STUDENT TEACHING OVERSEAS: OUTCOMES AND PERSISTENCE OF
THE STUDENT TEACHING ABROAD EXPERIENCE

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Student teaching abroad programs provide American students who major in

teacher education an opportunity to complete their student teaching

internship either partially, or wholly, abroad. This is an important

professional opportunity for American student teachers who would like to

build their global teaching experiences, especially as the issue of diversity

becomes increasingly important for the United States. In this study, I

interpret the experiences of former participants of a student teaching abroad

program through participant interviews. This study helps to unearth how the

effects of these teachers’ international experiences cognitively and

professionally persist or dissipate once they return to the U.S. and begin their

teaching careers. Based on the findings, I discuss the most significant ways

that student teaching abroad impacts individual teachers as professionals and

its impact on the teaching profession as a whole.
Dedication

I dedicated this research to my parents who always believed in me and supported me so that I could have the opportunity to pursue my dream in the United States. I would be unable to complete this journey without them beside me on the road. They have taught and shaped the person I have become. They have been gracious to accept my all too frequent journeys away from Taiwan. I would also thank my husband for his support. I thank you all for your love. Many others have contributed to this dissertation in ways great and small. This endeavor would have been impossible without the care and love of those whose number is too great to mention.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

I designed this study to understand and discover the overseas student teaching experiences of undergraduate students who participated in Ashland University’s Student Teaching Abroad Program. In addition, this study evaluated the participants’ overseas experiences and how this experience persists through their professional careers. Ashland University provides the opportunity for students to complete their student teaching requirement both domestically and internationally. The participants in this study were former students who elected to participate in the student teaching abroad program at Ashland University. This was a qualitative phenomenological study. Constant comparative methods were used for the data analysis. This study benefits the students, educators, and the administrators who are interested in international education and student teaching abroad programs. This chapter provides the rationale for the study, problem statement, the limitations of the study, and definitions of terms.
The Rationale for the Study

The Need for Multicultural Education

In the 21st century, contemporary teachers need to display a keen ability to interact effectively with people, especially with students, who are from different cultures and backgrounds. According to one survey, more than 16% of the world’s adults would like to move to another country permanently, and the United States is the top desired destination (Esipova & Ray, 2009). Under these circumstances, Americans need to prepare for an increasingly diverse society by acquiring knowledge and skills that equip them to live and work in environments that are made up of individuals from many different cultures and backgrounds (Paige, 1993). Recent research (Banks, 2008; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001) has revealed that there is a need for more competent multicultural-oriented educators in the United States because of the increasing diversity. Jiang and DeVillar (2011) noted that most colleges and universities face the challenge of providing their students with international experiences in order to prepare them for the “multicultural and multilingual professional environments in which they engage” (p. 47). Because of the changing society in which we live, it is necessary that teacher education provide opportunities for prospective teachers to experience, reflect, and develop, rather than to just transfer knowledge in the classroom. A key part of reflection and
development is becoming aware of the “cultural identity” of oneself and others (Freire, 1998).

One’s cultural identity is shaped by a variety of factors including upbringing and education. We carry this identity throughout our lives and it influences the ways that we interact with others. Teachers must always be aware of culture (their own and the cultures of their students) because a simple gesture, verbal expression or attitude can have a profound influence on the life of a student. Freire (1998) argued that teachers’ cultural identity can be the incentive to motivate students’ learning even to the entire classroom. Freire emphasized that teachers need to have the ability to reflect and respect each individual. Teacher education needs to imbue students with an effective sense of educational practice that is grounded in theory rather than turning out teachers who are simply ready to work. This is the difference between a teacher who views him or herself as assuming the role of a professional for a career, versus someone who is a transmitter of information.

It is important for teachers to know how culture and power disparities operate in the classroom in order to create an effective learning environment. Cultural and perceived power disparities in the classroom can influence student and teacher expectations and interactions (Gay, 2000). For example, students who come from a traditional culture with a hierarchical society usually treat teachers with great
respect (e.g., students who are African Americans, students from lower social economic status, or students whose first language is not English).

Multicultural education has a long history and the modern multicultural movement developed in the United States after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Banks, 2008). Professional organizations, for example, (AACTE, NCTE), colleges, and universities published guidelines to define and guide schools in integrating ethnic groups or culturally-sensitive curriculum into their courses. However, practitioners often have a limited conception of multicultural education. Most view it as “curriculum reform that involves only changing or restructuring the curriculum to include content about ethnic groups, women, and other cultural groups” (Banks, 2004, p. 4). A key goal of multicultural education, according to Banks, is “to help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures. Multicultural education assumes that with acquaintance and understanding, respect may follow” (p. 2). Researchers argue that teaching practice should be a holistic practice; teaching practice does not exist unless there is learning simultaneously, and teachers must be active participants in the construction of each learning environment (Freire, 1998; Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000). In this respect, student teaching abroad programs can provide opportunities for prospective teachers to learn “the skills, attitudes, and knowledge
needed to function within their community cultures, within the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures” (Banks, 2008, p. 2). Namely, through encountering new cultural environments (different from their home culture in the United States), prospective teachers learn the basic skills, attitudes, and knowledge in order to function in a flat world (Friedman, 2007).

Teacher Preparation and Globalization

The second rationale for this study is that besides providing students intercultural learning opportunities; programs which engage students with cultural difference all depend, to some extent, on whether the faculty and administrators in higher education have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to lead students in reflecting on and unpacking their experiences with cultural difference. Globalization not only increases the number of people crossing national and cultural boundaries, “it also changes how people interact with people from other cultural communities” (Shaules, 2007, p. 16). Universities in the United States have always been the first option for most international students who choose to study abroad even though the cost of higher education has increased faster than family incomes (Massy, 2008). According to the report from the Institute of International Education (2011), international student enrollment in US colleges and universities grew from 547,867 in 2000 to 723,277 in 2010 (para. 1).
Even with a seemingly diverse system of higher education, Merryfield (2000) argued that most White teacher educators who grew up middle class due to their unearned privilege of being born and raised in the mainstream, would not understand life being an outsider unless they had to leave the United States and lived in another country. Put another way, it would seem that despite the diversity in American colleges and universities, White Americans are mostly unmotivated to challenge their cultural stereotypes, move beyond their cultural boundaries, or question forces that have empowered some groups over others.

Merryfield’s (2000) ideas about cultural privilege also might explain why some college students fail to interact with international students, and their colleges fail to prepare their prospective teachers to teach in diverse settings. Merryfield noted that even though these teacher educators may interact with people who are different from them, “it is almost always from a privileged position” (p. 441).

Besides the lack of international experiences of faculty and administrators, another controversial issue is that some faculty members believe that in order to be a well-prepared public school teacher in the United States, one must student-teach in an American public school (Mahon & Espinetti, 2007). Some faculty believe that it is meaningless to practice pedagogical skills in an overseas school when the intent is to prepare students for a career teaching in the United States. Furthermore, some
faculty believe that a lack of domestic student teaching experiences could harm
students’ employment opportunities in the future. The number of international
students who choose to come to the United States, however, has increased every
year; Fowler (2009) noted that in terms of “both immigration and differential birth
rates, the U.S. population is becoming more diverse ethnically, linguistically, and
religiously” (p. 66). Faculty and teacher educators need to have the ability to
empathize with and be tolerant of those who are different than themselves since
future teachers are more likely than ever to need to be able to identify, understand
and actually teach and prepare students who are from different cultural groups.

The Purpose and the Problem Statement

Before the twentieth century, the role of teachers in the United States was
focused on teaching students discipline, maintaining good morals and preparing men
to vote intelligently and women to train their sons properly (Kaestle, 1983). For
much of the 19th century, teachers encountered students who came from a similar
background as their own. During that time, politicians used de jure segregation to
separate White students from Black students in the South. An informal segregation
occurred in the North, separating Black students, and students whose families had
recently immigrated from those whose families had been in America for generations
(Tyack, 1974).
According to Banks (2004), multicultural education is “linked directly to African American scholarship that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and indirectly to intercultural education” (p. 1). Together with African-American/White diversity, an influx of immigration to the U.S. between the late 19th and mid 20th centuries meant that multicultural education would be vital to a diverse nation. Multicultural education had its roots in intergroup education that “emerged when the nation was sharply segregated along racial lines and was beginning its efforts to create a desegregated society” (Banks 2004, p. 11). Because of this history, multicultural education primarily tries to teach a message of “equity, justice, and cultural democracy…” (p. 1).

The last twenty years has seen many changes world-wide. According to Friedman (2007), the distance between people is getting smaller, people are becoming more aware of their political rights, and people are communicating more with one another about a wide range of topics. American businesses have taken advantage of this shrinking global environment by employing individuals in other countries such as India to perform tasks recently performed by Americans themselves. Education has been affected too. Students learn academic concepts through the Internet anytime and anywhere. In addition to a rapid expansion of
sharing information, improvements in transportation make physical traveling easier than ever before.

In our classrooms in the 21st century, teachers have students who come from diverse backgrounds. According to Darling-Hammond (2006):

In the classroom most beginning teachers will enter, at least 25% of students live in poverty and many of them lack basic food, shelter, and health care; from 10% to 20% have identified learning differences; 15% speak a language other than English as their primary language; and about 40% are members of racial/ethnic “minority” groups, many of them recent immigrants from countries with different educational systems and cultural traditions. (p. 301)

“Teachers are not simply curriculum dispensers, but rather are cultural workers committed to addressing the contextual issues facing our students, our schools, and our communities” (Kincheloe, et al., 2000, p. 5). Teachers need to understand and recognize that students bring different abilities and aptitudes to school. Based on the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession (2005), one of the standards that teachers are expected to meet is that, “Teachers model respect for students’ diverse cultures, language skills and experiences” (Ohio Department of Education, 2005, p.12). According to the US Census Bureau (2011) nearly 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States composed 16 percent of the total population
in 2010. The Asian population grew faster than any other major race group between 2000 and 2010. Teachers in the 21st century not only need to teach students basic knowledge, but also they need to function as cultural workers, preparing students for a diverse society (Romano & Cushner, 2007).

