

The Effect of Work Abroad Experiences on Career Development for U.S. Undergraduates

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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of vocational exploratory behavior on vocational self-concept crystallization (VSCC) and work commitment for U.S. undergraduates who participated in practical experiences overseas, compared to two groups: 1.) students not involved in practical experiences, and 2.) students who participated in practical experiences within the U.S. The above constructs are well-established in the vocational psychology literature and will be discussed later. In reviewing the literature, the effect of learning experiences in the workplace on work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization has not been clearly demonstrated. In spite of the lack of definitive empirical support for this relationship, a long historical tradition exists for the learning-by-doing method, and this tradition is an important means of training students in a profession or trade. The learning-by-doing tradition can be traced back to shortly after humans began engaging in cooperative work efforts. There are records that document the existence of apprenticeships in Babylon, ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. This practice was further formalized in the Middle Ages with the development of guilds and apprenticeships in mediaeval Europe. As early as the thirteenth century, apprentices worked under a master to learn the skills to be carpenters and armourers. After a seven-year apprenticeship, the title of journeyman was granted (McHenry et al. 1993). Further experience, and the presentation of a masterpiece to the guild were criteria used for establishing that the

journeyman was qualified for the rank of master. The title of master bestowed upon its holder the authority and privilege to teach apprentices (Mish 1986). This type of vocational exploratory behavior was incorporated into the university, and from there the title of master, or master's degree, was adopted, probably as early as 1200 AD. The apprenticeship system has existed and evolved over the centuries. By the first half of the twentieth century in the U.S., trade schools provided a part-time, on-the-job training experience for the students who had completed their first year of study.

From the Middle Ages through much of the 20th century, the concept of changing careers was relatively unheard of; however, today's students have a much higher level of occupational mobility. Along with this mobility, there is the risk that students will spend more time trying out a series of careers without developing a commitment to a specific career. This may even have an impact on commitment to work in general. Jordaan (1963) refers to this as a haphazard and unsystematic exploration which can be costly in terms of time and occupational achievement.

The research reported here focused on overseas practical experiences, exploring the relationship between practical training experiences, increased levels of vocational self-concept crystallization, and work commitment, to evaluate whether working in another culture has benefits in increasing vocational self-concept crystallization and work commitment. It is part of a larger study (Hannigan 1998) which examines both overseas and stateside practical experiences to test the relationships mentioned above.

Vocational self-concept crystallization is the clarity and certainty of an individual's self perception of attitudes, values, interests, needs, and abilities for career choice (Barrett 1976; Barrett & Tinsley 1977a, 1977b). The concepts which make up the definition of vocational self-concept crystallization have their source in Super's (1963a) theory, and include three metadimensions of self-concept: clarity, certainty, and the overall structure of the self-concept. *Work commitment* has been succinctly defined as the conative or emotive component of a model of work importance, being the emotional attachment and identification with a work role and its activities (Super 1982). *Vocational exploratory behavior* is physical and mental activity performed for the purpose of gathering information about oneself and the environment for use in choosing a career (Jordaan 1963).

The effect of vocational exploratory behavior on vocational self-concept crystallization and work commitment is particularly important in providing empirical evidence of the value of overseas work experiences for undergraduates. Currently, in U.S. colleges and universities, there is increased importance being placed on assessing educational outcomes. This includes an expectation that institutions must demonstrate the value of educational experiences, including hands-on activities that students participate in as part of their preparation to enter their chosen careers. It is generally believed that such learning-by-doing experiences are an important transition from the classroom to career. International Education also is in need of explaining itself to the larger academic community. Evidence that work abroad programs are effective means of having students clarify their vocational goals and increase commitment to their work goals would be a welcome finding for those who advocate for work abroad experiences.

Vocational exploratory behavior also encompasses apprenticeships in which students move from the more passive role of classroom learners to a position in which skills are used and students begin to take on a role in their chosen careers. This testing of the new role should result in students finding the career environment suited to their interests, in which case an increase in level of commitment to their work should result. The opposite would be true when the reaction to the apprenticeship does not fit with the student's expectations. Along with work commitment, students involved in overseas career-related work experiences would be expected to clarify their self-perceptions of the suitability of their career choice. In short, these learning opportunities are thought to be pivotal and critical in the students' career development. They very likely are instrumental in helping students to take a major step toward understanding the importance of their career goal in their lives, or deciding that they do not want to dedicate their energies to the field that they had initially chosen.

