

The Experience of Teaching Abroad: Pedagogical and Other Benefits

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Abstract
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This thesis is based on interviews with seven Montreal based teachers who sojourned abroad and to teach English. The stories were collected based on a semi-structured interview schedule. The study's objective was to (a) to examine the impact, if any, of their teaching abroad upon their professional and personal development and (b) to determine whether, upon their return to Quebec, Canada, they applied the lessons learnt to their teaching practice. All participants, whose age, educational background and length of work experience varied, described changes in their professional and personal development, similar to the examples identified by the research subjects in the literature review upon which this study was based. They are firmly convinced that their work abroad had a positive impact upon their teaching in Montreal and they were able to provide examples to support their claim. Furthermore, they maintained that direct teaching and living experience in other cultures and customs, especially for monolingual teachers, helped them appreciate the challenges that students from other cultural backgrounds face in their Montreal classrooms. Some teachers were inspired from their work abroad to pursue teaching on a full time basis. One teacher developed his own private business. Thus, in spite of the difficulties inherent to teaching abroad, the positive impact that such an experience can have on a teacher's ability to be self-critical and to evolve may provide benefits that go beyond simple personal growth, benefits that dramatically empower both the personal and professional development of many teachers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father Vasilios A. Markoulis and my late mother Effy Markoulis, who always encouraged me to follow my dreams. Without their continued love and support, creating this work would not have been possible.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This study addresses the relationship between teachers who work abroad (that is to say who work outside of Canada in another country anywhere in the world), and the transformative changes they undergo, both personal and professional, on their return to Canada. Do teachers' experiences working abroad effect change at a personal level, and does that change move them both to reflect on and, eventually, alter their teaching practices? Finally, to what extent does a teacher's contact with a different culture bring such changes about?

With increasing global change and the movement of immigrants and refugees from one part of the world to another, schools in cities such as Montreal are becoming more and more culturally diverse. As a result, teachers need to acquire much more cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity than in the past, so that they can interact appropriately with learners and understand what they bring from home to the classroom in terms of cultural values and language abilities.

In recent years, the internationalization of university programs has become the norm. Indeed, more and more governments are now encouraging students in education to work abroad. For example, generous travel grants to teachers are now made available by the Ministry of Education to Quebec residents on the assumption that the experience of teaching abroad will contribute toward the ability of teachers to work more effectively in an intercultural context.

One purpose of this study is to review the research literature regarding the potential for international travel and study experiences to move beyond merely expanding intercultural awareness among teachers. Of particular interest is the influence that such an expanding awareness has on subsequent teaching and pedagogy in the classroom. Much of the existing research has been carried out from the perspective of the US. Thus, more research is needed from a Canadian perspective where, unlike in the US, there exists not only a federal policy that relates both to multiculturalism in general and multicultural education, but also a provincial policy in Quebec on interculturalism and intercultural education.

Main question to be explored (Research Question)

The objective of this study is to examine whether a teacher's experience abroad helps develop cultural and global understanding which can then be transferred to the classroom upon return home. In particular, this study seeks to determine the influence of teachers' initial training on the experience abroad and then in turn, on teaching practice following the time abroad. Participating teachers are interviewed who have received original training in Canada, have taught overseas, and have returned to Montreal to teach. Thus, I seek to determine whether teachers who work overseas acquire a heightened awareness of cultural differences and then transfer new skills based on that awareness to their students, and whether a Canadian or Quebec initial teacher education.

The questions investigate the following aspects of the subjects' teaching practices:

- 1) How much teaching training / teaching experience do the teachers generally have before leaving to work overseas? How much if any of that training included courses in diversity or international and comparative education?
- 2) How long do the teachers generally work abroad before they report significant changes appear in their teaching styles?
- 3) Which factors external to work experience have had an impact on the teachers' work?
- 4) Which factors overall do teachers consider as having the most impact on their practice?
- 5) Do personal background factors (such as non-English, non-French first language) play a role in this issue?

Why is the study important?

According to Parker, Hiroshima and Cogan (1999), there has recently been a great upheaval in current work environments. Overseas outsourcing and contemporary communication technologies increasingly require workers to integrate their efforts with those from other nations and cultures. The education of these workers must therefore address the needs of the global citizen. Since many jobs can be done from anywhere in the world, the global worker should be prepared not merely for the concrete aspects of the job, but the cultural context of potential co-workers from an increasingly diverse labour pool. The work that teachers do is no exception. Thus, they must understand these recent changes both in order to develop their skills in handling a multicultural classroom, and to

transmit these skills, in turn, to their students. In order to best achieve these objectives, they as professionals must be aware of this changing world in which more people travel and work abroad and, with this in mind, many teachers now travel to increase their own cultural awareness and improve their pedagogy. Some individuals return to Quebec and pursue a degree in teaching, while others obtain their degree before they set out to see the world. I have met individuals from both groups and they have all shared positive experiences from their work abroad. They believe such experiences allow one to learn and grow as a person and this study endeavours to find whether that broadened base of experience has positive implications in the classroom when the teachers return to Quebec.

Chapter II

Literature Review

One of the impacts of globalization has been the realization that we no longer live in homogeneous societies. Individuals work, marry and travel beyond the physical borders set by individual nations. Therefore, schools need to address the constantly changing demographics of society and the needs of the new classroom as it reflects these changes. Through my own work experience, and from the experience of other teachers I observe, I know that multicultural classrooms require different curricula and class presentation of teachable subjects to better relate to an increasingly diverse student body.

In order for a teacher to make changes to her curriculum, she must first acknowledge the need for certain change to occur. This can be accomplished through a critical reflection, which can arise from, among other opportunities, the experience of living and teaching in another country. Once critical thinking occurs, transformative learning may take place. The teacher makes the required changes in her attitude, and practices to best meet the events which she is faced with. In the personal and professional sections of this chapter, concrete examples are provided to illustrate both the critical reflective and transformative learning that teachers and pre-service teachers undergo when they encounter new situations while they work abroad. What are the impacts of this transformative learning on a personal and professional level upon their return to their home towns and classrooms? The literature reviewed is divided into: critical reflection and transformative learning; personal development; and professional development.

Critical reflection and Transformative learning

Brookfield (1995), in *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, presents a number of theorists who illustrate how the teacher develops reflective teaching tools. The author begins with an analytical review of how a teacher needs to be critically reflective in her work; discussing the various reflections an instructor may experience in order to maximize the effects of the lesson. According to Brookfield, the structure of the lesson and the teacher's role may vary from one lesson to the next, so when developing lessons the teacher needs to shift focus from the self to a guided exploration by the students. He further states that developing critical reflection enables the teacher to explore her choices in the classroom through the feedback provided by colleagues and students. Moreover, he notes that the ability to critically reflect on a situation enables the instructor to better isolate problems and apply changes to resolve the identified problems.

Brookfield maintains that teachers who engage in critical reflection are those most likely to develop professionally. He describes educators who recognize that their ideas and practices need constant analysis and revision as definitive models of good teaching. Moreover, he notes that in an essentially democratic learning environment, the instructor does not cease being in charge of the classroom. Instead, the teacher creates classroom conditions where learning can be both negotiated and guided. Brookfield also maintains that teachers, during discussions with their students or colleagues, speak openly about their own quest for greater understanding of the various events they may have encountered on the job. Such openness not only helps the teacher find solutions, but also encourages other teachers to describe their own experiences (Brookfield, 1995).

Brookfield (1995) also looks at situations outside the classroom to demonstrate the processes by which self-reflection is developed. For example, during graduate studies, a teacher can gain access to methodologies that can refine and clarify self-reflective processes involving such issues as power and authority. He contends that a good teacher can identify the methods by which students learn, as well as develop a specific curriculum that facilitates her students' learning. In addition, to broaden their students' horizons, teachers need to introduce their students to innovative learning styles and situations.

The author notes that change takes place whenever mere discussion escalates into sharp differences of opinions. However, he insists, a significant change in the environment must occur as well. For example, when critical reflection is built in to a job description, teachers are encouraged to make a connection between such reflection and how they must do their job. In other words, they link the act of critical reflection to the quality of their results. Brookfield also states that administrators set a good example when they too participate in critical reflection meetings, thereby creating an environment that champions critical thinking. He cautions us, however, that those who in principle are open to this kind of an environment must also be prepared to face potentially disagreeable feedback on the part of others. In short, Brookfield argues that critical reflection is the portal to a better understanding how one teaches and learns. If it is done in a supportive and non-threatening learning environment, both the teachers and the students gain greatly from the experience. Moreover, teachers enhance their teaching and students learn to become critical learners. Clearly, an element of mutual openness and respect must remain in place for this to work effectively (Brookfield, 1995).

The volume by Mezirow et al. (1990), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, presents a collection of articles whose authors describe critical strategies suitable to a variety of adult learning environments. Mezirow begins the book with an essay on transformative learning, in which he explains that reflection on one's thought processes not only often leads to the solution to a problem, but also, through such reflection, transformative learning may be achieved.

Kennedy's paper (1990), "Integrating Personal and Social Ideologies", addresses the issue of how each of us adopts a set of assumptions about reality that corresponds with an idealized identity group. In short, our ideologies influence our relationships, as well as the way we view society and function within it. The author notes, however, that unexpected events may lead an individual to question his or her environment and ideology. Such events often provide the catalyst for transformative learning. Kennedy offers a two-stage approach that instructors can use to help their students experience transformative learning. Students must first experience critical reflection by openly acknowledging their experiences. Next, the students discuss their results in groups, a practice that encourages deep analysis on the part of each person. In the second stage of the activity, the students describe their experiences in the framework of their social, political, and economic contexts. Doing so allows the participants to identify their ideological filters. This process is much the same as that which teachers who work abroad often experience, a process that ultimately influences both their lives and their teaching styles.

In "Challenging Habits of Expectation", Irvin Roth (1990) raises the question of what has made us develop into the person we now are, exploring the views of a number of theorists on that topic. He examines Mezirow's position on how, by paying attention to an individual, he or she become more self-critical with respect to previously held assumptions. Roth also refers to Bandler and Grinder's (1975) three categories of transformative learning: generalization, deletion, and distortion. According to those authors, people in the generalization stage select elements from their experiences and generalize them to other similar situations. During the deletion stage, individuals begin to edit and select which aspects of an experience to retain and which to dismiss. Finally, the distortion stage allows individuals to use their experiences in order to revise their current beliefs, altering them so that they are more consistent with the individual's actions. Roth (1990) also looks at a number of techniques that educators and other communicators can use to help participants undergo transformative experiences from the events and encounters that have occurred in their environment. Moreover, as a result of their cross-cultural experiences in the classroom, students become more aware of their own ideologies, which allow them to critically reflect on their work, family and social environments.

In "The Reflective Judgment Model: Transformative Assumptions about Knowing", Kitchener and King (1990) discuss some of the goals of transformative learning. One goal is to help people become both more aware of and more critical of their assumptions. A second goal is to help them examine and change their ideological views. The authors' "Reflective Judgment Model" examines epistemic beliefs surrounding how critical assumptions, influence an individual's' perceptions and abilities to solve

problems. This model advocates a sequential seven stage process for all individuals, irrespective of their age. In the first stage, what one sees is assumed to be true and is not questioned by the individual. In the second stage, valid knowledge can be found if only presumably reliable sources are sought out. Stage three acknowledges the possibility that the truth of a situation may not be available to everyone, even to persons in authority. At stage four, individuals seeking answers accept that persons in authority may not have the answers. Moreover, individuals at this stage question the people in authority and their functions, recognizing that even the experts may disagree. During stage five, individuals realize that to achieve validity, knowledge needs to be located within a specific context. At in stage six, knowledge not only needs to be placed in context but to be evaluated objectively. At stage seven individuals have come to believe that knowledge can be achieved through critical thinking, and on the basis of existing evidence.

In his article, "Using Critical Incidents to Explore Learners Assumptions", Brookfield (1990) asserts that the emphasis shifts away from relative unawareness and toward critical reflection through individuals' investigations of their own assumptions. He contends that this process occurs in three phases: first, individuals become aware that assumptions can influence their thought; second, they become aware of their assumptions; and third, they become aware of how their assumptions relate to their own experiences, such that this transforms their subsequent assumptions. For Brookfield, assumptions help people make sense of the world around them. Hence, participating in critical thinking can entail certain political and psychological risks. Moreover, the individual may not be ready to face the issues that arise and that challenge previously held assumptions. Furthermore, individuals who take the risk of questioning an issue may

find themselves incapable of ceasing to question all of the factors that may be contributing toward their sense of identity. Finally, under certain political regimes, individuals questioning the ideologies of the political party in power may find themselves in a difficult predicament. For this reason, including critical reflection as part of a curriculum needs to be internalized as part of an educator's world vision. The instructor must try to see the world from the student's perspective in order to move students out of their comfort zones and challenge their basic beliefs. Educators refer to this method as the phenomenological approach.

Pierre F. Dominicé (1993) provides a series of educational biographies, which offer individuals an opportunity to reflect critically about their knowledge, their values, and their understanding their own experiences. This life history approach aims to help adult learners become more aware of as well as more accountable for their own learning process through creating autobiographies in which they reveal the process of how they 'became themselves' and learned what they now know. Students' individual characteristics, as well as their life and work experiences, have set the ground for their transformative learning. For instance, teachers who have traveled and worked abroad most likely will view situations in a different manner than those who have always stayed at home. Their exposure to different languages and cultural norms can lead to their total reassessment of their goals and accomplishments.

Philip C. Candy (1990), in "Repertory Grids: Playing Verbal Chess", introduces a form of critical reflection that was introduced by Kelly (1955), who referred to such reflection as "man-as-scientist". Candy states that, just as scientists do, people learn from

their daily activities, namely, through observation, by developing theories, by experimenting, and then by examining outcomes. Candy introduces the “repertory grid” to isolate what a participant thinks or feels and constructs about an idea, a person, or an event. This grid allows the respondent to organize his or her thinking on specific aspects of life. Should the grid produce inconsistent patterns in thinking, then the participants may be motivated to examine a particular event from a different perspective. By offering concrete comparison and detail of events, objects, people, behaviors, social entities, and emotions, these grids can help individuals attain self-understanding. Candy claims this form of transformative learning will link the personal interpretation of each situation to changes in the community.

