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Michelle Grenier, Associate Professor of Kinesiology, travels to Scotland

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Recommended Citation

Grenier, Michelle, "Michelle Grenier, Associate Professor of Kinesiology, travels to Scotland" (2013).

Faculty Travel Reports. 79.

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Michelle Grenier

Michelle Grenier, Associate Professor of Kinesiology

Professor Grenier travelled to Scotland to continue her research on physical education teacher practices for students with autism spectrum disorders in the Scottish system.

My trip this past fall to Edinburgh was a rich experience for many reasons. With support from the Center for International Education, I extended my research program to focus on examining the primary issues incurred by physical education teachers (PE) when teaching students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Edinburgh a spectacularly beautiful city; one filled with winding medieval streets and a castle that dominates a spectacular skyline. Our institutions share similar educational goals and a faculty body eager to establish a collaborative relationship. For two weeks, I lived in Portobello, which is an area three miles outside the city center, and sits on the Firth of Forth. The spirit of the Scots are jovial, their humor infectious and their generosity unpretentious, which made for easy travel. I also took the opportunity to travel to the Loch Ness (no sign of Nessie) and hike the Fife trail that borders St. Andrews and the Firth. Of course, no trip to Scotland would be complete without a few castle visits.

The combination of scholarship with travel is one that builds professional connections and enhances the construction of knowledge. Both the United Kingdom and the United States share similar educational patterns in the way students with disabilities are being educated. However, little is known about how teachers are working to create an inclusive PE environment in the Scottish context, particularly with the growing number of students diagnosed with ASD. My collaborator, Andrew Horrell, is the director of the Physical Education program at the University of Edinburgh and like myself, committed to best teaching practices and research that supports teaching.

Our work began last spring when our Physical Education (PE) program hosted Andrew's visit to the states. During one of our school observations at a local school, we sat in on a physical education class that included a student with ASD. After the class, we met with the occupational therapist that, in collaboration with the physical education teacher, had designed a special program of video prompts that were used to guide the student through movement experiences that enabled him to be successful in his PE class. That meeting led to a joint program to ascertain the teaching practices and issues facing physical education teachers when teaching students with autism in PE across both continents.



Students at the primary school provided a perspective on | school life within the Scottish system



Professor Grenier (l.) on a visit to the Stirling Castle

Prior to my arrival in Scotland, Andrew and I developed an online survey administered to PE teachers in elementary and secondary schools in the City of Edinburgh. The survey examined two primary areas: (a) background questionnaire and the second, (b) an elicitation questionnaire that addressed teachers' knowledge base and strategies employed when teaching students with ASD.

Essentially what we found was that teachers felt confident about their ability to teach but lacked knowledge of the technical skills that can impede their participation in PE. Communication issues were the primary barriers. We followed up with observational visits to primary and secondary schools. We spoke to teachers and administrators and had the opportunity to observe inclusive classrooms with students with ASD. We attended a conference at the university that focused on software for people with ASD. These experiences, in concert with the questionnaire and interview data provided a format for our professional training day in late October at the University of Edinburgh. During the day, we offered resources and strategies that encouraged students' engagement in the classroom, as well as providing the attending teachers an opportunity to share their own successes and challenges in the classroom.

While the trip to Scotland is over, our work is not yet complete. We've revised the survey to be administered to physical education teachers in the United States and will analyze the data comparatively across both cultures. Our intent is to complete a manuscript for publication. Finally, I would like that thank Center for International Education for supporting this project.





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