The international education literature has produced a plethora of impact studies which demonstrate that the overseas experience encourages change in attitudes, values, and interests (Carsello & Grieser 1976; Nash 1976; Pfinister 1972; Koester 1987). However, this literature has produced little regarding the impact of overseas practical experiences on career development, although there is evidence that students who go overseas do so with consideration of the impact of the overseas experience on

their career development. Koester (1987) has documented that 29% of her sample of students involved in overseas educational activities ranked career goals, an aspect of work commitment, as among the top four motivations for participation in overseas learning activities.

The current study has broken new ground in the career development and international education areas by examining a sample of students who participated in overseas practical experiences. As there is a paucity of career development research on students who work overseas, this study proposes a new context—overseas practical experiences—in which to examine this aspect of vocational behavior. To date, this is the only study that links the international education literature and the vocational psychology literature on this issue. The theoretical foundation for the current study is based on the work of Super, Jordaan, Barrett and Tinsley.

Super's (1963b, 1963c, 1981) theory of career development offers a developmental perspective on how the individual comes to understand him or herself, and how self-concept can be manifested on one's work. Jordaan's (1963) writing on vocational exploratory behavior examines in greater detail how certain tasks assist the individual in deciding on, and committing to, their work.

Super's approach is developmental, and presents a series of career stages. He describes five stages of career development: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline, that relate to one's choice and commitment to work. The exploratory stage ranges from 15 to 25 years of age, but this time frame is more a guideline than a firm schedule, particularly with today's more frequent career changes.

In moving from the exploration stage to the establishment stage, there is an expected increase in commitment (Super 1963b) and this study focuses on the exploration stage which usually occurs during late adolescence and early adulthood, i.e., around the time when many individuals are involved in making decisions about majors and careers and participating in internships and fieldwork experiences. A practical experience, at this point in development, gives the participant an opportunity to personally evaluate whether the chosen work environment is a suitable place to invest a major part of one's adult life.

There has been a trend in the vocational psychology literature to investigate the relationship between work commitment and vocational exploratory behavior, especially in connection with learning activities in

the workplace. Several researchers have found a relationship between practical work experiences of students and increases in vocational self-concept crystallization (Goldberg 1976; Speights 1979; Taylor 1985; Brooks et al. 1995), although all the research does not support this relationship.

Regarding the relationship between vocational exploratory behavior and work commitment, there is less clarity. It has been demonstrated by Goldberg (1976) but other researchers have not found support for this relationship (Speights 1979; Andritsi 1981; Bernardo 1993/94; Brooks et al. 1995). Although the effect of vocational exploratory behavior on commitment has been researched over the last thirty years, results have not clearly delineated with whom and under what conditions vocational exploration leads to work commitment. Thus, further research on this relationship is needed to clarify under what conditions vocational exploratory behavior increases work commitment.

V o c a t i o n a l E x p l o r a t o r y B e h a v i o r C o m p l e t e d O u t s i d e t h e U . S .

None of the studies reviewed has given any consideration to overseas vocational exploratory behavior and the effect that it may have in helping students to develop greater clarity and a more determined attitude toward work goals. Given the trend toward more undergraduates participating in overseas education activities and the focus on globalization of the marketplace and business world in general, such an omission is becoming more problematic. It follows that addressing this omission is a means of providing data on an aspect of vocational behavior that has hardly been examined up until this time.

The research question addressed was, to what extent are there differences in the impact of practical experiences on work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization for students who complete practical experiences overseas? There are several reasons that there may be differences. Overseas students are exposed to work settings that have their own unique cultural idiosyncrasies, including: (1) a constant feeling of being an outsider, (2) the need to use one's personal resources more than in one's home country where it is easier to retreat to the comforts of family and friends for social and emotional support, and (3) demands of a foreign language (in those countries where English is not the *lingua franca*)

(Kauffmann et al. 1992). Generally, the overseas practical experience will offer all the challenges of the stateside practical experience, along with those mentioned above.