Deshler (1990), in "Metaphor Analysis: Exorcising Social Class Ghosts", works on a more abstract scale. For Deshler, each person can assign his or her personal interpretations to a metaphor. The interpretations may be influenced by one's culture, socialization, and popular culture. Moreover, the assigning of a metaphor provides a way to paraphrase social behavior, allowing the user becomes to reflect critically on an issue. Through the discussion of and reflection on the meaning of a particular metaphor, one's views on social issues may become transformed, such that they guide an individual's purpose and promote a deeper understanding the world in which they live. Through the evaluation of an assigned metaphor, transformative learning expresses itself in the form of dialogue.

In sum, Mezirow's book looks at the aims of adult educators who are engaged in helping adult learners better understand the significance of their life experiences. All of

the authors reinforce the idea that transformative learning can be achieved through a variety of means, which educators select according to the needs of their students.

Although the questioning that may arise from these practices has the potential to create a crisis of identity for the learners, the writers universally agree that adult educators are ultimately responsible for creating environments that allow students to participate in discursive and transformational learning.

In *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, Mezirow et al. (2000) survey a series of articles on transformative learning.

Transformative theory looks at how we both reason and understand our lives. The authors examine how adults make sense of their experiences through reason, reason being a distillation of an individual's culture and past experiences. Mezirow references the theories from which the idea of transformative theory has evolved: Bruner's (1996) four step making-meaning model and Kitchener's (1983) three levels of cognitive processing. In the former work, the author both establishes subjectivity as well as relates it to events by identifying experiential deviance. In the latter work, data input and comprehension lead to meta-cognition and self monitoring until, at the third level of cognitive processing, one achieves epistemic cognition, that is to say, an ability to understand subjective experiences that occur outside of oneself. These models provide the reader with a basic view of the elements which compose one's transformative learning process.

A constantly changing society requires a flexible way of looking at the world in relation to the experiences one has undergone. In the article "Inequality, Development, and Connected Knowing", Belenky and Stanton (2000), state that this flexible way can be

accomplished through our ability to reflect critically on our environment, and thereby create the knowledge that is necessary for us to evolve in a changing world. The authors present a number of meaning-making structures that researchers have used over time. An important feature of Mezirow's theory is his contention that adults need to re-evaluate their way of understanding their experiences when their traditional approaches no longer work. Many adults have never learned how to think reflectively, in large part because many schools fail to teach individuals how to reflect upon their life experiences. One sees this in the roles that women continue to assume. Indeed, society has been divided into male-female and public-private sectors, and women are generally not encouraged to reflect on their place in society; have not learned how to maximize their contribution to society with minimal cost and effort. A primary objective for feminists has been to dissolve the restrictive boundaries that determine women's place in society, and prevent them from reflecting upon and learning from their experiences. We welcome the emergence of the "midwife-teacher", who guides learners by highlighting their strengths, recognizing the learners' experiences, and who devaluing competition in the classroom. The aim of this method is to incorporate the views and participation of all students. Such adult educators guide their students to become critical reflective thinkers, and challenge them to find multiple means for developing their knowledge. The concept of midwife-teachers has recently been incorporated in community organizations in the form of midwife-leaders, whose aim is to bring together individuals from different backgrounds so that their respective and distinctive voices may be heard.

Daloz (2000) begins his article, "Transformative Learning for the Common Good", by referring to Nelson Mandela as a role model for transformative learning. As is

well known, Mandela experienced many difficult challenges during his lifetime. Moreover, while in prison, he lived under inhuman conditions which most other people could not endure. Nonetheless, it was these very experiences that reinforced his mission to seek social justice for all South Africans. Using Mandela as an example, Daloz identifies four conditions that are necessary in order that transformation to take place: first, the presence of others; second, an awareness that others are different than oneself; third, a willingness to reflect critically on one's earlier beliefs; and, finally, participation in a mentoring community that responds to our needs. The author proposes that transformative learning ushers in a supportive and safe classroom environment in which students can learn to learn together effectively, and independent of race, economic status, physical differences, and age. Through discussion and the sharing of experiences, reflection is strongly encouraged, which greatly enhances learning.

In "Transformative Learning as Ideology Critique", Brookfield (2000) contends that critical reflection is best seen as a catalyst for transformative learning, rather than as a synonym for transformative learning. He argues that critical reflection can take many forms and can work on multiple and diverse levels. The reflection can be simple (as when one plans to take a coffee break), or it can be as profound as revising one's spiritual ideology.

Brookfield suggests that the first step in critical reflection is to isolate one's assumptions and then question them. Such assumptions generally color every aspect of one's life: what music one listens to, the books one reads, and even spiritual experiences. The point at which the critical thinker can not only identify but also challenge the criteria

that are essential to good literature, good music, or the development of the spirit, is that point at which critical reflection has begun, heralding in transformative learning.

He further advises instructors to encourage students to challenge the particular hierarchies they embrace both in their lives in general and in the classroom. This often results in an elimination of the purported authority figure in the class. Moreover, Brookfield argues that the hegemonic assumptions that are embedded in our culture and that are accepted by many as common sense can be eliminated, even at the level of the teachers. The author refers to the four steps of adult learning that are required in the development of a critically reflective adult learner, as proposed by Mezirow (2000): first, elaborating existing frames of reference; second, learning frames of references; third, transforming points of view; and fourth, transforming habits of mind. While these steps highlight the importance of critical reflection in helping adult educators engage learners in reflective learning of their own assumptions, the author informs us that critical reflection does not always lead to transformative learning. For example, a student's assumptions may remain the same even after critical reflection has occurred.

In the article, "Teaching with Developmental Intention", Taylor (2000) emphasizes the importance of adult educators in helping their students understand and produce knowledge from their experiences, thereby allowing them to become productive members of an ever changing society. She illustrates how students can pursue a certain path of scholarship, even to the point of writing a dissertation on their topic, without ever attempting to link that topic to the substance of their own lives. In short, she underlines the fact that intensive study is no guarantee that transformative learning will follow.

Thus, she advises educators to help their adult learners improve themselves by giving assignments that focus on the issues of daily life, such as marriage and child-rearing. She emphasized that learning initially involves the storage of factual information that will later be retrieved for reference. The students tend to identify the new knowledge to which they are exposed as a challenge to their assumptions. Indeed, the very process of questioning their assumptions, both about themselves and about society, may cause some students to experience a new knowledge paradigm as highly frustrating.

In "Individual Differences and Transformative Learning", Cranton (2000) contends that people make sense of their experiences on the basis of their background, their social and cultural beliefs, and their values. She adds that transformative learning demands an awareness of how we work psychologically, and an understanding that we are all part of a collective. Moreover, she notes that neither psychological preferences nor learning styles remain the same, both in the case of the students and the teacher. Educators encourage transformative learning by helping students become aware of their psychological habits, re-interpret their past experiences, and develop new points of reference. This allows learners to establish their autonomy within the group, even taking a position against the group. Finally, Cranton (2000) argues that transformative learning is more likely to occur when individuals have been sensitized to a critical thinking approach, one that fits their own individual needs.

That adults create meaning in their lives by recalling their life events is an idea that is discussed in the article, "Transformation in a Residential Adult Learning Community", by Cohen and Piper (2000). At Lesley College in Cambridge,

Massachusetts, a residential community model provides the means for transformative learning through fostering critical thinking within a safe environment. Here, the faculty and students meet to isolate the student's interests, experiences and areas of expertise. Each student leaves with an individualized lesson plan for the semester. Here, the student develops an independent perspective, leading to transformative learning. Cohen and Piper show how residential education provides sufficient time and opportunity for reflection on the part of students. Dedicated private tutors, working within a flexible time frame, are able to offer their students personalized lessons. The Intensive Residency Option (IRO) offered in an Adult Baccalaureate program, is an alternative way for adult students to further their academic skills. The objective of such a program is to help the individual critique his or her emotional and spiritual self as a pre-requisite of transformative learning.

In "Creating New Habits of Mind in Small Groups", Kasl and Elias (2000), discuss the benefits of having educators encourage students to learn as a group. The authors state that many theories that apply to individual learning can also be usefully applied to group learning. They also select elements from various theories and blend them. For example, they combine aspects of transformative learning theory to constructivist-development theory and arrive at the insight that human growth entails the transformation of systems of meaning. Moreover, they apply this blended theory to pedagogical practice at the School for Holistic Education (SHE), which offers a doctoral program in transformative leadership. The aim of the program is to identify how students observe existing reality, how they go about developing another outlook, and how they succeeded in altering their outlook in the process. Individual versus group purposes are

examined. Finally, the authors encourage all adult educators to undergo their own reflective critique, since the majority of such educators have bought in to a hegemonic system which, in a multicultural society, systematically privileges white males.

In his article, "Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory", Taylor (2000) reviews several theoretical models in addition to Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Boyd's model of transformative learning stems from Carl Jung's work in psychology. It examines the individual and his development through time. The key elements in Boyd's theory include empowerment of the individual, a better understanding of the self, and a sense of self-responsibility. The author examines how the Vygotskian dialectic process describes how adults make sense of the changing experiences in their lives. According to Taylor, some individuals undergo a revision of meaning experience while others undergo a transformation of perspective. The author explains that transformative learning is a complex process. He underlines the importance of further research on the topic, especially with respect to culture diversity and to the development of transformative learning opportunities in the classroom.

In "Theory Building and the Search for Common Ground", A. Wiessner and J. Mezirow (2000) comment on the degree of access of information available to adult educators on the topic of transformative learning. In referring to The First National Conference on Transformative Learning, the authors note that the conference joined together professionals interested in transformative learning, both from theoretical and practical perspectives. Addressed at this conference were types of research being conducted on the subject, proposals for future research, and the roles and responsibilities

of adult educators. Special emphasis was placed on developing a shared theoretical perspective that would inform adult educators as to the strategies and techniques that would help them guide not only their students but also themselves.

The various theories put forth in this section emphasize one main point, namely, that teachers must develop critical reflection not only in their students but also in themselves.

Personal development as a result of transformative learning

Personal development means different things to different people. For most of the authors whose works were examined in the literature review, personal development refers to the changes that individuals experience on a personal level when faced with difficulties relating both to living and to working in culture different than their own. Sometimes, changes in personal development can occur as the result of the culture shock the individual experiences when moving to and working in another country (Lippincott, 1997).

Another way to characterize culture shock is as a “frustration reaction syndrome”. According to socio-psychological theory, persons select how they will react to a situation and, in the process, create their own private realities. Also, some individuals never adapt to their new environment and become isolated, while others eventually adjust, but in a very slow manner (Anderson, 2002).

Individuals commonly experience difficulty either in negotiating their way around a new culture or else interacting with individuals from other cultures. According to Schnell (1966), culture shock is divided into four gradual stages: a honeymoon, a crisis, a

resolution and stabilization. The honeymoon stage usually occurs immediately after the entry into the new culture. At this early stage, the individual enjoys the new experience, noting differences between the new culture and the old. In the second stage, the crisis, the individual faces a situation which, within the framework of his own values and expectations, seems both unreasonable and perplexing. In the resolution stage, the individual develops ways to cope with the new situations he or she faces. In the final stage, the stabilization stage, the individual has established a firmer ground upon which to live and work.

The works of authors who have written on the topic of personal development as a result of transformative learning will now be reviewed. Bernardi (1989) describes four stages that individuals experience while living in a new country: fascination, friendship, frustration, and fulfillment. The first phase of living in a new environment is one of fascination, accompanied by the feeling of serenity. During the second phase, friendship, individuals begin developing for themselves a new social system, either within their own cultural or professional circle or beyond. For teachers, this often occurs among their own colleagues. However, they may subsequently manifest a “we –they” syndrome (as in “we the English teachers and they, the local teachers”). During the frustration phase, individuals may experience stresses relating to the situations they are encountering, whether at work, or in their everyday lives. For some, the frustration can escalate into hostility, such that they may decide to leave that country. The final phase is the fulfillment phase, during which living and working abroad is seen as a positive experience. This occurs only when the individual recognizes that while things in their

new environment are unlikely to change; their own outlook needs to change. It is at that point that being abroad becomes less frustrating and more pleasant.

Each of the two scholars cited above (Bernardi and Schnell), has presented a series of stages that individuals pass through while living and working abroad. Although the authors' terms and descriptions differ, they concur on one issue, namely, that individuals living and working abroad who accept what their new environment offers and are able to work within it are ultimately the most content.

The following articles report on the experiences that teachers and pre-service teachers have had while living and working abroad. The articles illustrate the impact of culture shock on these individuals. These articles cover a gamut of sources and look at how contact with and awareness of the new culture added value to the lives of the teachers. For many of the individuals discussed in the studies, what triggered change within themselves arose mainly from their interactions with the new culture. For many individuals, this cultural awareness brought with it a new sense of self, and as well as a fresh view of the world around them.

Wallis (2006), in an ethnographic case study that appeared in her dissertation, examines the cultural and linguistic experiences of a single, monolingual, female teacher working in Brazil for the first time. All of the teacher's previous teaching experience had been in the United States. Wallis interviewed her regarding three issues: first, her cultural and linguistic experiences in Brazil; second, how her experiences had affected her perceptions and behaviors towards her Brazilian students and colleagues, and, finally, how her teaching style had changed as a result. Wallis states that the teacher in question had often experienced cultural difficulties while in Brazil, which affected her desire to

complete her original contract. However, at the end, she ultimately valued her experience, for she realized that it had helped her become more tolerant and less judgmental of others. Wallis also makes a number of recommendations concerning how to prepare pre-service teachers to meet the challenges they are likely to face while working abroad. Further, she offers advice to recruitment agencies and university administrators regarding how to locate teachers who are best prepared for pedagogy abroad.

Miller (2005) describes how a particular education program at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia addresses the issue of cultural diversity in the classroom. One aspect of that program is to provide guidance to pre-service teachers who wish to embark on an overseas practicum. Intercultural, multicultural and global education is offered through the ITEM program (International Teacher Education Model). The pre-service teachers who attended this program generally agreed that it met its objectives. However, Miller stated that, in her view, not enough emphasis was placed on global education in the program..

Haeger (2007) identifies the strategies used by faculty members at American universities to develop their intercultural competence. Her study examines the components of intercultural training that are offered by American institutions to prepare transnational educators. She also investigates the impact these programs have had on the students who went abroad. Using a mixed methodology which combined qualitative and quantitative research approaches, she interviewed ten faculty members from higher educational institutions in the US who had taken part in transnational education, along with 73 foreign students who had enrolled in the courses given by these same faculty

members. Ultimately, her findings illustrate that the teachers who live and teach in a host country use many of the strategies and developmental stages of intercultural competence that are described in Bennett's DMIS model (1993). Haeger encourages future participants in overseas programs to familiarize themselves sufficiently with the culture and education systems of their host countries so as to reduce possible challenges and conflicts, to make their stay more productive, and to become more competent interculturally.