Yet, although American teacher education programs have spent a great deal of time preparing teachers for the issues of diversity and multicultural education, Cushner and Brennan (2007) argued that teachers are poorly prepared in areas dealing with global issues and cross-national understanding and interconnectedness. Today, a high-quality teacher training institution must prepare its student teachers to live and work in a world of growing multicultural environments and diminishing national borders. Colleges of education field experience offices routinely provide student teachers with the opportunity to complete a teaching internship before they graduate; however, the percentage of students who choose teaching-abroad is much less than the percentage of students who choose to fulfill their internship in the United States (American Council on Education, 2005). Student teaching overseas is more than just an adventure. An important occurrence during student teaching abroad is that the experience challenges student teachers’ beliefs and values when they encounter and teach culturally diverse learners who are different from those in the United States.
McDiarmid and Price (1990) noted that student teachers and beginning teachers tend to generalize and prejudge the students who are culturally different from them based on the information legitimized by textbooks, formal teacher education programs, and experts. It would seem that student teachers need more opportunities to reconsider and reexamine their own beliefs in specific contexts, and that teaching abroad would provide an ideal opportunity for this kind of self-examination. Despite the amount of research on the impact of student teaching abroad on students’ self-efficacy and self-confidence, (Banks, 2006; Brewer, 1983; Brindley & Morton, 2007; Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Cushner, 2007b; Merryfield, 2000) whether the effects of the teaching abroad experience persisted over their future career and how they practically utilized this experience in their teaching in their classrooms as professionals is not known.

Previous research (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002) sampled students who had just completed the overseas experience. The present study is unique because it sampled individuals at various points in their career who have participated in an overseas student teaching experience. This phenomenological study attempts to describe and understand the experience of student teaching abroad and to comment on the extent the outcomes of teaching abroad persist over the
course of a teacher’s career and how classroom professionals draw on their abroad experience in practical ways throughout their career.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the student teachers’ experience of teaching abroad and how this experience impacted their teaching career. In order to understand the lived experience of teaching abroad, the following research questions will be answered:

1. What did the student teachers learn from the experience of teaching abroad?

2. How did student teaching abroad challenge the student teachers’ beliefs of diversity both during and after the experience?

3. How do the former student teachers draw on their international experiences in their teaching?

4. To what extent do these effects persist over the course of a teacher’s career?

**Overview of Methodology**

I chose phenomenology as the approach because this study focuses on describing the lived-experience of actual people (Patton, 2002). This research seeks to understand and describe the phenomenon of student teaching abroad on United
States teachers and how they integrated their experiences into their classroom practice. The participants were former students who had participated in student teaching abroad program at Ashland University. Interviews were the main instrument for gathering data in this study. In addition, participants’ diaries and online blogs were read and analyzed in order to enhance the quality of analysis. Constant comparative methods were used for the data analysis.

**Significance of the Study**

To what extent the outcomes of student teaching abroad persist over a teacher’s career needs to be documented and understood more fully. The present research provides important information for American student teachers who would like to build their global teaching experiences, especially as the issue of diversity becomes increasingly important for most parts of the United States. Research on the outcomes of student teaching abroad not only benefits the students teachers who are interested in participating in student teaching abroad, but also the university faculty, administrators, and colleges of education. The data collected in this study may be useful to universities, teacher education programs and international programs departments who wish to consider adding or reforming a student teaching abroad program option or requirement for their students.
Limitations of the Study

This study sought to unearth how the effects of teachers’ international experiences cognitively and professionally persist or dissipate once they return to the U.S. and begin their teaching careers. The limits of this study are associated with limitations inherent to phenomenological study and qualitative research.

Instrument Limitations

This study is qualitative in design and as such, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). In order to reduce the impact of the researcher on this study, I had to monitor and identify my shortcomings and bias constantly. Triangulation methodology was utilized in this study as well to minimize bias.

Participant Limitations

The participants in this study were former students who had participated in the student teaching abroad program at Ashland University, Ohio. The participants were selected as a purposeful sample from the name list that was provided by the Alumni Office. This sample may not be representative of the population outside of Ashland University. In addition, the participants’ experience and perspectives of student teaching abroad may not be shared with other populations’ experiences with international study abroad.
Definitions of Terms

The following definitions applied to the purpose of the study:

COST

Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) includes 15 colleges and universities in the United States which have collaborated to provide opportunities for student teachers to experience student teaching in overseas settings (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). The COST program has been operating since 1973. The placement sites include Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and Asia. Student teachers who enrolled in one of the 15 institutions that participate in COST can apply for student teaching overseas in order to complete their student teaching requirement.

Culture

The definition of culture in this study refers to “the shared beliefs, symbols, and interpretations within a human group…People in a culture usually interpret the meanings of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways” (Banks, 2010, p.8). Shaules’ (2007) definition of culture referred to the unconscious meanings, values, norms, and hidden assumptions that allow humans to interpret their experiences when they interact with other people. Slavin (2006) defined culture
from a psychological perspective, as “the language, attitudes, ways of behaving, and other aspects of life that characterize a group of people” (p. 98).

Bennett (2010) provided a definition of culture from anthropological and sociological perspectives that culture is a complex concept that makes a certain group of people unique from another group of people. Although there are several different definitions of culture, all of the definitions relate to the intercultural and cross-cultural interactions of groups of people. In this study, the concept of culture is important in that this study seeks to understand how participants’ view of culture and teaching practice was influenced by their time abroad after they returned to the United States.

**Globalization**

Globalization has been a buzzword for the past decade. Friedman (2000) defined globalization as an “inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before” (p. 8). In addition, Albrow (1996) suggested that globalization should be viewed as a transformation of the world, meaning entering a new form of how humans live in the world. Globalization has brought both positive and negative effects not only in politics, but also in economic, social, cultural, and
educational spheres as well. This tendency turns the countries of the world into more interdependent and interconnected entities. Globalization in this study focuses on educational issues and how they are related to teacher education. Banks (2008) noted that contemporary educators must help students to develop the sense of global identifications and deep understandings of the roles in the world community. Students need to understand how life in their own cultural community influences and connects with people of other cultures in their daily lives.

**Intercultural Experience**

Paige (1993) cited three main factors that comprise intercultural experiences:

“intensity of emotions,…knowledge areas that incorporate many cross-cultural differences that sojourners find hard to understand, and some bases of cultural differences, especially concerning how people think about information” (p. 2).

People who have been immersed in cultural differences sometimes experience intense psychological stress. Paige explained that the same stress can happen again when people reenter their home cultures and seek to comprehend what has happened to them. The stress can also come from when they seek to integrate new experiences into their lives and readapt to their own cultures.
Multicultural Education

The definition of multicultural education, according to Banks (2008):

assumes that race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and social class are salient parts of the United States and other Western nations. It also assumes that diversity enriches a nation and increases the ways in which its citizens can perceive and solve personal and public problems….When individuals are able to participate in a variety of cultures, they are more able to benefit from the total human experience. (p. 1)

Even though there were several different definitions and approaches to multicultural education, Banks (2004) commented that the major goal of multicultural education is to “reform the schools and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality” (p. 3). Another important goal of multicultural education is to give females and males an equal opportunity to experience educational success and social mobility (Banks, 2004; Klein, 1989; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Multicultural education in this study focuses on how it is practiced and implemented in the curricula of teacher education programs. Teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities in the United States have revised curricula,
courses, and fieldwork experiences in order to include diversity and multicultural education (Davis & Fries, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996).

**Student Teaching Abroad**

Student teaching abroad provides student teachers opportunities to work and live in another country while completing their student teaching requirements; students also receive academic credit from their home universities. Student teachers who participate in student teaching abroad programs will be placed in local schools of another country during the period of student teaching. The international placements are arranged through a partner university abroad or directly with an overseas school. The duration of student teaching abroad varies from a minimum of 6 weeks spent abroad to a maximum of 12 weeks. The student teachers who choose to student teach abroad usually do so without instructors accompanying them. Student teachers gain different perspectives on the role of schooling, a different educational system, and policies (Mahon & Espinetti, 2007).

**Study Abroad**

Study abroad in this study is defined as a program that allows students to leave their home universities for a semester or a year and study overseas at a university in a different country. Study-abroad students receive academic credit from their home universities for the successful completion of the program. By traveling
and studying in another country, students have the opportunity to experience different languages and cultures.

**Summary**

This study focused on the outcomes of a student teaching abroad program and how it influenced the student teachers in this study in their subsequent careers. Most importantly, I attempted to understand to what extent the effects of this experience persisted in their careers by understanding the lived experiences of the research participants.

In chapter one I provided the introduction of the study, the rationale of the study through multicultural education and teacher education, the purpose of the study and the problem statement, significance of the study, limitations, and definitions of the key words.

In Chapter II I examine the literature related to student teaching abroad. There were three themes that emerged from the literature: intercultural communication skills, development of perspective consciousness, and the development of leadership.

In Chapter III I present the methodology of the research that includes the rationale for using qualitative research and the research process. Finally, I examine the quality and credibility of the study. In Chapter IV, I present the results and the
discussion from the participants’ experience. Chapter V concludes the study with a brief summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further study that are related to student teaching abroad.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the literature relevant to student teaching abroad programs in the United States. The educational value and influences that global education and student teaching abroad can provide to college students have been discussed and recognized by multiple scholars (Brewer, 1983; Burn, 1979; Cushner, 1998; Goodwin & Nacht, 1988; Stephens & Little, 2008). The literature related to student teaching abroad allows the researcher to define the current field of student teaching abroad and to identify influences that student teaching abroad brings to prospective teachers. Student teaching abroad programs not only provide student teachers an opportunity to put into practice their knowledge and teaching skills learned from their university programs, but also unique chances to gain non-American perspectives about a multitude of subjects while immersing their teaching in a culturally challenging and diverse environment (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Kissock, 1997; Merryfield, 1995b). Teaching knowledge keyed to standardized tests is necessary, yet it is not the only thing that contemporary teachers must be able to do.
According to Omoregie (2007), the ability to communicate and collaborate with people and students who come from different backgrounds, cultures, and values is becoming increasingly important as the United States grows more diverse each year. Keely (2007) commented that many countries are facing issues relevant to increasing cultural diversity in their educational, economic, and political systems due to developments in technology and transportation. Because of its ties to economic development and equity, the educational sphere is particularly critical. Darling-Hammond (2006) commented that teachers no longer teach students who come from homogeneous backgrounds. In fact, she suggested that teachers in the 21st century are encountering more diverse student backgrounds than ever before.