While no previous studies have examined the effect of work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization, there is research showing how overseas educational experiences lead to changes in attitudes. Kauffmann et al. (1992) cites a general trend of increases in interest in international affairs, world-mindedness, and cross-cultural empathy after undergraduate experiences overseas. Also, students returning from overseas generally demonstrate a change in behaviors, including increased involvement with organizations that focus on international issues and participation in activities with the goal of increasing international understanding. They also report an increase in general self-confidence and a clearer self-concept (Carsello & Grieser 1976; Nash 1976; Pfinister 1979; Pyle 1981). Kauffmann et al. (1992) mentions that many returning students are aware of more career options than before the sojourn. This suggests that some type of vocational exploratory behavior may occur overseas, since there is some indication that students' career options increase.

In general, the undergraduate years are a time when young adults gain an increased sense of who they are and where they are going, particularly in relation to career plans (Chickering & Reisser 1993; Super 1963c). The overseas experience shares a number of commonalities with the undergraduate experience that is completed stateside. However, the overseas student worker is probably more frequently challenged because of his/her foreignness, and has less opportunity to find him or herself in the mainstream (Laubscher 1994). These additional adjustment challenges in the work experience might affect changes in work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization that are different from the changes in stateside work experiences. The current research gathers data on these relationships as well as determining whether vocational exploratory behavior, abroad or stateside, is related to increases in VSCC.

This study proposes two hypotheses and one research question:

H1. Students engaged in semester-long, overseas practical experiences will demonstrate a greater increase in vocational self-concept crystallization than students not participating in practical experiences.

H2. Students engaged in semester-long, overseas practical experiences will demonstrate a greater increase in work commitment than stu-

dents not participating in practical experiences.

The above two hypotheses are presented because students who enter practical experiences have an opportunity to test the fit between their abilities, interests, values, and satisfaction with their chosen work environment. These two hypotheses test whether VSCC and work commitment change more readily when the student is in a workplace versus a classroom setting.

RQ1. Do students participating in overseas practical experiences demonstrate different outcomes in vocational self-concept crystallization and work commitment than students engaged in similar vocational exploratory behavior in the U.S.?

The above research question deals with U.S. students interacting in a work environment in different cultures compared with students working in the U.S. The literature review provided here demonstrates that there has been a paucity of information about changes in work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization when students work in overseas settings. The literature suggests that changes in work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization may be different when U.S. students work in foreign cultures. Because there is little theoretical guidance about this issue, the relationship in RQ1 is posed as a question rather than a hypothesis.

Method

The study undertaken implemented a pre/posttest design involving a stateside practicum group (SPG), an overseas practicum group (OPG), and a nonpracticum group (NPG). All participants completed the same set of pencil and paper tests, prior to or during the first weeks of the semester, and again at the end of the semester.

Participants

Participants were undergraduates from a variety of institutions of higher education in the Northeast, including private and public colleges, community colleges, and four-year colleges. However, the main focus of this study was on two institutions which facilitate the participation of U.S. students in overseas practical experiences. These two institutions

provided participants from throughout the United States. The participants who were enrolled in the first institution completed work study experiences in Australia, France, Great Britain, the People’s Republic of China, and Spain, that were clearly related to their majors in work settings such as art galleries and newspaper offices. The second organization consisted of participants who worked in Ecuador, Great Britain, Jamaica, and the Philippines, in more of a public sector arena for the students’ practical experiences with placements in elementary schools, clinics, and social work agencies. Nonpracticum students were students who remained in the classroom and did not participate in a practical experience. They were similar to their practicum counterparts in that they were in the same majors and had voiced an interest in a practical experience but subsequently did not participate in one.

A total of 431 students completed the pre- and post-test questionnaires. Two hundred seventy students participated in practical experiences during the fall semester, with 218 (80.7% of students participating in a practicum experience) students reporting that they completed practical experiences stateside and 52 (19.2% of the students participating in a practicum experience) stating that they completed their practical experiences outside the U.S. (See Table 1).