In her article, "These kids are so bright! Pre-service teachers insights and discoveries during a three-week student teaching practicum in Mexico", Faulconer (2003) looks at how three American pre-service teachers doing a practicum in Mexico deal with both personal and teaching challenges in a culturally different environment. The aim of the practicum is to develop teachers' awareness of the needs of Hispanic students in the classroom, and to apply that new awareness to their subsequent teaching in the US. Faulconer is interested in discovering what the pre-service teachers learned during their three week practicum in Mexican schools; also, how their experience influenced their personal and professional lives upon their return to the US. She urges educators to find ways to sensitize pre-service teachers to the needs and abilities of culturally diverse students, pointing to evidence that students from Mexican backgrounds who are studying in American classrooms tend to underachieve, possibly because of certain negative attitudes on the part of teachers, classmates, and others. This article shows how international teaching experience can help educators develop a global view that will aid their pedagogy upon their return to the US. It also examines some common biases that appear in the classroom, focusing specifically on Mexico – US relationships. The article

also provides a template to help educators facilitate a safe learning environment for all children, with an attempt to teach without bias in the curriculum and the instruction. The pre-service teachers learned how it feels to try to function in a new culture without language fluency or familiarity with contextual cultural expectations. Because they had the opportunity to look at their own prejudices regarding Mexican people and had the opportunity to empathize with individuals who need to live and work in a different culture, the teachers brought a greater level of empathy into their classrooms in the US.

In their research, Cushner and Mahon (2002) contend that: “Conditions in the world today demand that teachers have increased international knowledge and experience that they can transmit to the students in their charge” (p.44). Their study examines whether international teaching experience creates a positive influence on a teacher’s personal and professional development. The study is based on the assumption that Americans are close-minded, and that with the growing phenomenon of globalization, the need for Americans to become more culturally aware has become essential. The study looks at fifty teachers who had taken part in an overseas student teaching experience. These teachers stayed with a host family, at a university housing building, or in a community residence for the eight to 15 weeks of their program. They responded to open-ended questions that the researchers had designed in order to evaluate how the teachers benefited from their overseas experience upon their return to their US classrooms. Seven of the teachers provided journal entries dated from before, during, and after their work abroad, which showed a rise in “cultural awareness, improved self-efficacy and self-awareness, and professional development in terms of global-mindedness” (p.49). According to the researchers, an overseas experience can help

teachers learn from local students, local teachers, and the residences in which they were housed.

All of the researchers who addressed the issue of personal development as a result of transformative learning have illustrated that interaction with other cultures allowed the participants to be more flexible in their thinking about foreign students in their classrooms. Having lived through the isolation which so often is experienced in another country, as well as coming to recognize what another culture has to offer, enhanced the participants' general awareness of that culture, and, in most cases, enriched and improved their teaching. This research on personal development supports the argument that an overseas teaching experience can help individuals challenge their own (and, sometimes ethnocentric), beliefs. In short, increased culture sensitivity is the end result for many if not indeed most of those who participated in the studies.

In summary, on the level of personal development, cultural awareness can lead both to critical reflection and transformative learning. Most of the participants changed their style of pedagogy as a direct outcome of their experiences abroad upon their return to Quebec. While others did not make any conscious changes in their pedagogy, they recognized nonetheless that, as a byproduct of the foreign culture's impact upon them, subtle changes had taken place both in their attitudes and their behavior toward their multicultural students.

Professional Development

The following research shows that cultural awareness can also lead both to critical reflection and transformative learning not only in the teacher's personal development but also in the teacher's professional development.

The article by Sandgren et al, (1999) discusses how certain college instructors agreed to be sent to developing countries in South America, Central America, South Africa, and India. The object of this study was to show that work experience abroad has a positive impact on "globalizing" the instructors' teaching, in that they can then frame their course material in a way that is more diverse than would an instructor who lacked such travel experience. Furthermore, the experience of travel and teaching abroad was found to enhance their social and self awareness, and also brought about changes in their teaching methods. For some of the instructors, their increased global awareness also changed the content of their lessons. For example, they began including references from the countries to which they had travelled when they later taught courses in accounting, business, or other subjects. By being exposed to globally diverse examples, these students experienced a more varied set of viewpoints. Although the instructors did not all make sweeping changes to the content of their courses, they noted that their students, especially the international students, responded differently. Without addressing specifics, the article states that the instructors came to recognize some of the shortcomings of their pre-travel teaching practices. The authors sum up the instructors' two main areas of change: self awareness and social awareness, both of which altered their classroom interactions. The

instructors also became more aware of the privileges that American educators enjoy, as compared to their counterparts in other countries.

Germain (1996) looks at how the pedagogy of six veteran teachers (ages 40-65) was influenced by their work abroad. The researcher interviewed six teachers who taught K-12 level in different parts of the US. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher found that the individuals' international experiences were the source both of personal growth and pedagogical change in their classrooms. Because of their experiences, they began using authentic materials, such as pictures and stories of their travel. Moreover, their outlook towards their students changed, given that they were now more culturally aware of pupils from different backgrounds. Further, they used this awareness to enhance their lessons and motivate their students to learn. Germain's findings also illustrate that teachers who continue to learn through their work experiences abroad inspire not only their students, but their colleagues. She also shows that the length of time a teacher spends teaching in another country affects that teacher's pedagogical style upon their return to the US.

Boyd (2000) discusses the meaning of culture and of culture shock, and how individuals' identities are influenced as a result of teaching abroad; also, the positive effects that typically occur upon their return home. The author presents both the work and education histories of the participants, identifying areas of similarity and difference before leaving and after returning to Canada. His objective was to see how traveling and teaching abroad influences the participants' pedagogical practices, as well as their identities as teachers. The participants continued to teach when they returned to Canada

but the author found that since their return, they had made changes in their teaching styles. Moreover, he found that all participants remained in contact with some aspect of Japanese culture upon their return, e.g., teaching English as a Second Language with individuals who had worked in Japan or were from Japan. He concluded that increased travel expands a teacher's experiential awareness, and provides them with an opportunity to reflect upon their own teaching and enhance their cultural identity.

In a doctoral dissertation, Evans (2004) reviews the outcome of a three-week educational trip to China by teachers from St-Louis, Missouri. Evans evaluates the curriculum taught in the Chinese classroom as well as the professional development of the teachers. He also evaluates the interaction skills of the teachers with respect to students from different cultures. Evans also interviews the teachers on their return from the trip with respect to the trip's worth and its impact on their own teaching style. Evans shows that at the end of their trip, the teachers were positive about their experience. They also reported that their curricula were enhanced in terms of international education. Their international experiences were also integrated into their lessons. Many of the teachers were sufficiently satisfied with the experience to continue seeking overseas work in relation to their future professional development. They reported that the trip had played a vital role in their professional and personal development.

Another doctoral thesis by Hultquist (2007) examines how teachers gain cultural and global understanding that they can then apply in American classrooms. The thesis focuses on situations in which teachers experience "international immersion", and examines four components of that immersion: experiential learning, cultural learning, transformation of perspectives, and transfer of learning to the American classroom.

Working on the assumption that instructors who understand global issues are better able to help their students examine both cultural stereotypes and the complexity of world affairs, Hultquist insists that schools need to help students accept different perspectives, become more culturally aware, and increasingly work in groups with individuals from all backgrounds. Therefore, the objective of the study was to prepare teachers, at a theoretical level, to enter the classroom far better equipped to assist those students interested in gaining employment in an international world. Most of the teachers participating in the study acknowledged that the immersion experience benefited them in the classroom. Those who reported that they had undergone transformational and experiential change brought their new learning into the classroom, either deliberately or inadvertently.

A doctoral dissertation by Rapoport (2006) examines the impact of international exchange and training programs upon participants in order to determine how they were able to internalize and transfer the skills that they acquired abroad. The researcher interviews 31 participants from the US and Russia, and reviews the materials that were distributed among both the teachers and the students. The objective of the study is to investigate the influence of international programs on subsequent classroom teaching practices following the completion of the exchange program. The research findings show that international experiences broaden instructors' teaching methods; moreover, that through their multicultural curriculums, both the US and Russian students become more culturally aware. The participants in the study acknowledged that, as a result of their international training programs, their professional development increased. They also

reported that the opportunity to work and observe pedagogical approaches in other countries enhanced their own practice.

In her dissertation, Casale-Giannola (2000) undertakes to understand and to explain the kind of impacts that international work and travel have on teachers. She attempts to determine whether and to what extent they transfer their new experiences upon their return to their home country, and apply them effectively in their classrooms. The study examines the international experiences of twelve teachers from different cultural and educational backgrounds. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to design programs that will help teachers who teach abroad to use their experiences in their classrooms in an optimal way upon their return home. Some of the outcomes noted by the participants are: improved teaching skills, an increased interest in teaching, greater ease in helping their students become more aware of others around them (global awareness) through teaching involving of other cultures, the application of new and more interactional methods, and improvements in the curriculum. International experience tended to increase the participants' awareness of their students. It also created the opportunity to encourage the students' understanding of other people and their customs and beliefs. Interestingly, not all administrators and colleagues were supportive of the participants' overseas experience.

Lyon (2001) looks into the intercultural experiences and transformative learning from the cross-cultural experiences of twelve adult American female educators who have worked abroad. Using a qualitative approach, she explores the role of relationships in the participants' adaptation and transformation. Using autobiographical excerpts, Lyon recounts the participants' experiences. She also interviewed the twelve participants

whose academic backgrounds ranged from that of a doctoral degree (six), a master's degree (four) and a bachelor's degree (three). Through her experiences and those of the participants the author reports that they all underwent transformative changes. She states that the transformation did not occur in the women while they worked abroad. Rather, it started before they left home and continued until their return to their home country. She makes three recommendations for individuals who wish to work overseas: first, to attend conferences at which they can communicate with and learn from others with respect to their experiences; second, to undergo gender sensitive training; and, finally, to be provided with professional support before, during, and after their trips.

The aim of Carlson's (1997) research is to underline the importance of conducting further investigation of work experience overseas on the part of university instructors. Using a qualitative approach, Carlson engaged in a five week field study in China. The 19 participants in this field study, which was sponsored by the Asian Study Development Program (ASDP), were all professors or administrators from American colleges and universities. The paper concludes that the participants' experience overseas produced a change both in their views and their curricula, such that they included references to China upon their return to their home classrooms. Since the sample included only 19 participants, it was not sufficiently large to extrapolate to a larger population. The author calls for further research on this topic.

The objective of Kelly Bryn O'Brien's (2006) study is to see how teachers in the Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad program (which was designed to take K-12 teachers to East Africa for experiential learning) transferred their overseas experience to

the classroom upon their return home. Using a qualitative approach, O'Brien conducted in-depth interviews of the participants' impressions and observations. She also analyzed the content of certain documents, such as curricula, lesson plans, poetry, workshop outlines, and local materials brought back by the teachers. The study showed that all of the teachers benefited from the experiential study abroad. However, how they implemented their knowledge upon their return home varied with their circumstances: some experienced resistance from their administrators, others found that their jobs had been eliminated, and still others encountered constraints with respect to integrating their new found knowledge into the curriculum. Ultimately, most reported that they found ways to weave their global and multicultural experiences into their lessons, which supported the author's belief that their experiences were crucial to the teachers' pedagogy.

Scholefield (2006) examined an International Teacher Education Module (ITEM) in the Professional Development Program of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. The program prepares student teachers transfer their theoretical and practical knowledge both while abroad and upon their return. The author looks at how the student teachers saw and experienced their international education and subsequently transferred that knowledge to their home classrooms. Six teachers participated in the study in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in Oaxaca, Mexico. The results indicated that all participants acquired a new perspective as a result of their experiences working abroad. They connected successfully with the local students and later incorporated an international curriculum into their home classes.

Thomas's (1991) research sought to determine the effectiveness of the first operative year, 1988, of the British Columbia Ministry of Education Teacher Study Program. The program provided grants to teachers who wished to travel to various Asian Pacific countries in order to experience the culture and language and interact with the people of those countries. The teachers who took part in the program were asked to share their trip experiences with colleagues and to integrate their trip knowledge into their lessons. They were also to provide details concerning future travel contacts, monetary resources for trips, and recommendations for future study programs. In the results of the questionnaires that were filled out by participants, 92% reported being satisfied with the program. The researcher concluded that short-term travel-abroad can help meet one of the program's objectives, namely, that participants subsequently transfer what they have learned to their students at home. However, only half of the participants reported that they had maintained contact with their country of travel.

In another study sponsored by Fulbright, Wolf (1993), using both quantitative and qualitative methods, examined a control group and a focus group with respect to the impact upon Iowan educators of an intensive, five week exchange program to Russia. The author investigated not only the attitudes and perceptions of the participants towards their host country, but also their influence upon global education. The participants were teachers from K-higher education who qualified for the Fulbright program. Wolf's data showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups. The participants reported subsequent changes in their classroom instruction, such as the use of new ideas in their personal and professional, as well as in their teaching.

The goal of Wolfer's study (1990) was to determine that any association between the world travel experience of Arkansas school teachers and the teachers' subsequent global-mindedness and knowledge of world issues was insignificant. Wolfer used two questionnaires in the Acceptance of Global Education Scale (AGES), as well as a Worldmindedness scale. He conducted qualitative interviews with fifteen randomly selected teachers who had had travel experience. The findings did not support Wolfer's hypothesis, in that they showed that there is indeed a relationship between living abroad and a teacher's globalmindedness. The author acknowledged that other variables needed to be reviewed, such as the teachers' grade levels, their gender, and their foreign language acquisition.

Conclusion

Critical thinking, according to Brookfield (1995), is a method that encourages teachers to reflect seriously on their work, such that they make subsequent improvements in their habitual teaching practices. Mezirow et al (1990) identify critical thinking as a means by which a teacher can reflect deeply on a particular topic, which usually leads to transformative learning. In short, through critical thinking, the teacher self-reflects, undergoes transformative learning, and then acts in ways that improve their students' learning experiences.

