal, she increased her own self-awareness throughout the study. In turn, self-study assisted in shaping Shrehan's perspective related to what it means to be a teacher educator. Like Murphy et al. (2014), she found "there was great benefit in the ways that our research informed our teacher education practice, and vice versa" (p. 252).

In this study, Shrehan's critical reflection and openness to USA culture helped her recognize the importance of being more relaxed in her teaching approach at the collegiate level. Similar to findings reported by Wiebke and Park Rogers (2014), who also noted a lack of confidence when changing plans in class, Shrehan learned that she could not be the perfect teacher for every student. In her journal she wrote: "What's the middle ground? Am I ever going to be the perfect teacher?" Shrehan came to a critical realization that not all students were going to be on board with her teaching style in every lesson and throughout each segment of curriculum content. However, by making lessons engaging and being more flexible she could better meet students' needs. This finding recalls the "Perfect Ten" syndrome of receiving full marks on student evaluations (Brookfield, 1995). Being the perfect teacher for every student all the time is not possible, nor should it be something that a professor expects. Nevertheless, encouraging students to write honest comments on class evaluations does allow teacher educators to analyse their practices and identify ways to continue improving. Shrehan stated that her initial, regimented approach to teaching arose from her experiences following the English National Curriculum as a schoolteacher, where showing progress each lesson and being observed on a regular basis was expected. Coming to the USA required a new cultural understanding and awareness of a different educational system, which Shrehan gradually uncovered through discussions with Kevin. Shrehan was then better equipped to meet the needs of her students. Such cultural understandings and experiences in the USA clearly influenced Shrehan's identity.

Through her self-study research, Shrehan developed an understanding of her future role as a teacher educator and became comfortable with the realization that her identity will continue to evolve, change, and adapt throughout her career (Wiebke & Park Rogers, 2014). Although Shrehan's first year as a D-PETE student focused on her integration into the role of teacher educator, she also gained experience in research and writing for publication. These are experiences that are required for long-term career success in higher education; seeing teaching as inquiry complements research well (Marin, 2014). In our opinion, self-study research has much to offer faculty members who are interested in improving both their teaching and other facets of their role-responsibilities, including scholarship and community engagement (Richards & Ressler, 2016).

Conclusion

Through self-study, Shrehan developed an increased personal awareness, which was linked to her identity changing and her becoming more adaptable as an emerging teacher educator. It was

facilitated by her increased cultural awareness and broadened worldview. Shrehan looked at situations differently and realized she must accept and attempt to meet the needs of each individual student. At times, enculturation, or learning without awareness, played a factor (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006). By analysing situations or events in her journal and engaging in critical-friend discussions, Shrehan realized she had noticeably changed throughout the process of self-study. In itself, this finding calls for more self-study research to investigate how future teacher educators' identities, experiences, and priorities change over time (Allen et al., 2016; Butler & Diacopoulos, 2016; Foot et al., 2014; Gregory et al. 2017; Marin, 2014; McAnulty & Cuenca, 2014; Murphy et al. 2014; Wiebke & Park Rogers, 2014). With regard to doctoral students becoming teacher educators, this is the first study known to us that contributes to the beginning body of knowledge that has emerged linked to a D-PETE student using self-study. As doctoral students are the future of higher education, it is even more important to focus future research on doctoral education and the experiences of future teacher educators. As Marin (2014, p. 33) wrote: "reflection, inquiry, and self-study of teaching practices should be the norm, not the exception, in schools of education."

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