Table 1 - Frequency of participants in various groups

Stateside Practicum (SPG)	218
Overseas Practicum (OPG)	52
Nonpracticum(NPG)	161
Total	431

The nonpracticum group (NPG), numbering 161 students, showed no significant differences from neither the overseas practicum group (OPG) nor the stateside practicum group (SPG) in age or sex; however, stateside practicum students (SPG) were more likely to be married and more experienced in career-related volunteer and employment activities, than the OPG and the NPG.

Among the students involved in the overseas practicum group (OPG), there were 10 men (19.2%) and 41 women (78.8%), with one of

the students not reporting gender. The age of students ranged from 19 to 32 years with a mean of 20.75 years and a standard deviation of 1.90 years. Most of these participants were single (82.4%).

These participants who were focusing on an overseas experience were different in a number of ways from their stateside counterparts. They were younger than the stateside participants (group mean = 27.19 years), and were less likely to be married or to have dependents.

I n s t r u m e n t s

All 431 students were administered the Background Information Questionnaire and the Practical Experience Information Questionnaire (Bernardo 1993/1994), the ACT Interest Inventory (American College Testing Program 1981), The Commitment Scale of the Salience Inventory (Nevill & Super 1986), a ten-item questionnaire that assesses level of work commitment (range of scores:10 to 40) and the Vocational Rating Scale (VRS) (Barrett 1976), a 40-item measure of vocational self-concept crystallization (range of scores: 40 to 200). Vocational Self-Concept Crystallization and Work Commitment were operationally defined by the scores obtained on the Vocational Rating Scale and the Commitment Scale, respectively.

These same instruments were completed at the end of the semester with the exception of the Background Information Questionnaire which was replaced with the Practical Experience Information Questionnaire. Both of these instruments elicit demographic information and expectations and impressions about the work experience. The NPG completed only the demographic portion of the Practical Experience Information Questionnaire, since they had not participated in a practical experience.

P r o c e d u r e

Students were mailed the above battery of tests with a consent form and a cover letter from the director of the program. The cover letter described the purpose of the questionnaire battery and asked that students participate in the research study. Students were instructed to complete and return by mail the questionnaire before departing the U.S. or beginning classes. Students who did the above were informed that their names

would be included in a raffle drawing for \$100.

The second phase took place at the end of the semester and followed a similar procedure involving completion of the questionnaire by mail. Students who completed and submitted the second questionnaire were eligible for a \$150 raffle prize.

A n a l y s i s o f D a t a

Regarding Hypotheses #1 and 2, analysis of covariance was the statistical method used to determine whether increases in vocational self-concept crystallization and work commitment were significantly different between the OPG and the NPG.

Regarding Research Question #1, differences in posttest vocational self-concept crystallization and commitment scores for the OPG versus NPG were calculated to determine if the changes in these variables occurred differently as a function of where the practical experience was completed (stateside or overseas).

Regression of analysis was also used to determine factors that determined variance in VSCC and work commitment.

R e s u l t s

Hypothesis #1 predicted a statistically significant increase in vocational self-concept crystallization for the OPG when compared with the NPG. There was a significant difference in the increase in vocational self-concept crystallization when the OPG was compared to the NPG (See Table 2), thereby supporting this hypothesis. It should also be noted that a significant increase occurred when a comparison was made between the SPG and the NPG.

Table 2 - Group Means, Standard Deviations for Stateside Practicum (SPG), Overseas Practicum (OPG) and Nonpracticum Groups (NPG) for Vocational Self-Concept Crystallization and Work Commitment

Vocational Self-Concept Crystallization									
	Stateside Practicum(SP)			Overseas Practicum(OPG)			Nonpracticum (NPG)		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Pretest	157.75	21.03	216	150.75	23.33	51	149.58	23.68	161
Posttest	160.75	22.36	216	154.10	23.64	51	150.99	24.90	161
difference	3.00*			3.35*			1.41		

Work Commitment									
	Stateside Practicum(SP)			Overseas Practicum(OPG)			Nonpracticum (NPG)		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Pretest	35.22	4.62	216	34.25	5.49	51	33.41	6.56	161
Posttest	35.44	5.45	216	33.62	4.61	51	33.81	5.67	161
difference	.22			.63			.40		

* $p < .05$ level of significance

Note. Sample size (n) amounts do not agree in all cases with the amounts on Table 1 due to some participants not responding to some of the questions in their questionnaire packets.

