



Photovoice: Visualizing Student Experiences During an International Level I Fieldwork Experience in Tanzania

Brittany N. Saviers, Ph.D., OTR/L and Mr. George Shirima, OT

Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, AR., USA

Tanzania Occupational Therapy Association



Background

Developing meaningful international experiential learning opportunities poses unique pedagogical challenges. Education abroad is considered a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008). Because of this, international fieldwork experiences in occupational therapy have gained attention for their potential to provide transformative learning opportunities and to contribute to global health initiatives and the provision of care to diverse populations (Adams, et al., 2016). Intentional critical reflection is vital to help students articulate the intricacies of the human experience, so that their portrayal of global health is not reduced to a superficial summary.

This 12-day fieldwork experience in Tanzania focused on learning outcomes grounded in cultural humility. Students acquired insight through hands-on experiences, cultural tours and activities, and dialogue with local residents, healthcare professionals, and researchers who are engaged in the nation-building of Tanzania.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to use Photovoice to explore meaningful learning experiences for occupational therapy students during a short-term international fieldwork experience in Tanzania.

Research Question

Using Photovoice, how do students engaged in a short-term international Level I Fieldwork perceive health, culture, and transformative learning experiences in Tanzania?

Methods

Participants:

- Five occupational therapy doctoral students (female) who completed a Level I Fieldwork experience in Tanzania during the Fall 2023 semester.

Data Collection / Procedures:

- Image capturing: personal smartphone or similar device
- Students captured at least one photo to illustrate each topic:
 - Health and well-being
 - Disease
 - Culture
 - A difference between Tanzania and the United States of America
 - When you think of Tanzania what do you think of?
- Students analyzed, discussed, and reflected on photos and experiences in country and upon return to generate captions illustrating the meaning and essence of each photo.
- Photo journals were uploaded to a password-protected shared-drive.

Data Analysis:

Participatory analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997):

- Participant selection of photos
- Contextualizing photos through journaling and captioning
- Codifying data into meaningful themes

Themes

Health and Well-being

Subtheme: Holistic

- A holistic perspective of health that considered physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.
- The importance of well-being through education of community members.



Spiritual



Physical



Community/Education

Disease

Subtheme: Health Disparities; Cultural Perspectives

Broad range of challenges and perspectives, including:

- Presence of disease/disability
- Disparities in access to healthcare and information
- Societal attitudes toward disability
- Cultural beliefs – traditional healing practices; importance of nature in health



Presence of Disability



Traditional Healing; Nature

Culture

Subtheme: Traditional Practices; Cultural Identity

- The importance of shared traditional practices, social relationships, and the interplay between people and their environment in defining cultural identity and a sense of belonging.
- Culture, belonging, and place is co-created by individuals in a community.



Traditional Practices



Co-created; Belonging

USA and Tanzania

Subtheme: Cultural Contrasts

- Occupational contrasts: meals and childhood play
- Gender norms in the Maasai tribe
- Ubuntu – the value of community in Tanzania compared to the individualistic tendencies in American culture.



Ubuntu



Gender Norms



Childhood Occupations

When I think of Tanzania

Subtheme: Transformation

Positive and transformative learning, characterized by:

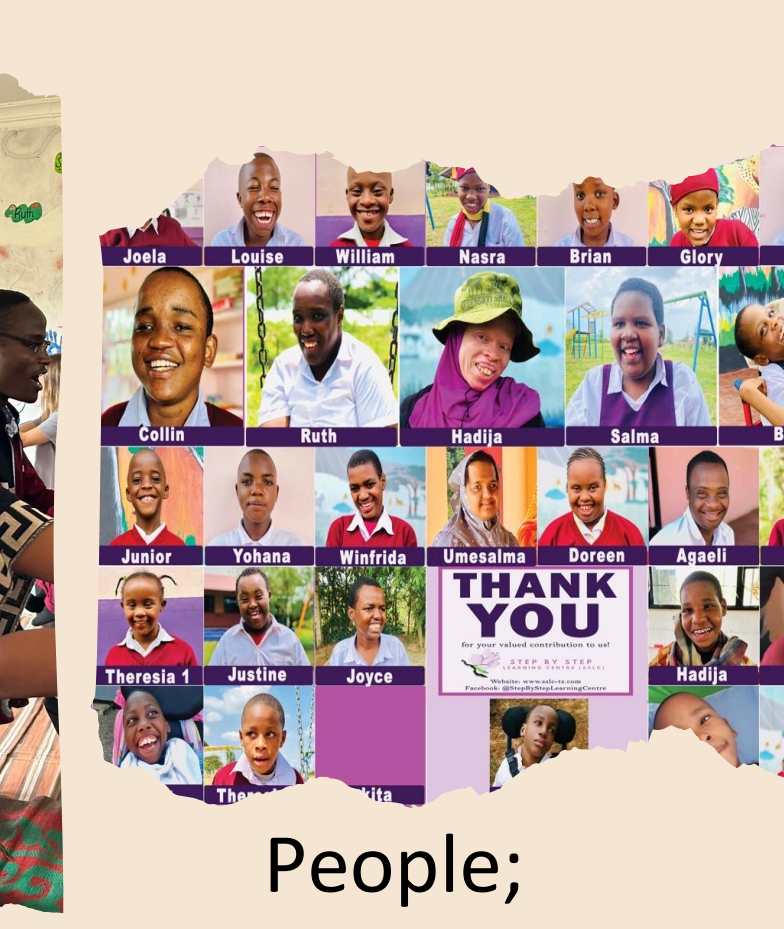
- Infectious warmth and joy of the people
- Beautiful landscapes –metaphor for personal growth
- Cultural immersion and intercultural relationships
- Change from pre-departure thinking that included: animals, poverty, and climate, to name a few.



Landscapes; Personal Growth



Joy



People; Relationships

Discussion

- This project affirmed the value of a short-term international fieldwork experience to Tanzania.
- Themes illustrated the impact that engaging with different cultures, environments, and perspectives have on personal and professional growth, a holistic view of occupational therapy, cross-cultural understanding, and global diversity.
- Photovoice allowed students to think creatively and abstractly.
- Supports the benefit of autonomous learning through engagement, discussion, and reflection while abroad.
- Despite preparation, some phrases were suggestive of *colonialism*, and/or *othering*, indicating that, while students were able to discuss differences between cultures, some were unable to process these in a way that created connections rather than reinforcing privilege.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This study suggests that short-term international fieldwork can help students improve cultural awareness and global diversity. Additionally, this study demonstrates that Photovoice can be a useful pedagogy and evaluation method for international experiential learning.

This research stands to influence the profession by demonstrating through Photovoice how international fieldwork experiences can help develop students who are prepared to practice globally.

Future Recommendations include (not exhaustive):

- Research with a larger sample size, varying sample demographics, and additional geographic locations.
- Combine with focus groups or intentional debriefing sessions to enhance student introspection.

References

A complete reference list is available upon request.

Acknowledgements

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