The available literature on teachers who have taught abroad generally points to positive end results, despite the occasional difficulties that are reported. This is the case regardless of the amount of time they have spent abroad, or the total number of hours they have taught. The most evident change in teachers' personal development was that their appreciation of other cultures grew significantly. Moreover, upon their return home,

most of the teachers incorporated their new-found knowledge of other cultures into their lesson plans, regardless of whether their students were culturally diverse or homogeneous. Further, to enhance their lessons, the teachers included authentic materials they had obtained from their work experiences abroad. Many maintained contact with those they had worked with abroad, as well as with those whom they met who had had similar work experiences.

In summary, critical thinking and transformative learning (which in some cases have been triggered by the exposure to unfamiliar cultures), have been linked to one another in the literature. Moreover, critical thinking is often seen as a pre-requisite to transformative learning. Both are shown to be important results of teachers' experiences working abroad. Finally, the literature in general reflects positively on the effect of travel and overseas experiences both in teachers' personal and professional lives.

Chapter III

Methodology

Research Procedures

The method of inquiry is qualitative, based on teachers' stories. It uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews with informants. This form of research helps to understand "how people think about the world and how those definitions are formed, you need to get close to them, to hear them talk and observe them in their day-to-day lives" (Bogdan & Biklen 2007, p.35). The questions were there to guide, but not to decide the course of the interview: a short structured interview guideline was of use to make sure there is a parallel story line. The approach has general and specific questions to permit for flexibility in the direction of the conversation. Thus, the interviewer had the option to pursue interesting topics/ideas in the course of the interview as the topics appear, instead of following a structured plan and missing opportunities of possible interest. The participants were first asked about their own teaching education prior to their teaching experience abroad, then examining their overseas experience and how they believe this experience is or might have been used in their present courses (Bogdan & Biklen 2007).

Interview Schedule

The following questions were asked of the study participants:

- 1) Tell me about your teaching experience abroad, the length of this experience and what you learned from the experience?

- 2) How long have you been a teacher? And where did you complete your teacher education and certification?
- 3) How many years of teaching experience did you have as a teacher, prior to your work overseas?
- 4) Do you believe your teaching practice (style, approach, etc) has changed since returning from abroad? If so, can you explain when, how and why this occurred?
- 5) What do you believe was the most significant learning experience from your teaching experience abroad?
- 6) What was the content of your initial teacher education? Do you think it helped you to gain from your teaching experience abroad? If so, can you explain?
- 7) Did you purchase any teaching materials (books, tape, DVD's, teachers' manuals) from your work/country abroad? Have you used these in the classroom? If so, tell me about them.
- 8) Did you attend any educational programs abroad? If so, please describe them. In what ways were they similar or different from the educational programs which you have attended in Quebec/Canada?

The interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience – they decided the place and time for the interview. In some cases, interviews took place at the participants' workplace. Due to the small sample size (7 adults) detailed below, all of the interviews were conducted by the same researcher to maintain consistency in the study.

Anderson and Arsenault (2002) emphasise the importance of informing the participants of the purpose of the study. Prior to the interviews, the reasons for and procedure of the study were explained to the participants. The interviews were recorded. The recordings were coded to maintain the individual participants' anonymity. Thus, the names and present work place of the participants were changed. I asked seven teachers who have worked abroad to participate in the study. A series of questions focused on their work experience as well on their belief of benefit from their experience abroad. The seven participants are 25 to 45 years of age and six of the seven are women. This gender weighting was not deliberately done, as the form of purposeful sampling required a background check of the subjects to ensure their primary qualifications (having taught abroad and returned to Quebec to teach) were met without consideration of gender.

Research-Subjects Relationship

According to McMillan (2004), face to face interactions help a skilled researcher to build a positive rapport with the participant. Consequently, the researcher did not only seek opportunities to develop and clarify the conversation but motivated the participants to expand and develop their comments/answers. A few teachers who had initially agreed to be interviewed changed their mind at the last minute for personal reasons and more requests for participation were sent out by e-mail, the original tool for recruiting participants.

Presentation of data in the form of seven profiles

The investigation of transformative learning, triggered by international teaching experiences, is accomplished through interviews with seven teachers. The teachers interviewed have diverse backgrounds and varied experiences teaching abroad. A common ground among all of the participants was that they had taught either French or English as a Second/Foreign language in their host countries outside of Canada. The next section presents a summary table giving some information about the seven participating teachers. This table is followed by individual summaries of the interview results of each of the seven participants. The next section presents the different themes that emerged from these seven interviews.

Table One**Table summary of participants in the study**

Name	Age	Initial education program and degree information	Countries Where taught	Type of School/grade levels
Mandy	Late 30s	B.Ed, University of Alberta; M.A, Second Language, McGill University	Canada, Japan, Laos	Public school (Canada & Japan); French and English Baccalaureate (Laos); adults (Canada)
Sonia	Late 30s	CELTA certificate; M.A.(French Literature)	Canada, France, Italy, China, Finland	University students (Canada); business persons (Finland), young learners (Italy, China, France)
Bob	Late 20s	TESOL certificate (Montreal); B.A. Linguistics (McGill)	Canada, Korea	Young learners and adults (Korea); adults (Canada)
Sally	Mid 20s	TESOL certificate (Montreal)	Canada, Mexico	Young learners (Canada; Mexico); adults (Canada)
Anna	Early 40s	B.Ed, University of Saskatchewan	Canada, South Korea, Taiwan	Young learners (Taiwan, Korea); young learners, high school and adults (Canada)
Olga	Late 20s	B.A. University of Ottawa; TESOL certificate, Algonquin College, Ottawa; B.Ed (TESOL), Concordia University	Canada, Italy	Young learners, adults (Canada, Italy)
Alexia	Early 30s	B.A., TESOL certificate	Canada, France	Young learners, adults (Canada, France)

Interview summary by participant

Note: The participants' names were changed to uphold anonymity.

Participant 1- Mandy

Mandy graduated with a B.Ed in education from the University of Alberta. Three years later she completed an M.A. in Second Language Education at McGill University. In between the two degrees, she worked with the JET program in the regular public school system in Japan as a language assistant to Japanese teachers. Her tasks included helping guide communicative activities in the classroom, which encouraged the students to practice speaking English. Since “students do not get the chance to use English so much...showing them that there are people out there who do speak English [made] it more fun and dynamic.”

Upon her return to in British Columbia, Mandy taught French as a second language to students ranging from the eighth to the tenth grade of high school. Her objective was to develop a communicative environment through the use of games which provided the students with opportunities to speak in French. While in B.C., she also taught English to students from other countries, helping them better integrate into the regular classes.

Mandy then moved to Laos for three years and taught French and English as second languages both to international students and to children whose parents worked in various embassies and thus tended to come from a higher socio-economic class. She also had an opportunity to teach in the international *Bacaloria* program, which “is internationally recognized; people come check, they lead you through workshops. It is

just a different, inquiry based type of learning.” While abroad she attended a workshop given by Howard Gardner whose topic of discussion was multiple intelligences. Since she worked mainly in remote areas of Laos, there were few opportunities for additional professional development. As part of the JET program, she attended monthly meetings in which the teachers were presented with a choice of workshops to attend. Their purpose was geared towards the teachers’ professional development, but also offered a kind of support system for teachers living and working abroad.

Books, ESL games and listening materials provided by the Japanese schools during her stay were another source of interest. These materials helped promote English in the classroom. She also brought to her classroom some materials she had developed with her co-workers at home and tested them in her classes abroad. Some of the activities and materials she brought back proved to be of interest and help to her students in Montreal who were also developing their English skills. She regrets not having brought back of these materials as they would have been a great asset in teaching her ESL students in Montreal.

She reports that her work overseas has had a lasting effect upon her teaching practices in Montreal, and caused her to appreciate how immigrant students feel learning and living in Canada. Mandy states that

“Just the fact that I did not understand what was going on, the language difficulties that made me feel kind of isolated, but I think it is a good experience for someone to have, when you are the minority. I think a lot of people do not realize that if you are of a ...you are not a minority so it is good to be in a place where you are looked at. Where people do make generalizations about

your behavior, because when you come back here you understand what other people are going through.”

To live abroad has helped her appreciate the challenges her students’ faces, which has led her to develop a better understanding of classroom dynamics involving her foreign students: “I know that I am more comfortable with people from different countries, nationalities. Maybe if they can’t express themselves in English I do not get worried like ‘no, I can’t understand them.’ ... I am in some way more patient with trying to understand what they are trying to say or come to an understanding.” She also developed a better understanding why students from some cultures respond in a specific way: “I understand,” she says, “why some Japanese or Korean people are shy to speak, I noticed that in the class. I am speaking in stereotypes, like people from Brazil or from Columbia are more outgoing and willing to speak and are not scared about making mistakes. Whereas Asians are a little bit shy. They do not want to make mistakes they try to say everything perfectly in English.”

Through her teaching experience abroad, she has developed methods that help her students to excel in learning English. Furthermore, being better able to relate to her students on a personal level has helped her develop a safe learning environment. Also, being able to share with her students her travel experiences helps some students feel more comfortable in the classroom. The students also come to see their teacher on a more personal level.

Often, students in Asia are more motivated to learn English than are Canadian students. In Canada, students tend to see school as a place to socialize and do not invest

in learning as do the Asian students. As Mandy stated: “when I was teaching abroad, the students were motivated, they wanted to be there, so I had higher expectations and [when I returned] I got annoyed with the students here” (my brackets). This has guided Mandy towards teaching international students and adults in Canada, which give her the opportunity both to teach English and learn from them. She also finds that the international students are a great source of diverse experiences.

A good teacher learns from others, and especially from other teachers. This was the case for Mandy in Laos who had co-workers who were from Australia and New Zealand. Through team teaching, she learned from the other teachers how to evaluate and provide a positive learning environment in a multi-level class. She also learned what not to do in an ESL classroom. For instance, teacher centered lessons were not productive in developing English speaking skills in Japanese students, although this approach is commonly used in Japan. She also found that while the local Japanese teachers were professional, but she did not have the same relationship with them as she did with other foreign teachers. Mandy believes that this may have been the result of the language barrier. In Canada, she often exchanged ideas and materials with coworkers, especially with teachers who taught the same grades as she did.

Mandy felt that her practical experience abroad provided her with a wealth of knowledge; preparing her to better provide her students with a motivating learning environment, and giving her the skills she needed to develop such a classroom. Even her degree from McGill did not ensure that she possessed the teaching skills and techniques she needed in order to succeed in ethnically mixed environments. The most relevant

aspect of her degree had been the internship, the practical component. It had given her the opportunity to develop her confidence in front of a group of students. Every environment requires that a teacher develop the skills that are relevant to this environment. However, in Japan, she found that her internship at McGill had not given her the skills she needed to help her students. Indeed, she had to learn through trial and error how to motivate her Japanese students to speak English.

She described some difficult moments abroad that were related to languages differences and the fact of being in a different culture. “I was the only foreigner in the school,” she says, “it was challenging. I cried in the bathroom sometimes... I learned Japanese, I made friends and everything, but sometimes I felt isolated. It was hard at times, we had other people in the program but they were in other schools. So we would get together on the weekends for different workshops, but I was the only foreigner in the school. I was the only white person in the school.” Yet, she felt the overall experience was worth it in the end and would certainly encourage anyone interested in working abroad to do so, “because it is a fabulous experience, it is good for people, to get out of their comfort zones and to visit other places. But it depends on the person too, if it is a person who has a hard time adapting to different lifestyle or feels uncomfortable outside ...where English isn’t spoken and where the culture is very different. Then I would say be prepared for different situations, but I would encourage people who have a passion for it, definitely.”

Participant 2- Sonia

Sonia successfully completed a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) in Halifax, which gave her the necessary skills to teach English as a second language abroad. Sonia first taught in Italy for one year, where she worked with business students, children and retired people. She then went to China for three months to work at a start up school, teaching students at the junior high and high school levels. The children she taught were eager to learn and this created an enjoyable atmosphere: "They were very responsive and I could be very creative with them." Her role was mainly to teach, but she was also aware of the administrative aspects of the school. Moreover, she felt that her age and lack of experience prevented her from becoming fully involved in administrative decision-making. "I think I was very young," she says, "maybe twenty-three or something like that. So a lot went over my head." This was true when it came time for negotiations, especially since she did not understand many of the cultural nuances. Her gender, she felt, was also an issue:

"But I think it is more for females. People will take advantage of you. You go in naïve ... and you do not look after yourself but, by the end, you hopefully know that you have to look after yourself a little more."

She felt that the cultural differences presented certain challenges, but she also came to understand that sometimes these differences were hidden within small details: "You know everyone wants the same things, they want some form of happiness and people may have different priorities."

Sonia came to realize that an awareness of the more subtle cultural differences were important to know when sitting at the negotiation table: “When it comes to business, that is when you need someone who is trained, like if you are going to be negotiating, I don’t have any idea about that stuff.” Another example of this occurred while she was teaching in Italy, where she discovered that her own sense of fashion had to be more polished in order to find acceptance.

She next taught in France, but only for a short period as she was also studying at the same time. Afterwards, she worked in Finland for one year teaching business English to professionals. She found the experience a challenge, for it helped her develop her teaching skills as well as gain a better understanding of herself and her capabilities. In Finland, she discovered that she needed to be very businesslike, and to adhere closely to an established schedule, which seemed to be the norm in Finnish culture. The Finns also tend to be a little more reserved, such that engaging in conversation became a challenge. This forced her to approach her teaching from a different angle so as to overcome the students’ reticence about conversing in English. Also, she discovered that her students responded best to non-personal topics. For example, they were more comfortable talking about more neutral topics, such as trains, than discussing personal topics.

On her return to Halifax, she taught at a university where her skill in adapting lessons to her students’ needs served her well. Furthermore, her teaching experience abroad had brought about a better understanding of other cultures. She also was able to better appreciate the challenges her foreign students often faced during their studies in

Montreal, which increased her respect for, and degree of comfort with students from other cultures.

The varied teaching environments Sonia encountered have helped her hone her teaching skills. In particular, through teaching children, senior citizens, and business people and from various cultures, her confidence has grown. As she commented, “you learn to hold your own.” She learned something different from teaching in each country. For example, in Finland the teachers were provided with materials that the school created for use in teaching English to executives and employees working in various companies. Also, in Italy, the schools used exam-based materials to prepare students for their Trinity exams. In other schools, they used the Headway ESL textbooks.