On Hypothesis #2, which predicted an increase in work commitment for the OPG when compared to the NPG, results showed no significant difference between the overseas participants when compared to the nonpracticum group, therefore Hypothesis #2 was not supported.

Regarding Research Question #1 (Do students participating in overseas practical experiences demonstrate different outcomes in vocational self-concept crystallization and work commitment than students engaged in similar vocational exploratory behavior in the U.S.), analysis of covariance was used to determine that there was no significant difference between the stateside and overseas participants on posttest vocational self concept crystallization nor work commitment. It is interesting to note that among the OPG, there was a decrease in work commitment.

Focusing on the OPG, a number of other important findings about how they describe their overseas experience were that 75% of the overseas practicum participants described the experience as either satisfying or very satisfying. Fifty-four percent rated the experience as important or very important in achieving career goals. Regarding ratings of level of super-

vision, 46% of the overseas participants reported that it was adequate or nearly adequate. Sixty-seven percent of the overseas participants considered the challenge of their work abroad experience to be adequate.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Students engaged in semester-long, overseas practical experiences will demonstrate a greater increase in vocational self-concept crystallization than students not participating in practical experiences.

This hypothesis was supported and, therefore, provides evidence for the value of vocational exploratory behavior in the form of practical experiences in the overseas workplace helping students clarify their career goals as well as increasing certainty about career plans.

It is noteworthy that this study found differences in the pretest VSCC scores of the three groups, with the nonpracticum group having the lowest scores of all three of the groups (See Table 2). This is possibly due to the nonpracticum group's not having taken up their role in their chosen profession during the period when this study was conducted. They were involved only in classroom activities, learning the theory behind their chosen majors. They were not facing the challenge of how they would function in a work-related internship. By contrast, the OPG and the SPG were at the critical point of entering a work placement in their chosen career. The task of fitting into their new role would very likely sensitize them to thinking about themselves, their chosen career and how they would take up their professional roles (See Table 3). The results of a regression analysis yielded four factors that explained nearly half of the variation of the posttest VSCC. Two of these variables were level of satisfaction and extent of supervision, and both may have been indirect measures of the quality of the practical experience. In other words, when students reported that they were adequately supervised and satisfied with the experience, they tended to become more crystallized in their vocational self-concept. Year in college was the third factor.

Finally, GPA was also identified as significantly related to VSCC. This might indicate that students who are higher academic achievers would be more focused on their major and career choice. With a clear picture of their academic and vocational goals, it would follow that they would have more crystallized vocational self-concepts.

Table 3 - Means and Standard Deviations for OPG, SPG and Combined Practicum Groups

Vocational Self-Concept Crystallization									
	Stateside Practicum(SPG)			Overseas Practicum(OPG)			Combined (SPG+OPG)		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Pretest	157.75	21.03	216	150.75	23.33	51	156.40	21.65	271
Posttest	160.75	22.36	216	154.10	23.64	51	159.37	21.03	271
difference	3.00*			3.35*			2.97*		

* $p < .05$ level of significance

Note. Sample size (n) amounts do not agree in all cases with the amounts on Table 1 due to some participants not responding to some of the questions in their questionnaire packets.

Hypothesis 2: Students engaged in semester-long, overseas practical experiences will demonstrate a greater increase in work commitment than students not participating in practical experiences.

This hypothesis was not supported, indicating that, although vocational exploratory behavior may be effective in increasing vocational self-concept crystallization, students did not report being more committed to their work after a semester of hands-on experience in their chosen field. This is true for both the OPG and the SPG. One explanation for the failure to achieve significant results is that the group means on the Commitment Scale for the students in this study were markedly higher than the norms for college students in general and, in fact, approached the maximum score on the commitment scale itself. The range of possible scores for work commitment on this instrument is between 10 and 40.

However, in reviewing a similar study by Brooks et al. (1995), it should be noted that they were unable to demonstrate a relationship between career commitment and work experience. They used the Commitment to Career Choices Scale, which has a considerably wider range and their participants were not near the upper end of the scale. This suggests that the lack of increase on commitment is not the result of limited range of the instrument, but rather that this variable is not influenced by the type of vocational exploratory behavior (practical experiences) used in this study.