Despite these facts, however, the research indicated a gap in that most teachers have relatively few experiences coping with diversity and intercultural issues broadly (Cushner, 2007b; Firmin, Warner, & Lowe, 2006; Melnick & Zeichner, 1998; Merryfield, 2000). In this qualitative study, I attempt to understand whether the three major effects of student teaching abroad identified in the literature (heightened intercultural communication skills, development of perspective consciousness, leadership skill development) are present in the teachers who have completed their student teaching abroad and to determine how these traits persist over their careers. In this chapter, relevant studies of student teaching abroad...
programs are introduced in the first section. Following sections examine the student teaching abroad program through the perspectives of intercultural communication skills, development of perspective consciousness, and leadership skill development.

**Student Teaching Abroad Programs**

**Overview**

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was authored by The National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report indicated that Americans were falling academically behind the rest of the world academically, and emphasized the importance of education as a way to prepare children for a rapidly changing social and economic life. Elwell and Labonte (2007) explained that not only had Japan created a more efficient auto industry, or South Korea built the world’s most efficient steel mill, or Germany made better machine tools than the United States, but the rapid and recent rise of China’s economy had presented a very tough and competitive environment in which American children would have to function. The world is becoming more competitive, but it is also becoming more interdependent. Elwell and Labonte indicated that Lenovo Group Limited, primarily owned by the Chinese government, purchased IBM’s personal computer division in 2005. Maytag was almost taken over by a major Chinese home appliances manufacturer in 2005. And, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) almost made a bid to
buy a U.S. energy company in 2005. To cope with these challenges and changes in the world, education plays a critical role. Cushner (2007b) contended that teachers are the most important vehicle for delivering the information and knowledge necessary for students to face the challenges of the future. Additionally, Cushner argued that teacher preparation programs should be responsible for training prospective teachers to have an international-minded framework in order to help give America the best chance of success in the future.

According to McKay and Montgomery’s (1995) research, the notion of providing opportunities abroad did not influence prospective teacher education until the 1980s. The importance of multicultural education increased due to increasing diversity in U.S. classrooms. McFadden, Merryfield, and Barron (1997) explained that the classrooms today have gradually become a confluence of diverse cultural experiences. They suggested that neither teachers nor student teachers should ignore this shifting reality in society. Today’s student body is composed of different religious, linguistic, racial, and ethnic elements. Additionally, the concept of diversity also includes gender, disability, age, and exceptionality. They commented that classrooms in the United States are increasingly composed of these diverse elements.
Kissock (1997) also provided a detailed rationale for the importance of culturally diverse settings in student teaching placements for prospective teachers. Kissock argued that this is important because the majority of American teacher education students enroll in institutions near their home and seek employment that is in the same region. Cushner (2007a) also argued that most teacher education students tend to prefer to teach where they grew up or in schools similar to the ones they experienced firsthand. However, not all prospective teachers are able to find employment near home; they may need to teach in a different region or their students may come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Student teaching abroad provides the opportunity for teachers to develop their teaching proficiency and to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the world of the ways in which others live and educate their children. The international field experience including student teaching abroad is an important way for the student teachers in the United States to expand their worldview and bring a global perspective into their curriculum development and classroom instruction (Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). Yet, other than developing self-efficacy and leadership skills from the student teaching abroad experience, the literature is sparse about how these prospective teachers apply what they have learned about culture and diversity to their real classrooms after their overseas experiences have ended.
Culture and diversity include ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, gender, language, and group identity in the United States (Slavin, 2006). Prospective teachers are also being taught to be sensitive to the students’ race, socioeconomic status, minority group, religion, and other variables. However, according to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education’s (AACTE) (2010) report, the majority of elementary and secondary school teachers are White non-Hispanic (80%), while only about 58% of the elementary and secondary students are White. Students go to school everyday and do not see teachers who look like they do. Likewise, Cushner (2007a) argued that teaching is still a rather homogeneous profession in the United States and the majority of teachers are European American with only a few being teachers of color.

Cushner and Mahon (2002) stated that the majority of the teaching force in most countries around the world represents the majority culture while the number of minority or underrepresented students continues to increase. This means that teachers need to have the ability to empathize with others and to be sensitive to the needs of students regardless of their race, religion, background, and socioeconomic status. While the proportion of minority students increase, “fewer than 3% of all American education undergraduates participate in any study abroad” (p. 46). This low figure is partially due to teacher education programs which are very intensive in
terms of requiring students to amass a large number of credit hours. Yet, during the past decade, the number of U.S. students studying abroad has been increasing until the 2008-9 academic year, when it started to fall slightly again, partially due to the economic recession (Institute of International Education, 2010). Student teaching abroad is not a new program or idea. Kissock (1997) commented that most teacher education institutions have prepared our teachers for their professions in one society even though the teachers eventually practiced their professional skills in a different one.

At the same time, global education has been a critical issue for many educational institutions in the United States (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Kissock, 1997; Merryfield, 1995a.) Merryfield’s (1995a) definition of global education is an education that is able to help students to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that they can adjust and make decisions in a world that is characterized by cultural diversity, interconnectedness, and international economic competition. As universities and teacher education programs internationalize their curriculum, conflicts over the best way to design the curriculum are inevitable. However, teachers need to follow a standardized curriculum laid out by their departments of education in order to teach in their local districts. An internationalized teacher
education curriculum is limited by the current math/science/literacy orientation of the state standards in the United States (Kissock & Richardson, 2010).

The experiences of student-teachers overseas are said to help future teachers have a better ability to communicate with students from diverse backgrounds and develop their intercultural communication skills. Kissock and Richardson (2010) suggested that students who taught abroad should develop a stronger belief in the importance of multicultural education through their interaction with both students and other adults from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds while the student-teachers are in other countries. Student teaching abroad also helps student-teachers develop self-consciousness when they stay in a country which is culturally different from their own. Hanvey (1982) explained that students therefore develop the awareness that their view of the world is not universally shared. Although student teachers teach in a culturally different setting, it challenges their previous perspectives about the world and themselves. Furthermore, by living and working in an unfamiliar setting, the student teacher can have the opportunity to develop as a leader (Stephens & Little, 2008). Clement and Outlaw (2002) view this overseas experience as more than a teaching internship that students have to complete. For the student-teachers, it is also a learning process.
The Program

Student teaching abroad programs provide American students who major in teacher education with an opportunity to complete their student teaching internship either partially, or wholly, abroad. Several different international and intercultural student teaching programs are offered at universities in the United States (Quezada, 2004). These programs include: The Cultural Immersion Project of the Overseas Student Teaching Project at Indiana University-Bloomington (Stachowski, Richardson & Henderson, 2003), Pacific Region Student Teaching Program (PRST) (Kuechle, O’Brien, & Ferguson, 1995), University of San Diego-School of Education Global (SOE-Global) Project in 1989 (Quezada, 2004) which became Global Student Teaching (GST) of the University of Minnesota today, and the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). All of these programs provided their students opportunities to student teach abroad while earning academic credits. The duration of student teaching abroad experience depends on state internship requirements as well as requirements and limitations the student’s home university may have. In general, the student teaching abroad experience lasts anywhere from 6 weeks to an academic semester (15 weeks). Ashland University is one of the members of COST; and the University is also the program from which the research participants were drawn. Through these programs, American students have
the opportunity to complete their teaching internship in a setting outside of the United States.

According to Cushner (2007a), the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) has been established since 1972. Only the students who are enrolled at institutions that are members of the COST organization have the opportunity to apply for their programs which are located in 16 different countries around the world. Ashland University is one of the 15 institutions in the United States that are members of COST. There are only 15 member institutions, therefore, the numbers of students who have participated in student teaching abroad are limited.

The undergraduate students at Ashland University who choose to participate in student teaching abroad need to complete a six-week internship in the United States, and another six weeks in a foreign placement before they can graduate. At institutions similar to Ashland University, students may spend the entire 12 weeks teaching abroad.

A student teaching abroad program is different from study abroad programs which may be led by an instructor. Students who participate in student teaching abroad programs have a higher level of responsibility for themselves and others. Unlike study-abroad programs, those who student teach abroad usually have no
instructor to accompany them, or fellow students from their own country or school with whom to share the experience (Cushner & Mahon, 2002a). The students usually stay with a host family or in a dormitory that the host schools arrange. The students not only need to take care of their own daily lives, but they also need to co-teach with and be supervised by the teachers in the local schools. In addition to cultural and linguistic challenges they face, a different curriculum than what is typical in the United States can also be a difficulty for the student-teachers. Yet, if student teachers earnestly participate, they are culturally immersed in local schools and communities in a way that is impossible with study abroad programs, because they usually go without an instructor along. Under the circumstances, Goodwin and Nacht (1988) stated that students will be faced overseas with “difference” and become more mature, sophisticated, hungry for knowledge, culturally aware, and sensitive. They learn by questioning their own prejudices and national stereotypes.

**Program Goals**

Cushner and Brennan (2007) suggested that the goal of student teachers participating in a student teaching abroad program is to prepare prospective teachers to teach in a world that is “flatter”, interconnected and more complex than in the past. Most importantly, the goal of a student teaching abroad program is to equip prospective teachers for an increasingly diverse population of students in the United
States. Mahon (2007) suggested that student teaching abroad is an important element for teacher education in that it helps to internationalize education at all levels. In addition, Lambert (1989) found that the experiences of student teaching abroad benefits student teachers psychologically and cognitively (such as an increased cultural awareness and sensitivity to other cultures). Other research concurs with these perspectives. Engle and Engle (2004) discovered that the longer the period that student teachers stayed overseas, the greater gains student teachers made in cultural sensitivity. Jackson (2005) noted that student teachers tended to be initially reserved in their new setting; however, as the student teachers became more at ease in the new environment and had more exposure to social activities, their social confidence and communication increased. Slimbach (2005) also suggested that it is important for learners today to be able to demonstrate an awareness of ethnic, class, religious, linguistic, cultural and class differences. Likewise the student teachers were able to bring and transfer this experience as minorities while they were student teaching in another country into the classroom and become more flexible and sensitive to students’ needs and develop the ability to empathize (McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Zhai, 2000).

