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European Tour

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Schools all over the world are working to develop diverse educational systems that will offer students the most in-depth learning experiences possible. Taking the opportunity to travel to Europe, my educational experience has broadened and been enriched through interactions with people from several European countries. My main focus, while studying over in Europe, was to become more knowledgeable of primary education systems throughout the world. I was able to observe and interact with students and staff in the countries of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Although they are located geographically near each other, there were many differences within their school systems and the importance that education has in their culture.

While in England I was able to visit a private primary school in the city of Westminster. The school, St. James and St. Michael's, has 150 students between the ages of three and eleven. When first entering into the school it did not appear much different from a private school in the United States, but after having the chance to talk with students and the principal I learned that their school system had few similarities with an American system. The most surprising was the school's diverse student body. Students of all faiths, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds attend this school and are able to succeed to their full potential. Stated in the schools mission statement; "Our school is a microcosm of the multicultural society in which we live. We welcome its diversity, recognizing this as both enriching and beneficial". The headmaster strongly emphasized

the schools dedication to this statement and it was obvious from walking around the school, that every teacher and student is held accountable for creating the supportive and enriched environment. The success level of the students enforced the importance of involving various cultures in the classroom.

Preparing as a future educator, my cultural awareness has expanded through my interactions at St. James' and St. Michaels, in the sense that I am more aware of the value of including several culture's aspects within one classroom. Although schools in the U.S. generally consist of only two or three different race or ethnic groups, it is crucial for the students to be aware of the many cultures that exist in the world. The Education system of Westminster states that, "Children (need) to develop self-esteem, self-awareness and to take responsibility for themselves, others and the world around them". In order to enrich the knowledge of young children teachers need to educate them on cultural differences. Expanding my own sense of culture through interactions and observations I am more aware of not only the educational differences around the world but also the value of including a range of cultural experiences to enrich education.

Emersion of myself in several different cultures in a short period of time, I was able to recognize similarities throughout the European educational systems as well. The major focus for the primary schools is to prepare students for their future education. In England, the Westminster school districts "(Helps students) develop the physical, emotional, and social skills needed for today's world". Similar to the U.S., the educators are aware of the importance in preparing students for interactions with people from all over the world. I believe that it is crucial for each child to be aware of the differences all over the world and to be prepared in every aspect of their life, for interactions that will

arise. Similarly, St. George's school in Edinburgh also focuses on preparing the students for the future. " St. George's aims to provide learning opportunities...(to prepare individuals) for the next stage of education, adult life and work". It is obvious throughout the European education system that future preparation is the main focus.

Having the opportunities to interact with both students and educators in Europe opened my eyes to the differences and similarities that exist in education. As I come closer to having my own classroom and preparing students for the future I am more aware of what cultural aspects to include in my classroom. Students need to be able to work well with each other in the classroom, but they also must be prepared to work with students and adults from all over the world. In order to have successful interactions, I must offer them knowledge and support, learned through my own experiences, that will open their eyes to differences among a variety of cultures.