Sonia highly recommends teaching abroad, for it provides learning experiences that are virtually unobtainable in regular classrooms. She suggests that one begin by establishing goals concerning what one wishes to accomplish abroad; also, to become more aware of one’s level of tolerance regarding work and travel, since every destination has its own particularities. For instance, although one can visit art museums and learn more about history in Europe, European schools there do not provide as many accommodations as do Asian schools; nor are the salaries as profitable as in Asian schools.

Participant 3-Bob

Bob completed a one-year TESOL certificate in Montreal called Teach and Travel, a program emphasizing English grammar. Bob found it only moderately useful.

He mostly enjoyed meeting other people who wanted to go abroad to teach. He taught English in Korea for three years, spending the first year mostly with kindergarten children and, later, 'afterschool' children in the afternoons. His first year was interesting mainly because it was the first time he had spent so much time working with children. However, his teacher-training certificate had not adequately prepared him to work with children, and thus he had to learn this on the job. He became increasingly aware of how children think and discovered the best teaching approaches to use. This experience influenced him profoundly, and would prove to have a lasting impact on his teaching career. He developed great patience with his young students, and learned how to introduce a topic in a way that would stimulate their interest. He also learned how to deal with the various schools and their bureaucracies, which often demanded as much patience as did the children.

During this first year, he developed an interest in phonetics, and eventually returned to Canada to complete a degree in Linguistics at McGill. His work experience abroad had also sharpened his interest in teaching English as a second language, specifically with respect to the correction of accents. He returned to Seoul in 2004, where he taught mainly university students and housewives. Korea, which is an export oriented country, has a huge demand for English teachers, since a professional cannot advance in a company without passing tests in English. But teaching abroad meant he had to deepen his knowledge of English grammar, because his formal training at McGill had been geared towards theoretical linguistics. Indeed, the classroom became a place in which to practice what he had learned in university. In Korea, it was easier to help the students overcome certain learning difficulties since they shared the same first language (L1),

namely, Korean. This provided Bob with the opportunity to develop better teaching techniques and methods to help his students. On the other hand, classrooms containing students who have many different first languages pose a more difficult challenge, which creates a highly challenging teaching environment.

On his second trip to Asia, he learned how to be more selective in his choice of schools to work at, using such criteria as “size, on how long they have been around, and the kind of clients they provided services to.” While Koreans are able to open schools once they have lived abroad for six months, many lack the necessary business skills. He prefers not to work in small schools, but to pursue work in larger and usually better-organized schools.

After his initial experience working with children, he had decided that he wanted to work with adults. He taught the university students and the housewives in his second year and, in his third year, was teaching business people one on one. That experience led him to start his own company in Montreal, teaching accent correction. In addition, he also teaches general English to various clients. Bob has learned to understand language teaching as a business. In Montreal, the need for specialized teaching is growing, and the business he has developed has the potential to expand to European countries. Had he not had the opportunity to travel to Korea to teach English, he might never have opened his own company. “Going to Asia,” he says, “gave me my break.”

Asian students make a point of mastering English grammar, and thus, working with these students gave Bob an opportunity to increase his own knowledge of grammar, without which he would have lost the respect of his students. In Montreal, this also works

in Bob's favor, giving him a set of knowledge skills that is not as common as one would think, and which helps him quickly develop new techniques. Furthermore, through maintaining a rigorous work schedule, he has developed endurance and can now teach for as much as 12 hours at a time.

Bob also brought back an entire collection of ESL books from Korea, developed by the local language schools. These books provide another means of presenting English grammar in ways that students have not before encountered. In Bob's view, these materials are generally more effective than their North American counterparts, which are often outdated and not cognizant of the latest pedagogical approaches.

While abroad, he noticed the cultural differences between Canadian and Korean society as it relates to children. In Montreal, to teach children entails keeping them busy; in Korea, on the other hand, "teachers keep [students] in line by public shame; I had to learn how to teach from their cultural perspective." Working in Korea, he became aware of how foreigners feel while abroad, and at times he felt self-conscious just walking down the street. In Japan, people were more discreet, but they too would often stare at foreigners. Bob never intended to set roots in Asia, which put things in an entirely different perspective. For example, he did not maintain the same close relationships with Korean teachers as he did with the other foreign teachers: "I was much more open and frank with foreign teachers than I could be with Korean teachers."

Korea provided Bob with the opportunity to develop both his teaching and his business skills. He also learned how to work around some of his weaker points so that he would be more successful in pursuing his career teaching English. For example, being

young and physically small, he took pains to refine his teaching skills in order to gain his students' respect, giving them the confidence of knowing that they would learn much from their time in his classroom.

Participant 4- Sally

Sally received a TESOL certificate (Teaching English as a Second Language) in Montreal. Her training, which included an internship teaching English to adults, lasted approximately five months. Before she left for Mexico, she had taught Spanish, German and English in a language school. When she arrived in Mexico, she taught children of various ages for a few months in a private language school, but felt that her certificate in TESOL had not prepared her for this type of clientele; nor did she possess any previous teaching experience with students in this age group. Therefore, it was only through trial and error that she learned how and what to teach young learners.

Her employer in Mexico did not provide any support in terms of extra materials, workshops nor accommodations. Thus, at times, Sally was overwhelmed with the demands of her new job, this, in addition to the usual adjustments required in a foreign environment.

The unfamiliar climate and food left her ill for some time, which also added to the strain of living and working abroad. These difficulties, which she had to overcome, were a great challenge at first, but she was ultimately grateful for the experience. She stated that: "What has changed for me from this experience is I have more confidence, the feeling [that] hey, you can do it."

The new work environment allowed her to see that classrooms containing first language learners from different cultures pose a special challenge, for each student tends to acquire the new language in a different way. This newfound knowledge allowed Sally to develop lesson plans that better accommodated her students' needs upon her return to Montreal. For example, she designed lessons that were more interesting and enjoyable for her students in Montreal. Furthermore, working with different books, she acquired a better understanding of the kinds of ESL materials that would allow her to present her lessons more effectively, especially to young learners. "The Mexican books for children," Sally says, "were in color, and they had a lot of Walt Disney themes ... which the children could relate to."

Although she was thankful for her experiences abroad, she reported that she would be careful to organize her accommodations and work contract more wisely, should she ever work abroad in the future. Overall, the experience allowed her to improve her teaching skills, and also led to a better understanding of her own strengths and weaknesses. She would certainly recommend that other teachers work in another culture. In her view, the experience was invaluable.

Participant 5- Anna

Anna graduated from the University of Saskatchewan with a B.Ed. She taught in Canada for two years prior to going to South Korea, where she taught English for four months. She returned to Canada to work, only to decide to return once again to Asia. This

time, she went to Taiwan for three and a half years, where she worked in a private school, teaching French as a second language and developing a French language program for the school. The second year in Taiwan, she taught English in a British school for a year and a half. She returned once again to Canada, but only for six months and then returned again to Taiwan, where she worked as the coordinator of a program in which English and French were taught both to high school and elementary children.

She attempted a number of different teaching approaches but found that the communicative approach that she had used in Canada was not as effective in Taiwan. Her Taiwanese students were accustomed to being taught through more traditional methods. In her attempts to use the communicative approach, she found that “the students did not know what to do with that kind of freedom,” as the Taiwanese schools demanded that teachers use lesson plans and structured lessons. Although she had found the work load in Taiwanese schools to be very heavy, her experience there proved very useful in her future teaching experiences. For example, once again in Quebec, she now provides her employers with lesson plans. Also, her overseas teaching experiences have helped her learn to adapt to different situations. Although she had taught students of different ages and at different levels, she had never had the opportunity to teach students with special needs. In Taiwan, such children do not attend the regular school system; rather, they attend schools designed especially for children with special needs, whether physical or psychological. This lack of exposure to overseas students with special needs made the prospect of teaching in Quebec schools especially challenging. She now finds it difficult to teach students with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or with other special needs within a regular class. Her experience overseas also helped her appreciate the

challenges that minority groups usually face in another country. She experienced this first hand in Taiwan where she herself was in the minority: “You are judged, you are different.”

Describing her feelings and experiences while in Korea, she commented that: “North Americans ... we are supposed to be a certain way or act in a certain way. They have a bit of a judgment, I haven’t been told anything wrong but I know from conversations with my boss in South Korea they thought that white women were more sexually active than Korean women.”

Her teaching experience abroad has clearly helped her view her foreign students in a different light. She did not speak Mandarin at all before her arrival, and this was an isolating factor for her since she did not understand the conversations that took place around her. She was living inside “a little bubble.” The experience abroad opened her up to new foods, new cultures, and new ways of looking at the world. She commented that Canadians tend to take for granted cultural events, such as Halloween and Christmas, which are not considered important abroad. She emphasized that patience is the key to a successful day, even in the classroom:

“...I know how much time it takes, it is different if you are a Chinese [person] learning French than if you are an English [person] learning French. Teaching [anglophones] in Saskatchewan ...[I found that] they could learn with much more ease in [French] immersion. There are more similarities between [English and French than between English and Chinese or French and Chinese]...I found [Canadian students] ...were more spoiled [than the Chinese students] and wanted to learn [French quicker]... As for the Chinese, it would take them a long[er] time to learn [either] English or French, and to learn it without an accent, and to be understood... [The teacher has to] ...give much more attention

to details as well. We did a speech contest [and] ... made them practice and repeat and drill. Drill was something we used over there that we do not use here.”

In Taiwan, she found that the schools were more open to trying out different activities with the students as compared to Quebec schools. Although Anna stated that the Quebec school system does not favor variety as compared to Taiwanese schools, she did not go so far as to argue that one system was better than the other. In Taiwan, they favor English grammar being taught by Chinese teachers rather than by Anglophone teachers.

Anna commented that the materials used in Taiwan are similar to those used in Montreal, such as, Interchange for English second language learners. However, she stated that the French materials used in Taiwan are different from those found in Montreal. She regrets not having brought back the series she had used overseas with the flashcards.

While abroad, she did not attend any significant professional development courses or seminars:

“I think we had one class with a lady who taught us on how to develop a course design, a course plan and I have one page of notes from that, I still have it. But it was very vague; she did not give us any handouts. Otherwise we did not have any other professional development classes. We had only one class with her over the three and a half years.”

In short, there were virtually no workshops in Taiwan as compared to the number of workshops and seminars she has attended in Quebec (such as those provided by SPEAQ).

Her teaching experience abroad was a positive experience overall, and she would like to teach abroad again, mainly because she had found that Asian students are more

eager to learn, as compared to North American students. The children in Taiwan were “not spoiled”, which is an important variable for any teacher whose goal is a productive class:

In Quebec, we “meet all sorts of students in the class... [an] inclusive classroom is not ... [an] ideal classroom for me. Some people can succeed in there, not me... there are too many ... students [that] get left behind. It is unrealistic to [be expected to] individualize your teaching all the time.”

This type of environment makes it difficult to teach all students equally and has discouraged Anna from continuing to teach elementary and high school students. Instead, she now chooses to teach adults.

The relationships one develops with other teachers while overseas are very different compared to those typically develop in Montreal. The local teachers in Taiwan will collaborate at work but tend to keep to themselves as a result of the language and cultural differences:

“But if you go for dinner they will be super nice, they [will] help you order a meal and we would drink together, they were very friendly in Taiwan. In South Korea, they were less friendly, but it was OK ...relationships with the other teachers was OK.”

While foreigners will help each other with basic needs, such as how to find an apartment or where to go grocery shopping, they do not develop long term friendships with the locals because they know they will eventually leave. Other teachers--- Australians, Irish, British, and New Zealander--- come from different cultures and

educational systems. British teachers, for example, place importance on uniforms, on methods, and on how they were addressed by their students. Anna, however, felt these were minute details and secondary to other issues. Furthermore, while teachers who work together on home soil will usually develop a relationship over time, that relationship will be based on different needs. According to Anna: “You collaborate more [in Montreal] and ...you see the long term more.”

Anna’s teaching and living experiences in Taiwan have also helped her develop patience, which has helped her in her work in Montreal. She is presently teaching English to some prisoners in Montreal, and the patience that she acquired overseas has helped her to inspire them. As Anna states:

“Because of the security, because it is a prison, [one notes] a different mentality [among] the teachers... if you are teaching prisoners your [expectations] ...are not that high. You are not dreaming of saving anyone, it is not the same thing as teaching children, or teaching literacy to adults. Teaching literacy to adults outside the [prison] walls opens up all kinds of hope because ... people [on the outside typically] want to learn.”

Participant 6- Olga

Olga graduated with a bachelor’s degree in General Arts from the University of Ottawa and then completed an eight month TESOL certificate at Algonquin College in Ottawa. She taught English for approximately four months to adult learners prior to leaving to work in Italy. While abroad, she taught English for eight months mainly to young learners, although she also had one class of adult learners. The Italian children were being prepped for the Cambridge Certificates. Thus, instruction was geared mainly

to the basics: grammar, reading, speaking and writing. The adult learners, on the other hand, were attending the same English course but mainly out of their own interest.

Olga did not believe that the TESOL certificate helped her when it came time for her to teach in Italy. She felt that the certificate was geared more towards adult learners and thus had not prepared her for the class management issues she encountered in Italy where, she claimed, “the kids were crazy.” She found they lacked interest in what they were expected to do and prepared only in order to pass their exams at the end of the year. Furthermore, she found that the main focus of the English courses in Italy was grammar. Olga had to improve on her English grammar before she felt able to teach it. Other courses which could have been of some use, such as language acquisition, were poorly taught at the college she had attended: Algonquin College in Ottawa. Thus, she was left on her own to learn the grammatical skills she knew she would need to teach her students. The materials she used while in Italy were designed mainly to prepare the students for the British exams and would be of little use in Montreal. Although she had brought back certain worksheets from Italy, she threw them out after two years as they did not serve any purpose in her teaching in Montreal.

Olga compared her Italian students to her Canadian students, both in terms of their needs and their ages. While in Italy, she taught mainly young learners, in order to prepare them for their British Certificates. The children not only lacked interest in learning English, but also left Olga with a number of discipline issues to address. This was in contrast to the students she teaches in Montreal, usually the children of immigrants and usually studying only part time.

“Even though I had started to teach kids here in the language school,” she says, “[they were] really well behaved. They are [the] ... children of immigrant [parents who] push them hard academically. These were not the type of kids [I taught] in Italy. They were so different, [not really interested in learning] but ...going to classes just for fun. They were smart but they were not serious students. Here ...the students are much more serious.”