Besides exposure to diversity, another important goal of student teaching abroad programs is to prepare prospective teachers in the United States to teach for
equity. According to Merryfield (2000), students from African American, Asian or Latin American backgrounds are more likely to be affected by discrimination and institutional inequities than their White peers. Teaching for equity means that the classroom teacher purposefully constructs the curricular content and its delivery to maximize opportunities for all groups to learn.

Several researchers argued that most teachers in the United States have not been prepared to teach for equity or even acknowledge the effect of globalization already in their lives (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Merryfield, 1991; Sleeter, 1992). Other scholars have noted that teacher education plays an especially important role in developing teachers who respect diversity and encourage global mindedness in their students (Chou, 2007; Grant, 1993; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Merryfield, 1995b). Within these studies, a common thread is the importance of having a lived experience among a diverse population for teachers through an international internship.

**Intercultural Communication Skills**

**Definition of Intercultural Communication**

One important aspect that has emerged from the literature involves the concept of learning about one’s own culture and the importance of intercultural competence through the interaction with students and co-workers while teaching
overseas (Banks, 2006; Cushner, 2007a; Koppelman & Goodhart, 2010; Lustig & Koester, 2009). Rogers and Hart (2002) explained that intercultural communication focuses on the interpersonal interactions among people who come from different cultures. Lustig and Koester viewed intercultural communication as a symbolic, interpretative, transactional, and contextual process as people from different cultures create shared meanings about the world. Through communication and interacting with others, culture is learned and established. Effective intercultural communication, according to Wiseman (2002), consists of appropriate behaviors and communicators who are able to demonstrate understanding in a given situation. However, cultural meanings, interpretation, and symbols are not entirely shared around the world; this explains why misunderstandings happen at times. Lustig and Koester suggested that sufficient knowledge is required in order to reduce conflicts and misunderstandings among people. The best way to gain this knowledge is to have lived experience and interactions with other cultures.

Intercultural competence is very important for teachers in the United States (Ference & Bell, 2004; Merryfield, 2000; Nero, 2009). Wilson (1993a) found that international experience positively impacts student teachers’ knowledge of global perspectives, their own personal growth, and cross-cultural interactions. Mahon and Cushner (2002) suggested that the student teaching abroad program provides more
powerful, direct, and real-life interactions for prospective teachers to develop skills than a regular study abroad program because they are regularly communicating with students who are from different cultures.

**Culture Identity and Contact**

During the socialization process, children learn to recognize themselves as members of particular groups (Allport, 1958). Aboud and Doyle (1993) also suggested that children between ages 4 to 7 are highly ethnocentric and become less so between ages 7 to 10. As children become teenagers and adults, their identification with groups becomes more obvious as they develop labels to represent their identities. Besides peer groups and families, teachers play another critical role in shaping students’ perception of cultural identity. According to Romano and Cushner (2007), if teachers cannot reflect on the importance of cultural identity based on their own experience, conflicts may be brought into the classrooms. The awareness of one’s own cultural identity can be triggered by the experience of living in another country or interacting with people who come from different cultures (Lustig & Koester, 2009). Also, cultural identity is not static; rather, it is dynamic and it shifts based on one’s ongoing life experiences.

Cushner’s (2007b) research identified the shift of consciousness that overseas student teachers have undergone (e.g., understanding that the United States
is not the center of the world and their views or beliefs are not universally shared).

Cushner commented that, “student teachers not only learn about themselves, but they develop a sense of their own culture as well as that of others. With this comes an increased understanding of global concerns…” (p. 33).

Many researchers commented that the best way to foster positive attitudes toward people of other groups or cultures is to create opportunities for personal contact (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Ference & Bell, 2004; Lustig & Koester, 2009; Merryfield, 1991). However, not every interaction or experience with people from different cultures is positive and pleasant. For example, not all groups have equal access to resources or enjoy their inherent rights as some immigrants to the United States are not always accepted and perceived as not being fully American by the communities where they settle. Negative perceptions about minority groups and immigrants still exist. This explains why some researchers have suggested that effective and positive intercultural contact should be established under certain conditions with professional support (Allport, 1958; Brislin, 1981; Garii, 2008; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Romano, 2007). Otherwise, student teachers run the risk of reaffirming pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices rather than breaking them.
Development of Perspective Consciousness

Perspective Consciousness

Many researchers found that the experience of student teaching abroad can change the student teachers’ perspectives of the world and their beliefs about diversity after they have completed their overseas assignment and returned to the United States (Barnhart, 1989; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Stephens & Little, 2008). This cognitive shift occurs when the student teachers are placed in a culturally different country.

Additionally, there are approximately 11 million students who speak a language other than English at home; 7.8 million of these students speak Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The imbalance between teacher background and experience with culturally different individuals and students’ backgrounds influences the students’ ability to connect with the teacher. Cushner (2007a) argued that the majority of teacher education students spend most of their time with people of their own racial group; this results in prospective teachers having a lack for empathy for those who are different from themselves.

Bennet’s (1998) definition of empathy, simply put, is the ability to stand in another person’s shoes. The definition of empathy is something like moving beyond
the golden rule, treating people as you would like to be treated yourself, to treating other people the way they want to be treated.

One of the major goals of education in 21st century is to connect students in the classroom with people from around the world. Our students need to learn from other people that beliefs, values, and perspectives are not universally shared. Hanvey (1982) explained that this “perspective consciousness” is knowledge that would be “shaped by influences that often escape conscious detection, and that others have views of the world that are profoundly different from one’s own” (p. 162). It is the realization that one’s own view does not necessarily represent truth, but rather a perspective.

Hanvey (1982) commented that perspective has a deeper meaning than opinion. Perspective leads an individual’s behavior. For example, the feminist movement in the nineteenth century raised the public consciousness about respect and equality for women. This movement began because individuals who realized their perspective was not universally shared began to engage in dialogue with those who were different from themselves. The ability to engage in such a dialogue is necessary for teachers who will teach students to be global citizens in the 21st century.
Self-Awareness/Diversity

In responding to the challenges and changes arising in society, researchers and scholars suggest that teacher educators need to focus more on integrating internationalization in the teacher education curriculum (Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Mahon, 2007; Phillion, Malewski, Sharma, & Wang, 2009; Zeichner, et al., 1998). Student teaching abroad allows student teachers to experience what it is like to be “others” in a society rather than the majority (Merryfield, 2000). Additionally, Hanvey (1982) commented that the most difficult part is to waken cross-cultural awareness, that is, to make people see the humanness in others rather than strangeness.

This self-awareness or “culture shock” challenges student teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and values of the world when they are teaching and living in another country. The experience of teaching abroad also increases student teachers’ global and cultural knowledge (Cushner, 2007b). According to Roose (2001), the teachers who recognize the existence of others and who have cross-cultural experience often can help students succeed in school. While student teachers teach in a culturally different setting, their previous perspectives about the world and themselves are challenged. Becoming aware that their views about the world
represent a perspective rather than *the truth*, helps teachers to become more sensitive to students from different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Despite the challenges to internationalization in teacher education, cross-cultural experiences help students develop self-awareness and global mindedness, both positive outcomes for professionals. According to Wilson (1993a), cross-cultural experiences can help students develop substantive knowledge of different cultures, and more sensitivity to global issues and dynamics. However, in order to obtain cross-cultural experiences, one must actively engage with other cultures. Interaction with others in a community and the continuity of learning experiences have long been considered two major principles of experiential learning for educators (Dewey, 1938).

**Leadership Skill Development**

**Self-Efficacy and Leadership Skill**

Gardner (1990) suggested that young people need to learn to cross cultural boundaries in an interdependent world. Student teachers who had experienced student teaching abroad often developed leadership skills at higher rates than their peers who had completed student teaching in the United States. Researchers suggested that by placing student teachers in an unfamiliar setting, each student teacher more fully developed as a leader (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Stephens &
Leadership skill develops quickly during student teaching abroad because most student teachers gain self-confidence about themselves and their abilities in a way that their peers who complete the student teaching in the United States do not. Some research also indicated that the experience of student teaching abroad brings student teachers positive influences; for example, besides personal growth, they felt more confident and open-minded after they completed their student teaching abroad (Mahon & Stachowski, 1990; Nero, 2009; Phillion et al., 2009). According to Bandura’s (1997) explanation of self-efficacy, people who possess high self-efficacy are optimistic about their own ability and believe that one can achieve what one sets out to do.

By teaching in a culturally different classroom, student teachers develop more self-confidence and this external challenge enhances their leadership abilities (Stephens & Little, 2008). According to Gibson and Dembo (1984), teachers with higher self-efficacy and confidence also motivate students more than teachers who scored lower in these traits.

**Professional Development**

Mahon and Cushner (2007) commented that most student teachers who had the experience of student teaching abroad often were able to transfer this experience to their teaching, which means they became more cognitively mature and flexible.
These prospective teachers are also more willing to adapt their teaching based on students’ differences (Kissock & Richardson, 2010). Another value of international experience for student teachers is to broaden their professional perspectives (Black & Duhon, 2006; Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2007). The experience of working with teachers in a culturally different setting and school system stimulates the student teachers to consider and think about their own teaching skills in a different way. For most student teachers, to live in another country also meant that they needed to be more independent in their lives and make decisions for themselves.

Wilson (1993a) commented that student teachers who teach and live in another country develop the acceptance of personal responsibility. This is sometimes difficult to learn when they are in their own country. Being a teacher for global competency also means that he or she is able to take the new skills, experience, and perception that are learned during the international student teaching and apply them into the classrooms in the United States (e.g., the overseas experience enhances student teachers’ instructional creativity and causes them to have a deeper understanding of students needs) (Quezada, 2011).

To this point, the literature has portrayed the useful outcomes of student teaching abroad; however, the experience and the influences that student teaching abroad bring to the prospective teachers are not always positive, especially when the
student teachers cannot access an active professional support system (Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Romano, 2007). Mora and Roux’s (2010) research indicated inconsistency in making criteria, receiving feedback, and obtaining support from the supervisors. These inconsistencies all have the potential of bringing negative influences to the student teachers. Stachowski and Sparks (2007) collected data since 2001 from student teachers at Indiana University in the form of on-site reports, supervisory visits, and completed evaluation forms from student teachers and host nation educators. These reports indicated that student teachers must be prepared for the school setting overseas. Preparedness included understanding the host nation’s system of education and curriculum. Student teachers also need to possess basic information about the host nation’s social, economic, and cultural differences. With these preparations, student teachers adapt to a new environment and culture more easily.