In addition, Brooks et al. (1995) did find support for the relation-

ship between practical experiences and vocational self-concept crystallization, mirroring the findings of this study. Other attempts to demonstrate a relationship between commitment and practical experience have also been unsuccessful (Speights 1979; Andritsi 1981; Bernardo 1993/1994), suggesting that vocational exploratory behavior in the form of practical experience may not affect work commitment.

An alternate explanation for the inability to demonstrate a relationship between work commitment and practical experiences may be the duration of the experience itself. Other researchers have also tended to use a single semester as the interval for data gathering. Perhaps this is too short a period of time to expect increases in commitment. Future studies might extend the period of time over which data is collected to six, eight, and ten months after the beginning of the students' practical experience. A modified time series design might also shed some light as to what type of student demonstrates relatively early increases in commitment, and which students require longer exposure to practical experiences to increase this variable. It may also be possible that becoming vocationally committed occurs after increased vocational self-concept crystallization. Perhaps work and career commitment increase more significantly when students are in the work force or in graduate school. It may be that VSCC is the more fundamental of the two tasks, i.e. the capacity to see oneself in a chosen career role must precede commitment to that career role.

Research Question 1 : Do students participating in overseas practical experiences demonstrate different outcomes in work commitment and vocational self-concept crystallization than students engaged in similar vocational exploratory behavior in the U.S.?

There was an expectation that the overseas practicum students might have different outcomes than their stateside counterparts regarding changes in vocational self-concept crystallization and work commitment. However, there were no significant differences in VSCC, nor in work commitment between these two groups. The only difference found in connection with vocational self-concept crystallization was in the amount of increase in this variable, with overseas practicum group showing greater increases than the stateside group.

Another comparison was made between the SPG, the OPG and the combination of all the practicum students (OPG + SPG) (See Table 3). Although the OPG showed the greatest increase in VSCC, it should be

noted that this group had the lowest group mean at the beginning of the study. Therefore it is apparent that the OPG is initially the least crystallized to begin with and although this group makes the largest gains, it still is lowest in posttest scores of these three groups.

This suggests that the dynamics in the overseas practical experience may be more complex than the local practical experience, and its effects on students may be different from a stateside practical experience. In particular, students who work overseas may learn a great deal, but these learnings may be only indirectly related to their vocational development. For instance, students who have worked or studied overseas frequently report having developed a new, more sophisticated understanding of U.S. culture and how foreigners view Americans and U.S. foreign policy. Also frequently reported is an increase in self-confidence and a better understanding of oneself. For others, the overseas experience aids in the development of maturity and an increase in self-reliance and independence (Kauffmann et al. 1992). While these learnings are undoubtedly very valuable, they are not necessarily related to vocational development.

Comparison of the SPG and the OPG groups showed some important differences. As discussed earlier, the students who worked overseas were less mature chronologically and vocationally. They also tended to be more homogeneous in terms of marital status, being primarily single and having fewer dependents than the participants that worked stateside. These differences in marital status and familial responsibility may have been a factor in self sorting of participants into different destinations for completion of their practical experiences. It appears that the single students and especially the students without dependents, had more freedom in choosing where they would do their work, either stateside or overseas, whereas the students with spouses and dependents may have limited their practical experience to a stateside setting. This also suggests that persons with family responsibilities may look at practicum alternatives more carefully, considering that their career decisions have implications for a larger number of persons. It may be that students who chose to work overseas have fewer constraints on their choice of work sites.

The overseas practicum group was also different in terms of their vocational development. Their pretest vocational self-concept crystallization scores were lower than those of their stateside practicum counterparts. These lower scores suggest that the OPG was less vocationally

mature than their stateside counterparts.

Another important difference was found in students' perceptions of their practical experiences. The OPG was significantly less satisfied with their practical experience. They also perceived the practical experience as less important than their stateside counterparts did, and they rated the supervision that they received during the practical experience as less adequate than the participants who completed practical experiences in the U.S. These differences in the perceived quality of the practical experience may have accounted for some of the differences in vocational self-concept crystallization. Being required to mobilize more of their personal resources to manage the additional difficulties of work in a foreign environment may have shifted focus away from vocational outcomes for the overseas students.