She also taught adults in the business sector in Montreal and found her students, for the most part, were both demanding and unappreciative of her efforts.

“They were at a level in their careers [where] ...they felt they were owed something, that was my impression, I am getting my twenty dollars an hour to go there ...and they are expecting to be proficient in English after five sessions... [they claim that I am] not doing a good enough job because they are not at the level they would like to be in. I did not really like them, I found them arrogant. I met some really nice people but overall I did not really like it. [Besides], ...there was a lot of running around.”

To live and work in Italy meant a certain amount of loneliness and culture shock, although Olga did not initially believe that one could experience culture shock in a developed country. The life in the small Italian town where she worked had some positive features, such as a plentiful supply of fresh fruits and vegetables. She apparently lost twenty-five pounds during the eight months she was there, mainly because the foods she ate were healthier. The flip side, however, was the isolation; no one spoke English and so, without any knowledge of Italian, she lived in a bubble for the entire eight months she was there.

“I wanted to say that it did not affect me. It was an isolated year in my life that had no bearing on [my life]. It was a weird year. I was teaching but I was lonely [and suffering from] culture shock. You know eight months, it is a short time [and], once you get over the culture shock ... then you have to leave.”

She was aware of the different stages of culture shock one goes through: “there was a stage when you say why [do] they live that way, and you hate it.” Her teaching experience overseas has helped her better understand how foreign students feel while living in Montreal. She now understands and listens to their concerns. She is also amazed at how things are done in Montreal as compared to her province of Ontario. If she had not herself lived that experience during her teaching abroad, she may never have been able to appreciate the concerns and comments of the foreign students she taught in Montreal.

According to Olga, she was not able to identify those elements of her teaching experience that particularly helped her. As a whole, however, her experience of having lived and worked abroad provided her with the ability to develop skills that have helped her grow as a professional. For instance, in Italy she taught children to prepare for the Cambridge certificate within a fixed curriculum. This experience provided Olga with another point of view that she can apply to her present teaching. For example, she can now critically evaluate other curricula. In Quebec, this has led her to question the broad theoretical framework of Quebec’s curricula.

While in Italy, Olga had no relationships with her three other ex-patriate co-workers, all of whom had different agendas than her own. Also, she had no shared interests with them. For example, her room-mate was much older Olga and they had very little in common other than to share a meal with her. Also, the only male in the group had values that were very different from Olga’s. Thus, she had little interest in developing any type of friendship or collaboration with him. Finally, the third teacher had already been there for a year and had established a life for herself, with her own group of friends.

Regardless of the challenges Olga faced during her eight months in Italy, she would stated that she would certainly encourage anyone interested in living and working abroad to do so. She commented that the experience of living in another culture can never be learned while one is studying in university. No mere vacation can ever provide the same thorough understanding of a different place and culture as living and working in another country can. She did mention, however, that it takes a certain type of person to live and work overseas. The teaching experience overseas was something she wanted to live again, and on her return to Canada, within a year she pursued a TESOL degree from Concordia University in Montreal. She is now teaching in the public sector.

Participant 7- Alexia

Alexia had completed a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and a TESOL certificate (120 hours) in Montreal. After teaching adults for a month, she moved to Saint Etienne in France to live with her boyfriend. She worked there for two years and taught English both to young learners and business people. At first, she felt the pressure to provide the students with pleasant and effective lessons. But she soon learned that "people are people ... [and that she] had something they wanted", nameiy, to be able to communicate in English.

The reason she eventually returned to Montreal was related to the cultural differences she had experienced; also, her inability to accept the way the society functioned in Saint Etienne.

"It was difficult living abroad, I was far away, making new friends, it all comes in a package , it is not all about teaching, I did not like living in that town the people.... It was very tense you could feel the tension. Like

a racial tension, half of the people are not French, it was a city of a lot of mines and when they closed people have been unemployed... French people ...not the Quebecois, they are not the same. You know in Quebec we try to soften everything. conflict is not something... we try to avoid conflict. In France in your face all the time, you go to the baker [who] does not like the way you speak to her, she will say you should have asked me....I would say I am not from here....it was very difficult. I have traveled a lot I have lived in London in New Zealand, I had a cultural shock.”

The cultural differences were prevalent in every facet of life. She recalls an incident in a store where the clerk was upset at Alexia and if she could have kicked Alexia out she would have. The difficulties were immense even for someone like her who shared a common language and the same religion as the locals. She then realized the challenges one faces immigrating to another country.

Her teaching experience, however, was certainly pleasant. The majority of the students followed a set program (called ‘Encounters’) which the school had already prepared. It encompassed levels 1 to 15 and the students first had to work on a computer, listening and repeating activities from their workbooks. Once they completed a section on their own, they attended the class where they practiced. She gradually added her own activities to complement the lessons.

“People enjoyed coming to my class and I remember coming to the front [of the class]... We had a hallway in the school and I would say: “this person and this person, come with me... When I had complementary classes people could enroll or not. [These classes] were in addition to the Encounters. [Sometimes] I could do what I wanted in those classes ... I would tell them I wasn’t doing the complementary class that day... You [could] see that they were disappointed. It was rewarding [and] it was fun. The receptionist [told] me [that] the students would ask who [the teacher was]... before they [would] enroll.”

She refers to her work abroad as an exceptional experience which helped both her professional development and her confidence. The knowledge and experience she gained in France has helped her to develop more effective and productive classes in Montreal.

Although she was given books to work by the language school in France, she did not bring any of that material home with her. She did, however, develop worksheets which she tested during her classes in France and which she brought back. The only other useful material she found was a local magazine called 'Today in English,' developed by the French for teaching English. Saint Etienne was a small town in which only one bookshop sold language books. Thus, Alexia's choices of English books were severely limited.

Her relationship with her coworkers was a give and take situation.

"...there was [a] teacher Greg. He was old. He was bored. He would try to get my stuff but ... would never give anything [in turn], so we had that kind of tension, students would complain about him... Tanya was from the United States and she [taught] English and ... would give [me] stuff to me, and the manager would give us things. Some people would not share. ... I heard that it was a battle [for] English [teachers] to make [handouts] ... [Because the teachers would not go to the trouble of making handouts], the classes were ... not...interesting for ... [the] students... I would try to find new stuff, new subjects... I don't really care but I didn't like it. I know the school did not like it when I took the materials when I left."

Alexia's teaching experience in France has helped her appreciate the difficulties others face when they change to a different culture. She appreciates the effort her students make in Montreal when learning either French or English in order to become

part of a bilingual society: “They want to learn the languages that are being spoken here and to try to work to integrate [themselves] and to [participate]... and I am happy to be part of that.”

Conclusion

The participants described their living and teaching experiences abroad and emphasized the challenges they had to face. The emerging themes all illustrate several common themes. They regarded living and teaching in another country as a valuable learning experience. The increased cultural awareness (and, for most, culture shock), was an important variable in how they interacted with their foreign students upon their return to Montreal. Their overseas experience also helped the participants make changes in their teaching approaches, to include in their curricula different points of view and materials on different cultures. For some of the participants, teaching abroad expanded their horizons and enlightened them as to other ways of living and thinking. Many reported that they had become more patient as a result of their everyday experiences abroad. Furthermore, for some, their work experiences allowed them to learn more about their own teaching preferences, for example, whether to work with adults or with young learners. For one participant, teaching also became a business venture. Above all, all seven participating teachers reported that they had lived through a unique and challenging experience while teaching abroad. These challenges strengthened their teaching skills and abilities, as well as their understanding of the implications of an immigrant experience. These were all valuable lessons that helped the teachers increase their self-reflection and self-criticism, two activities that are essential to the improvement of their professional practices.

Chapter IV

Identification of Results in the Form of Emerging Themes

During my interviews of the seven teachers, various themes emerged that illustrated what the respondents had learned from their experiences teaching abroad. While each participant was of a different age, had a different educational background, and reported different kinds of experiences, several of these themes were nonetheless reflected in each interview, especially with respect to cultural awareness, professional development, and personal growth.

One overarching theme was the increased awareness of and sensitivity to other cultures and their traditions and habits. Once coming in direct contact with other ways of living, the participants began to challenge their pre-established assumptions about the norms of the new culture. This also caused them to question their own perceptions. For some individuals, the views according to which they previously had lived by were not only challenged but sometimes replaced by a new set of attitudes. Some of the participants also reported that their experiences abroad enabled them to better understand and help their students in Montreal classrooms.

All of the participants claimed that they benefited on a professional level from teaching abroad, for example, in learning to develop materials that benefited their students, both abroad and in Montreal. They also stated that they had further developed their professional qualifications by developing strategies that made their teaching more effective. All participants expressed a positive outcome in at least one of the above areas.

Personal growth was a benefit that most of the participants claimed to have experienced. For some, it was the development of skills on how to survive the daily routine in a foreign country. For others, it was how to market their skills more effectively so as to find better paying jobs. For still others, it was how to overcome difficulties while living abroad that gave them the confidence to believe that they could conquer any problem. All participants, when asked if they would recommend teaching abroad, were unanimous in saying “yes”. The above themes were derived from the interviews and grouped in such a fashion as to provide a clear idea of issues relevant to this thesis.

Cultural Awareness

Increased cultural awareness and culture shock were two of the responses the participants expressed as their first reaction to their new environment. Mandy described her experience as especially difficult since she had no understanding of the language, a situation that ensured her isolation. For the first time, she came to understand the immigrant experience.

“Just the fact that I did not understand what was going on, the language difficulties that made me feel kind of isolated but I think it is a good experience for someone to have, when you are [in] the minority. I think a lot of people do not realize that if you are of a [privileged class]...you are not a minority so it is good to be in a place where you are looked at [as being different]. When people make generalizations about your behavior, ... when you come back here, you understand what other people [immigrants in Canada] are going through.”

Mandy’s experience allowed her to appreciate what a foreign student goes through living in Montreal. This increased her ability to help her students in Montreal reach their full

potential, since she now had a much better understanding of their situation and the challenges they faced attempting to integrate into a new culture.

“I know that I am [now] more comfortable with people from different countries, nationalities. Maybe if they can't express themselves in English I do not get worried like 'no, I can't understand them.' ... I am in some way more patient with trying to understand what they are trying to say or come to an understanding.”

The environment of Mandy's classroom is enriched by the ease with which she can now interact with members of different cultures. She has also used her travels as a conversation starter to break the ice with foreign students in her classes. The students feel a stronger connection to her when they hear that she had visited their country, and that they can discuss her experiences with her.

Bob also described how foreigners may feel in Montreal. He describes his experience in Japan as disconcerting, largely because he was aware of standing out as a foreigner. However, the Japanese were more discreet than the Koreans he had met during his teaching in Korea. There, he felt especially “self-conscious while walking down the streets of Korea”, because everyone would stare at him. This experience provided an occasion to change perspective and think about similar experiences that immigrants may go through in Montreal. Sally's concerns about foreign cultures were somewhat more basic. She found that the change in her diet and the unfamiliar climate caused her to fall ill. These difficulties arose in her day to day tasks, and are on the whole typical to a teacher at the start of their teaching period in another country.

During the interview, Anna shared her experiences of living and working in Taiwan. She had found these experiences almost surreal, especially the six a.m. practice

of setting off firecrackers. She also described the continuous noise that she heard, and the habit of the locals to go to bed very late and get up very early. Through her experience, she increased her patience in dealing with people. On a more personal level, she described how she, as a foreigner, felt in Taiwan: “you are judged; you are different.”

Furthermore, because Anna did not speak Taiwanese, and because this affected how she lived, she describes her time there as being enclosed in “a little bubble”. She became cut off both from what was happening in the world and the society that surrounded her. The sense of isolation she experienced made her more aware of the isolation and challenges many of her immigrant students experience in Montreal. This enhanced awareness has even improved her teaching skills, helping her to tailor her lessons to better meet her students’ needs.

Olga was the only participant who, through her reading, was acquainted with the fact that there are different stages of culture shock that one goes through when living in another culture. Yet, when she lived in Italy (which she considered to be an advanced and developed culture), she was astonished that she underwent culture shock as well. Like the other participants, she could not speak the local language and therefore was isolated from those living in the small community where she had taught for eight months. Her isolation produced a profound loneliness, along with a sense of being disconnected from other human beings. She also came to appreciate the curiosity of her Montreal students toward the kinds of customs and norms that most native-born Canadians simply take for granted. She no longer passes judgment; for she has walked in their shoes.

Alexia is French-Canadian who lived in France for two years. She decided to return to Montreal because the racial and cultural differences were impossible for her to reconcile. Initially she believed that her sharing of the same language and religion would make the transition easy, but she soon learned differently:

“French people ...not the Quebecois, they are not the same. You know in Quebec we try to soften everything, conflict is not something... we try to avoid conflict, in France in your face all the time, you go to the baker, she does not like the way you speak to her, she will say you should have asked me....I would say I am not from here....it was very difficult. I have traveled a lot I have lived in London in New Zealand, I had culture shock.”

Through her experiences in France, including numerous encounters with members of the local population, she learned how difficult it must be immigrating to another country.

Most of the participants experienced a heightened cultural awareness and, in some cases, culture shock. For some of the participants who lived and worked in Asia, the differences they perceived from their own culture were more prevalent. The difference in their physical appearance was made evident by the local's reactions to them. However, they gradually learned to accept this. For other participants, it was the everyday interactions and customs that were challenging. For the two participants who had moved both to France and to Italy, they had assumed (incorrectly, as it turned out), that, coming from the West, they would not have to face any major cultural challenges in France and Italy, both Western countries. Indeed, both had assumed that such kinds of cultural difficulties were experienced only by individuals who lived and worked in countries very different than their own, for example, Asian countries such as Japan and Korea.

Professional Development

Enhanced professional development was something that all participants experienced as a result of their work abroad. They developed skills that have since been a major asset to them in their classrooms. For some of the teachers interviewed, the aspects of their professional development included: the impact of the various instructional styles and the students they worked with upon their subsequent teaching; the acquisition of new materials and language games they had worked with abroad; the workshops they had attended and benefited from while abroad; collaboration among coworkers; increased confidence, such that some enrolled in university program upon their return to Canada in order to pursue a higher degree in education, thereby advancing their careers.

The impact of styles on students

Mandy, in her first teaching experience abroad, taught at an international school in Japan. Later, she had the opportunity to work with children in Laos. These opportunities helped her develop an appreciation of other cultures, and also to acquire greater patience when dealing with her students. Increased patience has also been her key to creating more fruitful lessons. Furthermore, as a result of working with the Standardized International “Bacalaria” Program (an inquiry-based system different from that used in British Columbia), provided her with a different perspective on teaching.