**Summary**

Researchers have emphasized the importance of intercultural competence and intercultural communication for prospective teachers. However, effective intercultural contact needs to be created under certain conditions and with professional supports. Perspective consciousness is an outcome of the teaching abroad experience that can affect an individual’s behavior. A shift in perspective
consciousness challenges student teachers’ previous views of the world and reality.

Researchers also commented on the importance of self-awareness and the awareness of diversity for teachers. The experience of student teaching abroad provides student teachers with an opportunity to establish their leadership ability because most student teachers became more confident about themselves and develop higher self-efficacy due to the difficulty of the placement. Finally, researchers suggested that student teachers that had an overseas teaching experience needed to be able to bring the experiences back and apply them to the classrooms in the United States. These issues are increasingly important as the population of the United States (and its schools) is becoming increasingly diverse.
CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to describe and understand the professional impact of student teaching abroad, and to what extent the effects of the experience persisted over the course of a teacher’s career. In this vein, the study sought to answer the following questions: What did the student teachers learn from the experience of teaching abroad? How did student teaching abroad challenge the student teachers’ beliefs of diversity both during and after the experience? How do the former student teachers draw on their international experiences in their teaching? To what extent do these effects persist over the course of a teacher’s career? The guiding focus for the investigation was to what extent the effects of the student teaching abroad experience persist over time and whether this experience was reflected in the participants’ professional growth and influenced their perspectives of diversity. This chapter presents the methodological process of the study and clarifies the research process. The first section presents the rationale for utilizing the qualitative research approach since this study focuses on describing the lived-experience of actual people (Patton, 2002). The second section describes the
research process in this study. The third section identifies the criteria for selecting participants and the setting. The fourth section examines the quality and credibility of the study.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach**

Multiple factors determine the research approach used and how the research problems are identified. These factors include the researcher’s personal interests and values as well as the availability of human resources to the researcher. Creswell (2007b) suggested that the best way is to determine which approach matches the research problem. As mentioned in Chapter I, the rationale for this study focuses on shifting demographics, which included changing social structures, better transportation, wider availability of technology, and a diverse and mobile population.

These changes have resulted in more political changes and economic competition among countries. These changes have also greatly affected the status quo of education. As world populations become more widely distributed than before, people around the world not only need to be more intellectually competent and sensitive to others’ culture and values, but also knowledgeable in order to thrive in this diverse climate. Educators have a responsibility to deliver knowledge and help the younger generation to face these changes. The United States is a country
containing diverse ethnicities. The need for American teachers to be more sensitive
and competent cultural workers in education has been discussed in the literature
review. Student teaching abroad provides a direct international experience for
prospective teachers in the United States. It also allows these future teachers to gain
access to students from different countries and backgrounds. The student teaching
abroad program at Ashland University provided the participants for this study.

This is a phenomenological study. Patton (2002) described the
phenomenological approach as focusing on “exploring how human beings make
sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually
and as shared meaning” (p. 104). According to Creswell (2007a),
“Phenomenological research primarily focuses on a concept or phenomenon and the
“essence” of lived experiences of persons about the phenomenon” (p. 93). This
research seeks to describe and understand the phenomenon of student teaching
abroad on United States teachers and how these experiences were incorporated into
their future professional performance and beliefs about teaching.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested that, “The phenomenologist seeks
understanding through qualitative methods, such as participant observation, in-depth
interviewing, and others, that yield descriptive data” (p. 4). Describing and
understanding how the student teachers’ experiences of teaching abroad were drawn on throughout their career is the main characteristic of this study.

**Strategic Themes and Theoretical Orientations**

Patton (2002) noted that qualitative methods and analysis by which participant responses were organized, presented and analyzed should clearly convey the meaning of the participants. The emphasis throughout the study is “letting participants speak for themselves” (p. 525) from their personal experience or their own life stories. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described qualitative researchers as researchers who study things “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 353). Through the data analysis process, researchers make the information that is collected from participants meaningful (Merriam, 2009).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) emphasized the fact that the rigor of qualitative research depends on “the presentation of solid descriptive data” (p. 390) so that researchers can lead the readers to understand and draw conclusions from the study. Good description, therefore, takes readers to the setting being described. According to Patton (2002), “Thick and rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting” (p. 437). However, a qualitative researcher should not stop after making thick description, the researcher needs to cross “the line from
description into causal interpretation” (p. 478). The data collection in this study is
designed to answer the questions regarding the shifting of an individual’s perception
after participating in a student teaching abroad program. Richardson (2000)
suggested that qualitative data analysis not only helps us to make sense of the
relationship to the world and discover things about ourselves, but also leads to
interpretation of human situations and phenomena.

This study focuses on selected participants’ perspectives and the impact of
the international experiences in relation to the student teaching abroad program. This
research also explores the participants’ interpretation of the world they perceived
during the overseas teaching. This intercultural research corresponds with Patton’s
(2002) description of holistic perspective of qualitative research. “This holistic
approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater
than the sum of its parts” (p. 59). Patton explained that a qualitative researcher
through holistic analysis gathers data from multiple aspects of the setting and treats
it as a unique entity with particular meaning in the related context. That is the thrust
of Bruyn’s imperative to “find a central unifying principle” (p. 61). The participants
in this study shared similar nationality origins, but differed in gender, culture, race,
belief, and values. The experience of student teaching abroad provides them an
opportunity to interact with the people who have different culture, languages, ethnicity, religions, and values.

As a researcher, I tend to be orientated towards an interpretive perspective in the way that I approach research. According to Merriam (2009), interpretive researchers do not “find knowledge, they construct it” (p. 9). Merriam’s view is that, “Interpretive research…assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality” (p. 8). Constructivism is often used and combined with interpretivism (Creswell, 2007a). Constructivists believe that reality and knowledge are constructed. Creswell explained that:

Social constructivism (which is often combined with interpretivism) is another worldview. In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things.…The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation…In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual’s lives. (pp. 20-21)
In this vein, Patton (2002) explained that “the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense” (p. 96). In this study, the experience of student teaching abroad allows prospective teachers to view the world from different perspectives. The overseas experience also challenges their beliefs.

Due to my orientation, the way that I approached the data collection was to interview participants and review their documents. Patton commented that a major characteristic of qualitative researchers is that they talk with participants about their experiences and perceptions. Qualitative researchers attempt to describe the lived-experiences of actual people. Likewise, the emphasis in this study is to let the participants speak for themselves about their student teaching abroad experiences.

**Naturalistic Inquiry and Inductive Analysis**

According to Patton (2002), “Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (p. 39). The student teaching abroad program was in prior existence in Ashland University’s College of Education. The participants were senior undergraduate students and former students who graduated from Ashland University who had participated in the program rather than in controlled experimental designs. According to Patton’s statement, the
The phenomenon of this study “unfolds naturally” (p. 39). The interviews were occurring in the “real world” (p. 39) setting.

The interview questions were designed in the form of open-ended conversations; yet in order to obtain significant information from the participants, structured interview questions were necessary (See Appendix A). Interviewing was the main data collection method used in this study. Semi-structured interview questions were conducted to elicit how the experience of teaching abroad influenced the participants. Semi-structured interviews were constructed by the researcher and based on three themes identified in the literature. Semi-structured interviews are the most suitable type of interview in this study because, while it is important that the researcher is able to ask interviewees questions that relate to the literature; it is also important for the student teachers to describe and express their thoughts and feelings on their own terms. Merriam (2009) wrote, “Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 90). Merriam (1998) also explained that this format can allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic. The study mainly focused on the overseas experience and the outcomes that the program brought to the participants without any “predetermined constraints on
findings” (Patton, 2002). Thus, the interviews were conducted with openness and flexibility of design.

According to Patton (2002), “The strategy of inductive designs is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be” (p. 56). The purpose of inductive design in this study is to seek to understand the interrelationships among “dimensions that emerge from the data” (p. 56) without pre-assumptions or hypotheses. The interview questions were designed to allow the respondents to describe their overseas experiences and to decide what was meaningful for them during their time overseas. According to Patton, a qualitative researcher should keep going back to the cases, reread the notes, and listen to the interviews over and over in order to examine emergent themes.

The constant comparative method was utilized in this study. The constant comparative method is a common way to construct meaning from qualitative data. Merriam (1998) wrote, “Categories and subcategories (or properties) are most commonly constructed through the constant comparative method of data analysis” (p. 179).
**Personal Interests and Qualitative Research**

My doctoral study in educational leadership provided me with an opportunity to have a comprehensive perspective of the American educational system and understand how leadership is defined and practiced in this system. By participating in different projects at Ashland University (particularly the independent studies that focused on international education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), I developed the interest to research the interrelationships between people in the United States with other cultures. This was also prompted by my identity as an international student. My independent studies initially focused on TESOL and integrating community services into ESL students learning. I extended my interest to student teaching abroad after initially participating in the formation of a student teaching abroad program at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio in 2010.

Most literature on student teaching abroad identified the positive influences the program can bring to the prospective teachers; however, there was a lack of follow-up research regarding whether the experience persisted in their future teaching careers. I initiated a pilot project to seek the answers for the research questions while I was taking a qualitative research course in 2011.

I interviewed three former students of Ashland University for the pilot project from July to November 2011. Four salient findings emerged from the
interviews: self-awareness, global mindedness, intercultural communication skills,
and leadership skills. All three participants noticed that they developed a better sense
of cultural awareness and when they returned to the United States, they felt their
teaching was more effective and productive because they were aware of the cultural
dynamics in the classroom.