The younger age of the overseas practicum students may be a factor in explaining developmental differences. These younger students may have been more focused on personal identity and interpersonal issues than on vocational issues. They also may have been more grounded in their identity as a student rather than worker. Entry into the world of work was likely to be less imminent for the overseas group than their older stateside counterparts.

The older stateside group may have been more focused on vocational issues and motivated to gain work experience through practica. They were more likely to perceive the practical experience as being a special opportunity to make contacts in their field and as a stepping stone to future employment.

The overseas experience had been expected to have a more significant impact on career outcomes. However, judging from some of the responses to the open-ended questions, the challenge of adjusting to life overseas may have been underestimated. Overseas participants appeared to be more frustrated in finding a niche for themselves and feeling that they were consistently involved in meaningful learning experiences in the work setting. This is not unlike the reactions reported by other cross-cultural sojourners such as Peace Corps Volunteers and international students, especially during the early months of their sojourns.

Considering that the overseas participants were on site for only one semester, they had to deal with major adjustment issues including orientation to a completely different environment and, in some cases, to a dif-

ferent language, as well as adjustment to the foreign work setting. This could explain their frustration. It would take a highly skilled and cross-culturally competent individual (Hannigan 1990) to make the transition and feel full advantage had been taken of an overseas work experience that was usually no more than four months in duration.

The additional adjustment issues that occur when an individual not only makes the transition from student to apprentice, but is simultaneously negotiating vocational exploration in a culturally different work and living environment, may account for these overseas student workers being less focused on vocational development. Furthermore, Koester (1987) demonstrated that the motivations for students participating in overseas educational experiences were many and varied, not simply related to vocational factors.

Open-ended Responses from Participants' Questionnaires

Students were given an opportunity to respond to two open-ended questions, one in the pretest battery and one in the posttest battery. The response rate for students (OPG + SPG) providing comments on the two open-ended questions was 34 percent. The pretest question was, "Please use the space below to describe what you expect your field experience to be like (your job, co-workers, etc.)". The most frequently noted comment on the pretest questionnaire was concern about relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and the clients, patients, and children with whom they would be interacting in their work setting. The second most frequent comment had the theme of worry about the level of difficulty/challenge of the upcoming practical experience. Ranked third were concerns about whether the practical experience would be a good learning experience.

Professionals who organize and implement practical experiences need to be aware of these preoccupations of their students in order to better prepare them for the work experience they are about to begin and to insure that these student workers will enter the practical experience with realistic expectations for the work role they will be assuming.

Responses of the OPG reflected unique concerns of working in a foreign culture: their foreign language proficiency and opportunity to compare U.S. business and education systems with those of other countries.

Although not frequently reported, comments which reflect no idea at all about expectations for the practical experience suggest that more needs to be done to orient students to the upcoming work experience. These comments may have been a defense against developing a set of unrealistic expectations that would have increased the amount of culture shock that participants would experience. It is possible that some students remained in an open, flexible state of mind without developing expectations and that this was translated into a response on the above question of having no idea of what to expect.

The post-test question asked students to comment on the quality of the practicum. Forty-seven participants (SPG + OPG) responded, and the only area that suggested disappointment was in the level of supervision where approximately half of those who responded felt that it was not adequate.

In summary, the overseas participant has a broader range of concerns than his or her stateside counterpart, including career development but also refining of foreign language skills, learning about a different culture and developing self-confidence in being able to work overseas. In comparing the older participants who work stateside with the traditionally-aged students who choose the overseas work experience, the older student generally perceives the practical experience as satisfying and the supervision as adequate. This is not to say that practical experiences are not educationally and vocationally valuable for younger, less academically accomplished students. Indeed, from a developmental perspective, these younger students may grow to be the type of student who will eventually gain the most from the practical experience. Maturation and life experience may be the key factors in gaining the most from a practical experience.

L i m i t a t i o n s o f t h e S t u d y

Although a number of problems with previous investigations were taken into account in the design and implementation of this study, several limitations remain, including the use of intact groups and the lack of equivalence of groups.