Sonia found that teaching adults in Finland were a challenge, mainly because of the social norms in that country, which are very different from those in North America.

Schedules are sacred, and the students tend to be considerably more reserved than their Montreal counterparts. She eventually made the necessary adjustments to these cultural norms in her teaching approaches. For example, she selected non-personal, neutral topics in order to ensure a more comfortable teaching environment. As a result, the Finnish students became more cooperative during conversation class. This experience served her well when she returned to Halifax, for she was better able to discern the cultural nuances of her foreign students. Having worked in a number of different countries, she had been exposed to many different curricula. The Finnish, for example, had developed their own unique curriculum. In the Italian schools, the focus was to prepare the students for the Trinity exams. In short, coming into contact with the varied materials gave Sonia a wide variety of perspectives on lesson building.

Similarly, Bob learned that, in order to help students learn, one must understand and respect their culture, especially in the classroom. In Korea, the “teachers keep [students] in line by public shame; I had to learn how to teach from their cultural perspective.” This technique helped him teach young learners” something which he had not been taught in the TESOL program that he had followed in Montreal. Bob also emphasized that, in order to be an effective teacher, one must be ready to respond effectively to the students’ academic questions. He noted that in Asia, the students work extensively with English grammar. He, on the other hand, had to deepen his knowledge of English grammar rapidly otherwise, he could never have gained the respect of his Asian students. Now, having acquired an excellent knowledge of English grammar, he is better able to teach English to his students in Montreal. Indeed, he has acquired a level of mastery of English grammar that most other English teachers lack.

Sally learned to teach young Mexican learners while on the job, and mainly by trial and error. She felt that her formal education in Montreal had not prepared her to work with children. The new work environment allowed her to see that classrooms containing first language learners from different cultures posed a special challenge to teachers, for each student tended to acquire the new language in a different way.

Anna acquired an appreciation of the different methods used by other cultures for learning a second language. The use of a communicative approach is encouraged in Montreal schools and works well in promoting oral communication. However, in Taiwan, this method failed with the students, who “did not know what to do with that kind of freedom.” They were accustomed to a teacher-centered approach. Therefore, Anna had to re-evaluate her teaching style and adjust it to the students’ needs. As a result, she has developed greater patience and is now aware that students from different cultures learn differently. She also points out that in Taiwan the schools required the teachers to provide the coordinators with a lesson plan and structured lessons of what they were going to be teaching. Although at the time it was a rigorous task, it has now become an invaluable skill, since in Quebec she has found that her employers have asked her to provide lesson plans and structured lessons of her work in advance. The Taiwanese schools were also more open to the foreign teachers trying different activities with their students in order to learn a foreign language, something which she feels is needed in Montreal. A disadvantage in having worked in an “exclusive” education system in Asia (e.g., children without any type of disability, whether physical, mental, or behavioral), has been her lack of knowledge on how to work with students with special needs. Since she returned to Montreal, she has found working with children having special needs (such

as those with learning or behavioral problems), extremely difficult. In Asia, students with special needs are not integrated in the regular school system, but instead attend special schools. Therefore, the little contact with special needs students has been a drawback for Anna when teaching in Montreal.

Olga, like some of the other participants, felt the TESOL certificate she had acquired had failed to prepare her in certain aspects of her teaching. Echoing Bob, she found that she too had had little training in teaching grammar, which was a necessity in Italian schools, where the children were being groomed for the Cambridge exams, which featured a major focus on grammar. She was left on her own to learn the more detailed intricacies of English grammar as she was teaching it. Another required course, language acquisition, was also of essence in Italy, but once again, her school had failed to prepare her in that area. The discipline problem in the Italian classroom was another issue that Olga had to manage and, again, her training had not provided her with the skills that were necessary to cope with such problems. However, even though she was not adequately prepared to teach the Cambridge certificate program, she managed to find the experience enlightening. She has since learned to question other education systems, such as that of Quebec, along with their theoretical frameworks. This ability has caused her to become a more astute critical thinker.

Alexia described her teaching experience abroad as an asset to her professional development. The curriculum she followed was different from what she had encountered in Montreal. This opportunity allowed her to become a more creative teacher in her Montreal classrooms.

Materials, language games and workshops

Professional development has to do with more than merely acquiring skills from one's work experience. It also includes development that results from attending workshops, mastering new materials, and encountering various kinds of curricula. All of these elements work together in enabling teachers to work in many different kinds of teaching environments throughout their careers.

In Japan, through the JET program, Mandy attended workshops for professional development every month. Her exposure to new kinds of educational materials, activities, and language games has enriched her English classes in Montreal. Her ideas were further influenced by her overseas co-workers. For example, while in Laos, Mandy interacted with teachers from Australia and New Zealand. During team teaching sessions, they shared ideas. She also participated in literature circles. She learned the most effective methods for evaluating a multi level student groups. These skills greatly advanced Mandy's professional development, both while abroad and upon her return to North America.

Bob developed an interest in grammar while working in Asia and the material he returned with is geared towards explaining the different points of grammar. He believes that the books produced abroad present the units in a more effective way, given that "they were written by young teachers", whereas the books that are used in Montreal are often outdated. Bob also develops his own materials and, as well, pays a lot of attention to what he calls "error correction."

Sally worked with various teaching materials in Mexico and has developed a certain skill in selecting ESL books for children. “The books for children,” Sally says, “were in color, and they had a lot of Walt Disney themes ... which the children could relate to.” She stated that she had not seen these kinds of books in Montreal.

Anna only recalls one course or seminar she had taken that was relevant. On the other hand, in Montreal she has found a number of professional development seminars available for teachers, such as SPEAQ and SPEAQ CAMPUS, among others.

Olga, in turn, did not feel the need to bring back any texts, for the books used in Italy were mainly used to prepare students for the Cambridge exams and would not serve her Montreal clientele. Although she had brought a number of worksheets back with her, within two years she decided to throw them out.

Alexia worked with a structured system and a series of books while she was in France, but the collection did not help any of her French students improve their English language skills. Through this opportunity, she was able to pick and develop materials that made the lessons more enjoyable and productive. She also realized which materials were most suitable for students at different levels. For instance, neither the collection of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) materials nor the teaching system that the French school had developed was effective for beginning students. Once she realized this, she brought her own worksheets in to help her students.

While abroad, the participants sometimes gained from using the educational materials, books and activities produced by the locals. Indeed, some of them brought back some of these materials to use in their Canadian classrooms.

Collaboration with Coworkers

Collaboration among co-workers is another form of professional development. It helps teachers to learn and to share teaching styles and materials. This is especially true for teachers from different countries who work together, regardless of whether or not they share the same first language.

Mandy described the local Japanese teachers she worked with as professionals. However, the Japanese teachers avoided developing relationships with the foreign teachers. Her assumption was that it was the language differences that kept the local and foreign teachers apart. In Laos, unlike in Japan, she had the opportunity to exchange ideas and activities with the other foreign teachers. This was also the case on her return to Montreal.

Anna described the relationships which teachers develop while overseas as very different to what one finds in Montreal. Teachers in Montreal invest the time and effort in getting to know their coworkers, mainly because they intend to build long term relationships with them. Once abroad, the foreign teachers who have been there longer will help a newly arrived foreign teacher find an apartment and even offer to go shopping with them. However, everyone is aware that such relationships are transitory and so no one is really willing to invest the time and to energy to establish a deeper relationship.

Anna also suggests that the fact that the foreign teachers all come from different cultures may also contribute to a reluctance to form close attachments. As an example of such cultural differences, she mentioned how much importance British teachers place on the students' appearance and uniforms. Whereas the local teachers would always work with the foreign teachers, they always maintained a certain social distance. Anna, like Mandy, attributed this social distance to the language differences. However, she qualified this by noting some differences in behavior in social and professional contexts. The foreign teachers working abroad do not develop the same relationships as teachers do in Montreal. Everyone is aware of the essentially transitional nature of foreign teaching jobs. They are also aware of the various cultural and linguistic barriers.

Olga painted a very similar picture of the relationships she developed with her foreign coworkers. In the school where she worked in Italy, it was mainly foreign teachers who worked there. They were all very different as individuals and seemed unable to develop any kind of a professional relationship. She believed that a common ground of some type is needed if any type of friendship is to develop among foreign coworkers.

Alexia, like the other participants in the study, realized that not all teachers were as open as she was in sharing their teaching materials and in collaborating with their colleagues. Some instructors who had lost their initial teaching zeal worked with outdated handouts. Alexia's students appreciated the time and energy she invested in their learning, which they demonstrated by signing up for the complementary lessons. This was a fulfilling experience for Alexia.

Personal Development

Building confidence, formal education and career advancement

Each participant gained a better understanding of themselves, which motivated them to further their studies, to advance in their careers, or both. For some of the participants, the satisfaction of overcoming the challenges was a reward in itself, not to mention their feeling of having done a good job.

Mandy described life abroad as initially lonely and difficult, but the experience turned out to be a reward in itself, for it ultimately became a source of subsequent wealth. The knowledge she gained from her work, especially the understanding she gained of her foreign students' experiences and difficulties, has contributed greatly toward her present teaching activities. As well, the knowledge she gained both from her co-workers and from the educational systems and materials she encountered added to her bank of knowledge. She advised anyone who was presented with the opportunity to undergo such an experience should accept the challenge without hesitation.

“Because it is a fabulous experience it is good for people, to get out of their comfort zones and to visit other places. But it depends on the person too if it is a person who has a hard time adapting to different lifestyle or feels uncomfortable outside ... where English isn't spoken and where the culture is very different. Then I would say be prepared for different situations, but I would encourage people who have a passion for it, definitely.”

In short, Mandy maintained that teachers benefit both personally and professionally by challenging their habitual attitudes and by escaping from their comfort zones.

Sonia presented a very different perspective on working abroad. When she first taught abroad she was twenty-three, and her lack of business savvy prevented her from optimizing her position when negotiating her contract. However, by gaining experience working in different countries and negotiating with people from different cultures, she developed a better understanding over time of what she was entitled to:

“But I think it is more for females. People will take advantage of you. You go in naïve ... and you do not look after yourself but, by the end, you hopefully know that you have to look after yourself a little more.”

Teaching and negotiating a contract in a foreign country was an invaluable experience that has helped her ever since. Through her various teaching experiences, through working with children, adults, business people and in different countries, she has developed greater confidence. The different materials and teaching methods that she brought back to Canada have been a source of wealth and have added to her knowledge and development; reinforcing her confidence. Like Mandy, Sonia would encourage other teachers to work abroad, for in her view, the learning experience was invaluable.

Bob gained a vocation from teaching abroad. On first entering university, teaching was not Bob's first choice. He wanted to work abroad and so pursued a certificate TESOL. He believes that had he not gone to teach overseas, he might be working today in a bank today (an option that clearly did not appeal to him): “Going to Asia,” he said, “gave me my break.” His teaching experience abroad helped him specialize in accent correction, and he has since created his own business in this area, a business that he hopes to expand one day into Europe.

Sally was faced with a number of challenges while living and working in Mexico. The training she received in Montreal had not prepared her for her trip abroad. She was ill from the change in the climate and the unfamiliar food. The clientele was much younger than she had worked with in Montreal and she had to learn how to adapt her teaching and her materials to their needs. Despite this, she maintained that the experience was invaluable and helped build her confidence: “What has changed for me from this experience is that I have more confidence, the feeling [that] hey you can do it.” She would certainly recommend it to other teachers.

Anna is another participant who recommends that other teachers teach abroad. The cultural input has made her more aware of how immigrants feel in Montreal and, more importantly, more aware of the many difficulties her foreign students are likely to encounter. She has developed greater patience and now has more “realistic expectations” of her students. Her work abroad allows her to compare the different clientele she has taught. She now realizes that teaching children in Canada is not one of her aspirations.

In Quebec, we “meet all sorts of students in the class... [an] inclusive classroom is not ...[an] ideal classroom for me. Some people can succeed in there, not me... there are too many ... students [that] get left behind. It is unrealistic to [be expected to] individualize your teaching all the time.”

The children in Taiwan are “not spoiled” and this is one of the main reasons that she would like to teach abroad again. Furthermore, teaching abroad allowed her to see life from another perspective.

Olga also felt the isolation and the challenges posed by a different culture, yet she would certainly encourage teachers to work abroad. The different educational systems, clienteles, materials and objects the schools set forth for their students all contribute to the teachers' knowledge. Olga notes that merely traveling to visit another country is a very poor substitute for the experience of living and teaching abroad. It helped her re-evaluate her career goals and to further her education upon her returns to Montreal. She finished her TESOL degree at Concordia University and is now teaching in the public sector.

Alexia described her teaching experience abroad as an opportunity to build her confidence. She was at first uncertain about her ability to meet the challenge of teaching students with a different cultural background from her own. As soon as she started to see an improvement in the students' work and their appreciation of her enthusiasm in presenting enjoyable lessons, her confidence soared, which motivated her to continue her efforts to improve the caliber of her teaching.

Conclusion

All participants described similar issues: increased cultural awareness, professional development, and personal growth. The majority of the participants were overwhelmed by living and working within a non-Western culture. Some of the participants who had taught in Asia were faced with radically different traditions and ways of life. Bob felt that the Koreans stared at him when he walked down the street because he looked different from them, and Mandy dramatically described her isolation, saying that she "was the only foreigner in the school, it was challenging [I] cried in the bathroom sometimes." Despite

the cultural challenges the teachers confronted, they continued their work. The increased cultural awareness some of the teachers acknowledged during their interviews became relevant in their subsequent classroom management and course development. Mandy, Sonia, Bob, Anna, and Olga all came to realize that students from different cultures learn differently, and all created lessons that would help their students maximize their learning.

Concerning professional development, Anna discovered that the local Taiwanese students did not respond well to the communicative approach, a method widely used in language classrooms in Montreal. Instead, a teacher centered approach was far more in-line with their learning styles. Mandy discussed the respect and dedication her overseas students showed their teachers, as compared to that which students usually display in Canada. This led her to select a different clientele upon her return to Montreal, and so she no longer teaches young learners. The material and language games they worked with abroad, as well as the workshops they attended, were of interest to some of the participants. Bob was inspired by some of the English materials he had used in his classrooms in Asia, materials that he brought back to use with his Montreal students. He maintained that the units in the books he acquired were assembled in a way that made the teaching of grammar more effective. He also noted that many of the books were produced by young individuals and thus reflected today's society more accurately, whereas the books he found in Canadian classrooms were generally outdated and thus less relevant. While Olga did not find that the worksheets she had brought back with her were of great help in her present teaching in Montreal, simply being exposed to teaching material from other cultures has given her a better understanding of their particular

purpose (as was the case in Italy, where the books were specifically geared toward preparing students for the Cambridge exams).