Research Process

The Participant and Site Selection

The participants in this study were students who had participated in an
international student teaching program at Ashland University in Ohio between 1983
and 2011. Working through the Alumni Office at Ashland University, I located 50
records in the data base after removing alumni who were deceased or who did not
want mail, solicitation, telephone calls, or emails from the University. According to
Merriam (2009), in order to determine the number of people to interview, the
researcher must consider the content of the interview questions, the data being
collected, the analysis, and the resources that support the study. However, Lincoln
and Guba (1985) recommended that the sampling process should stop when data
saturation is reached. The data collection procedure involved interviews, conducted
by the researcher either in-person or via telephone, which were recorded. In
compliance with ethical considerations, the interview procedure was submitted to
and approved by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at Ashland University before the interviews were conducted. After the approval of the HSRB, the 50 participants were contacted through email or telephone calls to solicit their permission to participate and proceed with consent. The content of the interview questions were peer reviewed designed for feasibility and consistency with the advisor before the HSRB application was submitted. The subjects in this study were ensured anonymity by using pseudonyms. The interviewees were advised to read through the consent form before the interview started. By signing the Participant Consent Form, subjects consented to the interviews, which were tape-recorded and transcribed. Interview data were securely stored and destroyed after 36 months.

I used purposeful sampling in this study. Merriam (1998) wrote “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). This study combined “Intensity sampling” with “Maximum variation sampling” (Patton, 2002); these two methods allow me to select a small number of participants who had had the experience of student teaching abroad. In addition, the methods allow me to understand how this experience was seen among different participants. In some ways, this research also fits the definition of a case study. Merriam (2009) noted that, “A case study is an in-depth description and
analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). This sample can be described as a bounded system in the sense that all of the subjects were participants in the same university overseas student teaching program. The participant students had taught abroad in a diverse range of countries (e.g., England, Taiwan, Australia, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Brazil, South Africa, Switzerland, Canada and Italy). They were also diverse in terms of gender, age, and number of years of teaching experience. While some of the participants had been in the classroom for 10 years or more, others had just finished their college career at the time the data were collected. There were no student teachers who were also foreign language majors at Ashland University who were interviewed for this study. The foreign language department has their own study abroad programs that focus more on traveling and studying the language rather than teaching (J. Hendershott, personal communication, February, 8, 2013).

**Role of the Researcher**

The interview in qualitative research often requires building rapport, and being in the position of neutrality with interviewees (Patton, 2002). This is especially necessary in this study because I am from a different country with different cultures, beliefs, and languages from the United States. When I designed the interview questions, I tried to put myself in the position of neutrality. Patton suggested that one way of wording questions to help establish neutrality is the
“illustrative example” (p. 366). This method was utilized in my interview questions (See Appendix A). For most phenomenological interviews, the first challenge is to refrain from judgment, personal prejudices, and assumptions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Due to my personal identity in this research study (a non-American who is a student studying at an American university), I was aware of the prejudices and pre-assumptions I brought into the research. Merriam wrote, “Epoche, is the process the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 199). I constantly reminded myself to “bracket” and set aside my pre-assumptions and prejudices during the research process and interview in order to explore the essence of the participants’ experiences.

Patton (2002) commented that a qualitative researcher should hold both insider and outsider positions and perspectives because the purpose of qualitative research is to present the essence of real world. Moustakas (1995) also suggested three processes that contribute to the development of a relationship which are being-in, being-for, and being-with. As an international student at Ashland University, I shared my life experiences, the difficulties, and the impact that I had met in the United States with my participants as they shared the experiences they had had while they were student teaching overseas. At the same time, I held the
position of outsider because I was not currently a teacher. My racial identity also made me an outsider from the participants in the study. This awareness helped place me in a unique position in regards to the research.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

As this is a qualitative research design, there were three main reasons that interviews were used in this study. First, according to Merriam (1998), “Interviewing is a common means of collecting qualitative data” (p. 71). In order to obtain significant information about the influence that student teaching abroad brings to student teachers, individual interviews were utilized in this study. Patton (2002) suggested that the purpose of interviewing is to allow the researcher to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341). For this study interviewing was a better data gathering tool as it allowed me to probe into the participants’ perceptions and beliefs in a way that would have been impossible with other data gathering strategies. Merriam (1998) said that interviewing will be necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. Third, in this study there were less than twenty research subjects. Merriam (1998) suggested that interviewing should be the best technique to use for researchers when conducting intensive case studies with a few selected individuals. Furthermore, the interviews in this study were designed around a set of questions and specific issues that focused
on understanding the student teachers’ experience of teaching abroad and how this experience continues through their teaching career. According to Merriam, “the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” when conducting phenomenological research (p. 25).

I used multiple methods for gathering data, known as triangulation (Denzin, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Documents such as participants’ blogs and their diaries were read and analyzed to check for continuities or disparities with the interviews. Interview transcripts were also compared to written documents to check for trends in the data. Patton suggested that the disparities in findings offer opportunities for deeper insight of the phenomenon being studied.

Qualitative interview data collected for this study were transcribed and coded manually and analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method is a common way to construct meaning from qualitative data. Data analysis consisted of open coding, axial coding and selective coding in order to construct categories or themes. Merriam (1998) commented that categories and subcategories (or properties) are most commonly constructed through the constant comparative method of data analysis. In addition to the initial categories, categories which emerged during data collection and analysis were included in the findings.
Quality and Credibility of the Study

Patton (2002) commented that the credibility of qualitative research depends on three major elements:

1. rigorous methods for doing fieldwork that yield high-quality data that are systematically analyzed with attention to issues of credibility;
2. the credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self; and
3. philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, that is, a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking. (p. 552-553)

These three issues are addressed in this section of the chapter.

Strategies to Enhance the Quality of Analysis

According to Patton there are four different kinds of triangulation that can contribute to validity: “verification and validation of qualitative analysis: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation” (p. 556). In this research, triangulation of qualitative sources was utilized.

Triangulation is the most common method to shore up credibility and the internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The multiple data
collection sources used in this study included interview, documents and participants’ blogs from the AU website in order to examine the consistency of findings and to increase the credibility of the study. The participants’ interviews were compared and cross-checked with any documents (e.g., personal journals) or blogs in order to confirm emerging findings. The purpose of triangulation is to establish that the findings were “trustworthy and believable” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 302).

**The Credibility of the Researcher**

Patton noted that there is no definitive list of questions that must be addressed in order to establish the researcher’s credibility. “The principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation—either negatively or positively—in the minds of users of the findings” (p. 566). In this section, the following provides the information that I utilized to establish my credibility in this study.

**Ethical concerns**

The data collection process and design followed the guidelines of ethics based on the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at Ashland University. “Confidentiality is an important issue when doing interviews or observations and later when writing” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 30). All participants were informed
to sign a consent form before the interviews, which were tape-recorded; the participants were ensured anonymity by using pseudonyms.

**Journal**

The first reflective set of journals was kept when I took a qualitative research course from May to July in 2011. The content of the first journals was mainly composed of reflections about being a qualitative researcher. The second weekly journals were kept when I took a research design course from September to December in 2011. The purpose of the second set of journals was to reflect on the accounts of student teaching abroad that I have read. I noted my reflections, insights, ideas, and even disagreements from what I have read during this reflective learning process from both journals. Data collection for this research began in 2011 as a pilot project and developed into the research presented in this dissertation.

The journals were used to cross-check data by “examining a wide variety of documents and supplementing these if possible with interviews and observations” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 39). In the journals, I constantly reflected on and examined my ideas and insights in order to reduce “distortions introduced by inquirer predisposition” (Patton, 2002, p. 569). Being an international student and a researcher at the same time, I maintained the stance of “empathic neutrality” (p. 569)
which means I keep my interest in the participants; yet I maintained my neutral position about the content of what the participants revealed.

**The Paradigms and Credibility**

According to Patton (2002), a paradigm is defined as a “philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry” (p. 571). The philosophical basis of this study is grounded upon phenomenology and constructivism. These two paradigms guide the entire study. These paradigms were the guiding force in constructing the research design and methods, research questions, the view of reality, and the knowledge that has been created. In this research, I attempted to truthfully present the findings, analysis, and the interpretation of the data that I have collected from my audience. I attempted to provide multiple dimensions to present truth from qualitative perspectives. Patton suggested that truth means “reasonably accurate and believable data rather than data that are true in some absolute sense” (p. 578).

In sum, in this chapter I reviewed the qualitative research methods and the rationales that guided the research process from the selection of participants and setting through data collection. Purposeful sampling with intensity sampling and maximum variation sampling were utilized in this study. Constant comparative methods were used for the data analysis. The triangulation of data sources for data collection included interviews, documents, and participants’ blogs to cross-check for
consistency. Finally, I discussed the paradigms that were used and how they were instrumental in constructing the research questions and design.

In the next chapter, I present the findings from the data collection and interpretation of the findings.
CHAPTER IV

Analysis and Findings

Introduction

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to understand the overseas student teaching experiences of undergraduate students who participated in Ashland University’s Student Teaching Abroad Program and discover how the effects of this experience persisted through their professional careers. This chapter lays out the analysis, findings and interpretation of the data collected from 12 interviews and on-line blogs.

The findings were presented based on the four research questions using a qualitative research method. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously. This allowed the constant comparative method to be utilized during the research process. By constantly comparing among the transcripts and on-line blogs, primary categories were extracted from the data. Through open coding and axial coding, I identified and labeled the concepts that emerged from the data. The process of breaking the data apart, delineating concepts, examining, and comparing the raw data is called open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During this process, each transcript was read and re-read several times, coded by hand and compared
with other transcripts, student teachers’ on-line blogs, and my own reflections from the notes in an effort to discover conceptual categories. Initially, 21 different categories were developed from the data. The initial 21 categories were combined into three broader categories by comparing the substance of the data with the notes. The three conceptual categories that emerge from this study are: personal growth and development, beliefs about diversity, and reported outcomes of student teaching abroad. Under each conceptual category, subcategories are used for purposes of specificity. The analytical process of developing categories directly spoke to my overarching research question, which was also my dissertation topic: To what extent do the effects of student teaching abroad persist over the course of a teacher’s career?

**Participants**

The 12 participants in this study completed their student teaching assignments separately in New Zealand, Taiwan, Germany, Ireland, Australia, and Brazil. The years that the interviewees participated in their student teaching ranged from 1983 to 2011. As shown in Table 1, 11 out of 12 interviewees are still teaching; and one interviewee decided to pursue a career other than teaching after she completed her student teaching overseas.
Table 4.1.