Implications for Preparing Students for Work Abroad

Most encouraging is the fact that this study provides additional empirical support for students' participation in practical experiences in their chosen majors/careers as a means of helping them crystallize their vocational self-concept. This study provides counselors with information to assist them in responding to students who question the efficacy of practical experiences as a means of helping them become more clear and certain about their career plans. Those professionals working with students who are considering practical experiences can state with confidence that this form of vocational exploratory behavior does indeed assist students in becoming more clear and certain about their career goals.

The results of the study also suggest that students preparing to engage in a practical experience need accurate information about what to expect, especially regarding interactions with coworkers, supervisors, and clients to better prepare them for the unfamiliar setting they enter. These guidelines are more important for the younger or more traditionally aged college students than for older students. It also appears to be a more salient issue for the students who work overseas, in that they are more likely to feel disoriented in a foreign workplace due to differences in language, work values, and relationships with supervisors and subordinates. International educators need to be especially attentive to providing a thorough orientation for all practical experience participants, especially those who will work in culturally different settings. Based on the responses to open-ended questions, it appears that students would benefit from information on the change in structure that they are likely to experience as they move from the classroom to the workplace. It appears that some students expected supervisors to provide clear and specific details on all work assignments, but in reality, the students participating in practical experiences were expected to take more initiative and define their role in the workplace more so than when they were students in the classroom. Vocational specialists need to work with students on this important aspect of the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

International educators might also consider clarifying with their overseas work site supervisors exactly how much time and support is expected for the interns they will be supervising. Using feedback from

previous students who have been supervised in those job sites, it might be important to share with the supervisors information regarding whether previous participants felt that they were challenged enough in that setting.

Regarding questions about the advantages of participating in practical experiences stateside versus overseas, this study also provides some direction. It is clear that for students who have a single goal of increasing vocational self-concept crystallization, the stateside experience is more likely to be the better choice. However, if students see increases in VSCC as one of several goals that might include increasing international awareness and developing self-reliance and cross-cultural empathy, then the overseas practical experience would be the better choice. In short, the overseas experience does not have an effect on just the vocational self-concept, but rather a broader array of aspects of the self-concept.

Professionals working with students need to be aware that some students enter the practical experience with doubts about the appropriateness of their career goal, yet conflicted about changing it. This study did yield information on a group of students, albeit few in number, who did change their career goals based on the learning experience in the workplace. Very likely, there were additional participants who had their doubts about this, but chose not to act on changing their career goal although the practical experience was not vocationally confirming. This is an important point to keep in mind when working with students. Often this vocational conflict is not explicitly stated by the student, yet the professional who is aware of this dynamic may be of more help to the student having doubts about his or her career goal. In fact, this suggests that some type of concurrent vocational counseling or seminar for students participating in practical experiences may be an important component to facilitate students working through their conflicts about what they are learning about themselves and the world of work. Such a seminar could also serve as a means of providing realistic expectations about what the work at hand will entail and what the student should expect regarding interactions with supervisors, coworkers, and clients.

Recommendations for Further Research

It should be noted that in all the literature on the effects of practi-

cal experience, virtually no research has examined overseas practical experiences. The hope is that the current study will stimulate further inquiry in this area. Among the research questions about overseas participants that need further examination are the following: (1) why do certain students pursue the overseas practical experience option? (2) Is the overseas experience a means of delaying or escaping from pressures to resolve decisions about work and career? (3) Is there a difference in vocational maturity for students who complete practical experiences stateside versus abroad?

It should also be noted that overseas practical experiences have a high degree of face validity for certain career goals (e.g., careers in international banking, international development and the import/export business), yet this connection has not been explored empirically.

In summary, this study provides support for the hypothesis that practical experiences are an effective means of increasing VSCC in undergraduate students; however, the same cannot be said for work commitment. It also demonstrates that older students tend to perceive the practical experience as an important means of entering into the world of work.

The results indicate that students consider the practical experience as important when supervision and the level of challenge are at appropriate levels. Finally, this study provides a first step in examining the effect of the practical experience on VSCC and work commitment for U.S. students who participate in practical experiences in international settings.

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