The level of collaboration with other co-workers, both abroad and in Montreal, varied among the participants. Anna found the local teachers with whom she worked while abroad polite but distant. While the other foreign teachers were helpful, they were unwilling to forge long-term bonds. Bob and Mandy found the foreign teachers more approachable and more willing to collaborate than the local teachers. At the other extreme, Olga could not find any common ground with her foreign co-workers while in Italy, nor did they seem to find any common interest among themselves, either personally or professionally. Finally, what all the participants experienced in common were increased self-confidence, a renewed interest in pursuing a formal education in teaching, or a desire to seek out career advancement.

Chapter V

Summary and Recommendations

The main objective of this study is to examine whether teachers' experiences abroad help them develop a cultural and global understanding which can then be transferred to the classroom upon the teachers' return home. The teachers interviewed for this research received their basic teacher training in Canada, opted to teach in other countries than Canada, and then returned to teach in Montreal. The study encompasses their work both abroad and in Montreal and in order to determine whether and to what extent their new awareness of cultural differences had increased as a result of their work in foreign lands, and how much of that newly acquired knowledge was subsequently transferred to their teaching practices on their return to Montreal.

Based on a qualitative approach, the participants underwent in-depth, semi-structured interviews, after which their responses were transcribed and summarized. The questions were not entirely open-ended, but were designed to guide the interview process. While this established a certain amount of standardization, it did not exclude the spontaneous and, often, very rich comments of the participants.

The participants were initially contacted through email and were provided with a description of the study and its specifications. Those who decided to participate were given the choice both of the time and the place where the interview would be held. In short, the interviews took place at the participants' convenience and sometimes at their

place of work or in conveniently located cafés. To avoid inconsistency in the interview style, the same researcher conducted all seven interviews.

Summary of the Results

All seven of the interviewed teachers identified aspects of their work abroad that proved to be an asset to them on their return to Canada. The study has shown that teachers can indeed benefit from teaching in another country, and that such an experience helps them engage in greater critical reflection about their teaching.

During the interviews, all participants demonstrated that they were able to reflect critically on their experiences, both personal and professional. This ability is clearly essential to professional development. According to Brookfield (1995), critical reflection is a result of several factors: first, the ability to self-reflect; second, engaging in interactions with one's colleagues on a specific issue; and, third, participation in programs that administrators provide in order to help teachers develop critical reflection. Kennedy (1990) identifies yet another component that may initiate critical reflection in a person, namely, the environment that surrounds them. Finally, Dominicé (1993) suggests the use of educational autobiographies, a process by which adult teachers can reflect critically on their own knowledge, values, and understanding of their life experiences.

All of the participants in this study experienced increased cultural awareness, culture shock, or both during their work abroad. For instance, Bob felt that he was scrutinized by the locals in Korea because he was appeared physically different from them. Alexia found that she could no longer live in France because of the cultural differences she encountered, even in her simple, every day interactions with the locals.

Anna offered an account of the isolation she felt in Asia, no doubt related to the fact that she did not understand the language and therefore could neither conduct simple transactions nor listen to the news. All participants could now relate to as well as better understand what their foreign students in Montreal must face in their day-to-day interactions. It would seem that the primary trigger events that pushed them into critical thinking were the cultural differences they had encountered. This led them toward the experience of transformative learning.

Roth (1990), in "Challenging Habits of Expectation", cites Bandler and Grinder's (1975) three categories of transformative learning, namely, generalization, deletion and distortion. According to Roth, in the "generalization stage", individuals isolate elements from their previous experiences and generalize them by making connections to their own professional practices. The "deletion stage" takes place when individuals start to isolate and question events from the experiences they have had. Finally, in the "distortion stage", individuals use their knowledge to change their current values so that those values more closely mirror their actions. Mezirow (2000) evaluates how people make sense of their experiences through creating a rationale for them. In other words, the rationale is the outcome of peoples' experiences and customs. Cranton (2000) in her article suggests that people decipher their experiences in accordance with their backgrounds, their social and cultural beliefs, and their values. In transformative learning, self-reflection indicates that we are now aware that we are part of a group, whose values and beliefs we have embraced, mainly uncritically, in the past, but which we are now preparing ourselves to question.

Educators, in their attempts to encourage transformative learning, often motivate change in their students' learning styles. These educators guide their students toward becoming more aware of their habits, of how they interpret their experiences, and more aware of their ideals. This allows students to separate themselves from the perspective of the community around them, and to consider and possibly shift to a different point of view.

Some of the participants described how their work abroad influenced their subsequent teaching in Canada. Anna, having experienced cultural isolation, not only was able to understand what her foreign students had lived through in Montreal, but was also able to take elements from her experiences abroad and work them into her Montreal curriculum. Mandy had found that her time in Japan was difficult because of the cultural isolation she experienced. Thus, she now has a shared experience with many of her foreign students in Montreal, which help her to connect with them more closely. Consequently, her students now feel more at ease in her class and more willing to participate in class activities. Ever since Mandy started designing her lessons with more cultural input, she has found her Montreal classes more interesting and more effective. In short, the participants' views on other cultures, as well as on their own curricula, underwent major changes as a result of their work abroad.

Major themes emerging from this study in the context of the literature review

The participants were asked the same questions but were given the opportunity to expand on their answers during the semi-structured interviews. The major themes which emerged from the interviews were: cultural awareness, professional development, and personal growth.

Cultural awareness

Lippincott (1997) discusses the impact that culture shock has on individuals living and working in another culture, as well as the influence that it has on these persons' private lives. Zapf (1991) adds that, regardless of the reason that individuals go abroad, whether it is to immigrate, to study, or to work, they experience a certain amount of culture shock, largely as a result of their interactions with persons of other cultures. Wallis (2006) looks at the cultural and linguistic experiences of a single, monolingual teacher who went to Brazil to work. The teacher stated that the recurrent cultural obstacles she encountered during her time in Brazil prompted her to break her contract and to return to the US. However, in the end, she appreciated the experience and learned to be more accepting of other cultures. Faulconer (2003) examines how three American pre-service teachers, during their practicum in Mexico, learned to conquer personal challenges in a different culture. There, they became aware of their own cultural biases. Upon their return to the US, the teachers incorporated a more diverse curriculum.

Cultural awareness increased for most of the participants in this study. Once abroad, they were faced with the feeling of being different. Bob's physical differences

made him sensitive to what his foreign students likely experienced in Montreal. Mandy, on her part, described her time in Japan as isolating, given that she neither spoke nor understood the language. Even Olga, who was the only participant who was aware in advance of the concept of social shock, had not expected to experience it in Italy, a developed Western country. However, the cultural differences were immense, such that she felt isolated from the world for the entire eight months that she was there. Similarly, Alexia had not expected to experience culture shock in France, since she shared the same language (French) and religion (Catholic). Yet these similarities were not enough to help her adapt to French society, which led to her rapid return to Quebec. Their exposure to cultures different than their own led them to re-examine their views on their own cultures, beliefs, and values; also, to re-examine their curricula and interactions with their Montreal students. As was shown in the literature review, this study demonstrates the occurrence of a critical change in the participants' views.

Professional Development and Personal Growth

Most teachers who have worked abroad experience changes in their professional and personal lives upon their return home. These changes are the outcome of transformative learning through critical thinking. Cultural differences often influence individuals toward re-evaluating many of their ways of thinking.

Dominicé (1993) believes that educational biographies encourage adults to reflect critically on their knowledge, values, and understanding of their "life experiences". The objective of the life history approach is to help adult learners become aware of their own learning progression in the form of an autobiography. The individuals must isolate what

they learned and the impact that learning experience had on them. Through these autobiographies, individuals who have lived and worked abroad re-evaluate their experiences, along with the influence these experiences have had upon their present lives. Candy (1990) introduces a form of critical reflection which Kelly (1955) refers to as “man-as-scientists”, referring to behavior as a continuing test. Candy (1990) maintains that people, in their everyday lives, learn through observation, base on which they produce theories, which lead them to expect certain outcomes. Individuals isolate certain situations and decide on what they may expect to occur as a result. If the outcomes do not meet their pre-established beliefs, then those beliefs are re-examined. This type of transformative learning allows an individual to assess his or her beliefs. In the literature review, a number of studies support the importance that teaching abroad offers with respect to learning, both on professional and personal levels. The article by Sandgren et al, (1999) illustrates how certain college instructors were sent to South America, Central America, South Africa, and India. The results showed that, as a consequence of their experiences abroad, their curricula now included a more “global awareness”. Moreover, they drew from their experiences, using examples in their lessons to explain concepts to their business and accounting students. Germain (1996) considered how the pedagogy of six veteran teachers’ (ages 40-65) was shaped by their work abroad. Further, those experiences strengthened their personal and professional growth. Once they returned to their classrooms, they added materials from their teaching experience abroad to improve their lessons. Furthermore, the teachers now better understood and appreciated their students’ diverse cultural backgrounds. This helped them promote a more productive learning environment for all of their students. Similarly, Eyans, in a doctoral thesis

(2004), reviewed the effects of a three-week educational trip to China by teachers from St-Louis, Missouri. The teachers demonstrated a change in their curricula which now included far more culture awareness; also, an improvement in their interactions with students from cultural backgrounds other than their own.

In this study, the participants acknowledged a positive change in their professional and personal lives as a result of their work abroad. On a professional level, most participants acknowledged the positive impact that their work abroad had had on their subsequent teaching in Montreal. Mandy, Sonia and Bob described how their work abroad changed the way they looked at their Montreal students. Mandy learned about the *Bacaloria* educational system in Asia, and developed her ability to be more patient with students from other cultures. Sonia understood that the social norms in Finland were different and that her lessons therefore needed to be developed so as to respect those differences, for example, the fact that her Finnish students worked best in a class where topics were less personal, more neutral, and, consequently, less threatening to the students. Bob, to his surprise, discovered that the more his Korean students respected their teachers, the better they learned. To gain their respect, he knew that he had to possess a thorough understanding of English grammar.

Some participants in this study brought their professional skills to a higher level through their hands-on experience working abroad. For some, the learning experience occurred through their use of local teaching materials and by attending workshops. While abroad, Mandy developed a number of teaching games while Bob taught in a school that provided a solid English language program and set of texts. He subsequently found those

materials very effective while teaching in Montreal for they had been produced by young individuals and reflected current life more accurately. Likewise, in Mexico, Sally worked with books produced locally that had been especially developed for young learners. None of the participants felt they had had sufficient exposure to workshops and professional developmental courses while abroad. Anna commented that there were more opportunities in Montreal to attend workshops and conferences, such as SPEAQ. Mandy reported that she had attended some conferences in Japan, set up by the JET program, but that they did not add much to her overall professional development.

The issue of collaboration with colleagues produced varied responses from the participants. Some felt that it had facilitated their professional development while others found it to be of negligible value. Olga had had little in common with her co-workers in Italy and thus could not develop professional relationships with them. Bob, Anna and Mandy found the local teachers in Asia polite and helpful whenever they asked for assistance, but they did not feel comfortable associating with them on a more personal level. Mandy found that she could exchange ideas with other foreign teachers and that she learned from them as a result. Bob, on the other hand, felt that some were not as eager or interested in advancing in their careers as he was, and therefore did not tend to put as much effort into their jobs as he did.

Concerning personal development, some teachers felt that their work experience abroad gave them the confidence they needed to pursue their goals. Sally faced a number of challenges in Mexico, from constant illness to the daily challenges she faced as soon as she began working in Mexico. She drew strength and confidence from her ability to

overcome some of the challenges she faced, and believes that this made her both stronger and wiser. She now knows what steps one needs to go through to work effectively abroad, and to profit from that experience. Sonia finally learned how to look after her own interests when negotiating a new contract. Alexia described her teaching experience in France as a time when she learned to perfect her professional skills. This gave her the confidence to create a safe learning environment for her Montreal students. To live and teach in another country certainly presents challenges, but it also carries its rewards. All participants in the study recommended the experience to other teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research

All participants described changes in their professional and personal development, similar to the examples identified by the research subjects in the literature review. The majority commented that both new and veteran teachers would benefit from teaching abroad, and that such experience would enhance their teaching styles, both through the exchange of ideas with foreign colleagues and their exposure to other educational materials and curricula. Furthermore, they maintained that exposure and sensitization to other cultures and customs, especially in the case of monolingual teachers who have lived within the confines of one culture, helps them appreciate the challenges that students from other cultural backgrounds may face in their Montreal classrooms.

The teachers interviewed for this study stated unanimously that they had benefited from their work abroad and, moreover, were able to provide examples to support their claim. Clearly, additional research on this subject would enrich the available literature.

The participants' ages, educational backgrounds, and length of work experiences varied. However, they all concluded that their work abroad had had a positive impact upon their teaching in Montreal. Concerning their professional development, some felt that their experience had helped them enhance both their teaching styles and materials. Others emphasized that integrating the materials and learning practices of other cultures helped to enrich their curricula. Because the cultural differences students bring to class may be unnoticed or misunderstood by teachers, there is a risk that students could fail to receive an optimal education. Through living and teaching in a foreign culture, teachers gain new skills and knowledge that they can integrate into their subsequent teaching methods.

On a personal level, the teachers learned the implications of living in a different culture and the difficulties that accompany it. They also learned to be more open minded and flexible in their expectations, both in and out of the classroom. Some teachers were inspired from their work abroad to pursue teaching on a full time basis on their return to Canada. One teacher even developed his own private practice as an educational entrepreneur. In short, despite the reported difficulties inherent to teaching abroad, the positive impact that such an experience can have on a teacher's ability to evolve appear to provide benefits that dramatically empower both the personal and professional development of the teachers.

In light of the reported benefits of teaching abroad, I recommend (a) that teachers be encouraged to seek out this experience and (b) that all teaching institutions take steps

to include courses on multiculturalism, thereby increasing teachers' awareness of the needs of their multicultural students, whether they are encountered in Canada or abroad.

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