**Participant Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Majors</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of years as teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>F Elementary</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>F Elementary</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>F MA K-12 Art</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>F Theatre Education</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>F Integrated Language Arts &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>F Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>F Integrated Mathematics</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>F Language Arts &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>F M.Ed: Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>F Integrated Social Studies</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>F Language Arts and Social Studies</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>M Mathematics &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the available 50 alumni who student taught abroad, 14 did not list either their email address or the telephone number. As a consequence, I had no means to contact these 14 people. I sent out an initial contact email to the 36 people with contact information. In the initial contact email I introduced myself, the study and asked if they would consider volunteering to be interviewed for this study. I
contacted several more people via telephone. Out of the 36 people contacted, 12 participants replied to my email or phone calls and expressed that they were willing to participate in this study. The interviewing began in July 2011 and it ended in October 2012. Since the data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, after I finished the first interview I began the process of transcription and coding followed soon after. A total of 12 participants were interviewed for this study.

During the study, a saturation point in the data was reached after the first ten interviews. The eleventh and twelfth interviews replicated and confirmed themes in the data from the first ten interviews (Merriam, 2009).

All 12 interviewees were told that the interview would be audio tape-recorded before we started the interview and were given a chance to assent to or decline to be interviewed. Three interviewees came to the Ashland University campus and these interviews were conducted in person. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The remaining three participants were interviewed in-person. The interviews were conducted over the telephone or via Skype. This was necessary as the interviewees lived in different parts of the United States and in different counties. The participants were diverse in terms of the number of years they had been teaching. While some of the participants were classroom teachers for 29 years or more, others had recently finished with their college career at the time.
the data were collected. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality in this study. The findings are presented in three categories as follows.

**Personal Growth and Development**

The first theme and the corresponding subcategories analysis answered the first research question: What did the student teachers learn from the experience of teaching abroad?

**Adaptation**

All 12 participants mentioned the fact that the experience helped them develop the ability to better adapt to different situations. All felt that they learned to step out of their comfort zone. Usually culture shock was the first difficulty the participants needed to overcome during their abroad experiences. The participants not only needed to adapt to the new culture and language, but they also needed to try to fit into a different school system and learn different patterns of interaction between students and teachers in their host countries. Mary said that, “You have to adapt to that country. That’s a big portion of it when people go overseas. You have to adapt to what they do, their rules and regulations and what they believe in.” Annie, who student taught in Taiwan concluded that this experience helped her to be more flexible, not only because her students were all non-English speakers, but also
because she was in a culture which was different in many ways from the United States. “I really needed to adapt my instruction in order to overcome the language and cultural barriers,” Annie said. She also felt that the experience of student teaching abroad made her more flexible with lesson planning and communication. She thought that these two outcomes might not have emerged if she had spent her student teaching in the United States. Liz commented on what she learned about adaptation: “Learning to adapt to different cultures, ways of life, and the way of education rather than showing up, and trying to wipe everything out.”

**New school systems, new relationships between teachers and students**

As for the relationships between students and teachers, Annie stated that, “The students in Taiwan view teachers as more kind of authoritative figure and it just wasn’t the same kind of rapport here in the United States”. Mary also described how students in Brazil viewed the relationship with their teachers was different from what she knew from the United States. Mary said:

In the States we’re so used to that line between teacher and student and these students were so affectionate, so loveable. Every morning they would come up and give me hugs and kisses. It also wasn’t in their culture to raise their hand or stop talking when the teacher is talking. So I had to implement procedures and routines with them…but it taught me a lot professionally on
how to think on my toes and not only to have a backup plan, but have like 5 or 6 back-up plans because these kids, I never knew what was going to happen.

For Jamie, who taught in Ireland in 2009, to adapt to students’ behavior in the classroom seemed to be the most difficult part for her because she was used to the structure of the classes in the United States. When she student taught in a public school in Ireland, she felt that, “it was just too hard to get used to the lack of respect. And that was something I demanded…I really struggled with their lack of order, and their lack of respect.” During the interview, she said that she really enjoyed the time in Ireland, but she also had a hard time dealing with the students because she was not used to that.

Linda completed her student teaching in Australia in 2003. For her, there were a lot of similarities between Australia and the United States’ school systems. However, there were still enough differences that forced her to adjust to a unique school culture and structure. One example Linda cited was the different structure of the educational system. “In Australia, the students do not necessarily go to the middle school and high school like in the United States. They are broken up into different areas of what the students want to focus on.” For Linda, the school system was not that overwhelming to adapt to, but it nevertheless put her into a position
where she was working with a different student population in terms of aspiration and ability than the one she would be working with in the United States.

The student teaching abroad program at Ashland University required student teachers to complete their first six-weeks of student teaching in the United States and final six-weeks student teaching overseas. This explained, in part, why the participants commonly cited students’ behavior in the overseas classroom as a major challenge. Since the student teachers were trained to teach in classrooms in the United States and most student teachers stayed in their host country only for a short amount of time, the student teachers had not only learned teaching behaviors that might have been counterproductive to teaching overseas, they also had a very limited amount of time to adapt to the teaching assignment.

Even though students’ behavior in the classroom seemed to be difficult for them to adapt to, when asked about how this experience prepared student teachers for their career in education, all 12 participants related that they felt more confident as a result of their abroad experience. For example, Jamie and Liz came back knowing that they were able to handle discipline issues in the classroom. Jamie said, “I really felt like I could really take on anything over here when it came to discipline issues.”
Liz’s experience in New Zealand not only helped her adapt to a different culture and different students’ behavior, but she also learned about a different way of life and education. She said, “Learning how to work with other people, and learning how to adapt to the different situation because nothing is going to be the way it is in the textbook. That’s not how life works.” Julie learned from the experience that it is important for teachers to be more adaptable and knowledgeable about what effective teaching is rather than have a perfect classroom plan. She said, “You may think you know the content as much as the back of your hand, but you don’t know how certain things work—it’s trial and error.”

**More than one way to teach**

When the student teachers went overseas, they were sometimes unable to teach the grades or subjects that they were trained to teach in the United States. For example, Mary always taught 6th and 7th grade in the United States; however, when she student taught in Brazil, she was assigned to teach 4th grade. She needed to learn how to accommodate and differentiate her instruction to the 4th graders because she was used to teaching in the higher grades. She said, “I really need to look at each student individually and their learning style and all aspects…how can I corporate that into the lesson to accommodate to them, so they can understand what I am saying.”
Tom gave me the most substantive answer when asked about the reasons he chose to do overseas student teaching experience in Brazil and how he adapted to the new environment.

It was great. I mean…anything I could have hoped for. I’ll say, special. Just in the aspect that the kids there really welcomed you and you felt like you were in a different environment and the kids really knew that you were from America, but they welcomed you…they were bilingual and that they could adapt to anything, any of my teaching styles that I had. And I had to do the same things as well. I had to adapt to their learning style. That was one of the reasons I chose to be down there. I wanted to be around a different type of student, different socio-economic statuses…

Blog analysis

Besides interviewing the participants, I also read the online blogs that some of the student teachers kept while they were overseas. The blogs were a useful tool in understanding the experiences of the participants as they happened.

There were six blogs analyzed for this study. Because of the relatively recent advent of the internet, blogs were not being used for the participants who taught overseas in the 1980s (these teachers either did not keep a paper diary or kept one but no longer possessed it). Due to this limitation, the blogs that I was able to access
and read for this study started from 2010. In the analysis of the student teachers’
blogs, the most frequently mentioned topic and theme that emerged from the blogs
of the participants was adaptation. Three out of six student teachers mentioned that
they not only faced a language barrier in the other country, but also learned many
things about different cultures. In addition to the cultural adaptation, all six student
teachers compared and noted the differences in school systems between their host
country and the United States. These two primary themes from the student teachers
blogs combine with the interview data to give a fuller picture of how the overseas
experience was testing these young student teachers.

Self-Awareness and Global Mindedness

Annie was the only interviewee in my research who student taught in Asia.

During the interview, she related how it felt to be a minority and why the experience
was valuable:

I think that being abroad helped me to develop a kind of awareness. Other
cultures see things differently, and that doesn’t mean that they are bad. As a
teacher you really need to acknowledge this…so just kind of seeing
differences of living life helps you understand the differences in your
classroom better.

She continued:
It was funny on the way because we could really see the gradual shift in
culture as we traveled. By the time we got to China Airlines International
terminal in LA, we were some of the few Americans there…it was a good
transition into being a minority. It sounds silly, but it really is strange to be in
the minority when we so obviously stick out.

Annie was alone among the interviewees in having the experience of being
an obvious minority (a White woman teaching in an Asian country). Most of the
interviewees chose to complete their student teaching abroad in countries located in
Europe, South America and Oceania, which were culturally more similar to the
United States.

The participants also expressed that they learned more about themselves by
participating in the student teaching abroad program. Betty learned about some
personality traits that she would not have been able to find if she was in the United
States—shyness while she was student teaching in Germany. “I kind of learned that I
can be very shy even though I am not.” She said, “It took me a really long time to
push myself to go out and meet people.” Betty who student taught in Germany
described her experience:

I think the general knowledge that, no matter where you are in the world,
kids are kids…So that was kind of like eye-opening for me. And I think the
importance of being culturally aware. In general, I think that sometimes, Americans really don’t have that at all. And I see how, even how much the Germans knew about America compared to anything we know about anywhere else…I think the more open you are as a teacher to new experiences, the more you can push your kids to have new experiences as well.

In addition, Jamie, who student taught in Ireland in 2009, learned that she was braver than she thought. Jamie stated:

At first, I was very intimated, by being in another classroom, and I quickly found that I am heck a lot of stronger than I thought. I was in that setting the teaching all I took was getting up in the front of the students. And I was a-hundred percent confident in myself again.

Although these participants learned more about themselves, some participants realized that they possessed other undiscovered personality traits. For example, Liz and Linda both expressed that this experience helped them confirm that they enjoyed meeting new people and traveling. Julie learned that people enjoy their life at a slower pace from her experience of student teaching abroad in Ireland. When asked what they have learned about themselves from the student teaching abroad experience, Cindy, who student taught in Ireland in 2009, commented that “I
think the thing I learned the most is that each person as a teacher really has something unique that they could give their students.” She explained, “Even if it’s artistic ability or a certain outlook, like a way to do something.”

Betty probably had the most substantial answer to the interview question, she said, “I think that the biggest thing I’ve learned through my student teaching abroad is that the more I learn, the more I can teach. The less I am limited, the less limited my students are.” I asked her to explain more and she said, “Because every time when you travel and do something new, you become a more dynamic individual. The less I am limited, the less limited my students are.”

**Learned about others**

One of the purposes of this study was to examine what was learned as a result of student teaching abroad programs and whether that learning would be conveyed to the students these student teachers would have in the future. I was very fortunate that I had the opportunity to interview two participants who completed their student teaching abroad in 1983. When the technology, transportation and the means of communication were not as readily available or efficient, student teaching abroad could have been a very difficult task for the student teachers. When asked about what they learned about others from the experience, Rachel, who student taught in 1983, stated that, “all cultures are the same, people are the same. I think the
hearts are the same…all the traces of human beings are everywhere in the world.”

On the other hand, Carol, who student taught in 1983 in Germany, learned that there was a different way of life and different cultures outside of the United States. Linda, who did her student teaching abroad in Australia in 2003 agreed. She eloquently stated what she learned from others:

We’re all very similar and different at the same time. Beyond student teaching, everytime I travel I am reminded that we’re all basically the same in terms of having the same goals, emotions and heart-breaks, but we’re also very different too in the way that we celebrate and the way that we grieve.

Besides experiencing the local life in their host country, the student teachers usually had an opportunity to observe or co-teach with the classroom teachers in their host school. Liz taught with a non-American when she student taught in New Zealand:

There was a history class one day where a man who was born and raised in England was teaching the students about the Civil War in America, and he taught a whole different way than I ever taught it and been taught, because when you are in a different country, or when you are the country involved, it was just like the WHOLE…cultural shift, and I thought it was amazing. I thought…I loved it.
Annie, who went to Taiwan, where the culture and language are quite different from the United States, learned about the different interaction between teachers and students in Asia:

Before going to Taiwan versus coming back and helping students with the assignments, I noticed that a huge differences as well because I developed a better sense of cultural awareness, how students and other countries respond to teachers differently, and I feel like my interaction with international students here was a lot more effective when I got back because I was aware of this cultural thing and it seems a lot more productive.

Mary performed her student teaching abroad in Brazil in 2011. When I interviewed her, she just got hired as a full-time teacher in the Beaufort district in South Carolina. Her thoughts about what she learned from the experience deal with aspects of culture and second language in the classroom:

I loved the entire experience. Not only the teaching and professional aspect but the personal aspect as well. Growing more as a person and being able to embrace a culture other than my own. Dealing with a language barrier and having to force myself to learn their language and embrace them for who they are and their culture. It was such a phenomenal personal experience on top of the schooling and the professional experience.
Rachel student taught in an international school in Germany in 1983. When asked about her teaching experience at that time and what she learned about others, she reflected on the differences between Germany and the United States. “It seems to be a little more relaxed than we are here in the States” Rachel thought, “…basically everybody left after school, and you would have a life.”

**Experiences in English-speaking countries**

The realization that even in other English speaking countries, people do not necessarily share the same cultural values was a common reflection that the interviewees who student taught in the English speaking countries mentioned in this study. I tried to probe for more details on this topic because I was curious whether the participants who went to English-speaking countries experienced different outcomes than the participants who went to the Non-English speaking countries. Liz, who student taught in New Zealand, described her experience:

They were very very curious about what I thought about politics, and it’s so funny because you were taught so often you hear people say never bring up religion, politics, or those kind of things or money. The first time you get there, that’s all they want to talk about, the religion, politics, and money….I just love getting the knowledge of different cultures rather than reading it in
a book, experiencing it and drawing in, and being a part of it for a good chunk of time.

Julie did her student teaching in Ireland. She told me that one of the reasons that she chose to go to Ireland was because her ancestors were from there. She said, “Adjusting is a little hard at first, even though I am Irish there was still culture shock.” Cindy mentioned:

Ireland is very religious. And their family structure is a lot different than ours. When I was there, I learned how to be in a community and how family comes together. For example in the U.S. drinking is a really bad thing. And you shouldn’t let your kids know anything about drinking. But, in Ireland, they celebrate all their family things in the pub.

Self-Efficacy

All 12 participants mentioned how the overseas experience helped them to gain self-confidence and become more independent. They also mentioned that this experience was valuable because it provided an opportunity for them to live and work in a culturally different environment.

Ability to lead, create and solve problems

For most participants, to live in another country meant that they needed to be more independent in their life and make decisions themselves. Annie stated that:
I definitely feel like how I was adapting and taking charge of the situation over and over again honed my leadership skills. Having to face unexpected challenges we don’t have in America really helps me. When you are out front and teaching in class in another country and you have to act on the spot.

When talking with Betty over the phone and asked about her teaching experience in Germany, she detailed the differences between teaching in Germany and the United States. The school that she taught in was very rural and did not have the resources that she was accustomed to in the United States. Therefore, Betty needed to be very creative and make good use of the resources on hand. For Tom, the greatest thing he took away from student teaching was to re-recognize the ability to have patience and the importance of classroom management. According to Tom, “The students there…they volunteer. In America, the kids I taught never volunteered at all. The problem here [in Brazil] was when I asked a question, they just shouted out the answer and never raised their hand.” Mary who also student taught in Brazil felt that the entire experience was a growing experience for her personally, as well as professionally. She recalled some of the more profound benefits of teaching overseas: “Growing more as a person and being able to embrace a culture other than my own. Dealing with a language barrier and having to force myself to learn their language and embrace them for who they are and their culture.” And Carol, who student
taught in Germany in 1983, she realized that, “I could be very independent and not be afraid to try new things.”

The student teaching abroad experience was not always positive; it also came with some perceived negative experiences, for example, frustration, loneliness, and anxiety. Some participants considered both the positive and negative experiences as beneficial. Through student teaching abroad in Brazil, Mary learned and realized, “how versatile I can be as a person and as a teacher. It kind of lit a spark for me because I want to do more traveling and maybe possibly look into other education opportunities abroad.”

Beliefs about Diversity

The second theme and the corresponding subcategories analysis answered my second research question. The second question was: How did student teaching abroad challenge the student teachers’ beliefs of diversity both during and after the experience? Under the main theme, several subcategories emerged after I combined and re-read the transcripts and notes again. These subcategories included how the participants changed their pre-assumptions about students and culture because of the overseas experience and how the participants shared what they learned while they were overseas with their colleagues and students when they returned.
Attitudes toward Students

During the interview with Jamie, she mentioned that having an open-mind was one of the most significant things that she had taken away from the experience. I repeatedly probed about this particular issue and asked her to provide more specific examples. She said that she was surprised that students were, “pretty similar…the students surprised me that we’re the exact the same that they come across the same problems they do here. Just to know that they have the same views and biases towards their country….It’s fascinating.”

Most participants found that their students overseas had a great amount of curiosity about others from around the world. “Their curiosity and there’s almost innocence and just really wanting to know…really just want somebody to sit down and tell them like what is this really like…what does that even mean…” Liz said. When Betty student taught in Germany, she described her experience as a little difficult; however, she still enjoyed it immensely. She said, “It was really interesting. And I really like it, the kids were really awesome, and their grasp of English was really interesting. I would say something in German, they could correct my German and I would correct their English.” Though some of the teachers enjoyed the challenge of teaching students for whom English was a second language, they did not typically have a chance to continue to work with English language learners once
they returned to the United States. Carol, who student taught in Germany in 1983, has been teaching in rural Ohio for 28 years and she had not had any non-English speaking students in her school at all.

Linda, who student taught in Australia in 2003, said the best thing that she learned from the experience was the ability to work with different students. She remembered that she, “had a student in one of my classes, I honestly thought he had a speech impediment. I couldn’t understand what he was saying…come to find out, his family was from New Zealand.” She went to say, “Every student and group of students take the lesson in a different way. You need to continue to try and tweak it to fit the student population you’re working with.”

When I first started forming my research questions and interview questions, I was very curious about whether or how this experience changed the participants’ beliefs about diversity. The other reason I was intrigued about this area was due to my personal journey from living in a society in which I was a majority to living in a town where I was a minority living among the majority. As an international student at Ashland University, I have personally experienced living, working and studying in a culture where I am living as “the other.” As a result, the experiences of the participants in this study resonated with my own. In terms of adaptation, my experience coincides with the participants quite closely. One major difference,
however, is that my other role in the United States was primarily as a student. The student teachers’ primary identity was as working professionals who were on the verge of careers.

As a result of my own identity as an international student residing in another country, I would like to know how this student teaching abroad experience challenged the participants’ beliefs about diversity after interacting with students who spoke different languages, held different nationalities or identified with other cultures.

**Attitudes toward Colleagues**

As mentioned in the literature review in Chapter Two, the student teachers who participated in student teaching abroad became more empathetic towards their students (Cushner, 2007a). Julie has been a teacher since 2006. She reported that she not only became a more empathetic teacher when she arrived in the classroom, but she also transferred it to the new teachers in her school. She said:

> The people in Ireland were so welcoming and nice and very eager to get to know me. I’ve taken that type of personality and welcomed new people. So, I’ve tried to take the way that they treated me and I try to treat the new teachers that way too…
The learned value of being open and accepting was a predominant theme during the process of coding the data. Linda explained how the experience of student teaching abroad shaped her beliefs about diversity: “You become more open not just to accepting them but celebrating them...you become more open as a teacher to invite those ideas into your classroom.”

Jamie thinks that the experience helped her to be more open to everyone. Jamie said, “I think my experience really helped me open-up, and I like to share with my students a lot and I try to make them more aware of the world that is so much bigger than the little River Valley School that I teach at.” In addition, Liz realized that even though people are different, she can still find the connection to draw people together. She said:

Even when people are so different, there is always something that can draw you together whether it’s similar like TV show you like, or the similar food that you like. There is always at least one thing that you can connect on that level with, and I think that something you can’t experience unless you go or meet somebody new…even though there is so much cultural diversity, there are so many things that are similar and that you can connect to. And you just have to go and you have to dig for it.
The thematic issues of empathy, acceptance and celebration were shared experiences for the most interviewees when asked about their student teaching abroad experience regarding the issue of diversity. Cindy shared her different perspective on this question. She felt that this experience made her look at her own country, the United States differently. I probed and asked her to provide me an example during the interview. She said, “Because when you’re living with people of a different background, of a different culture, it helps you see through their eyes how you are.” She went on to say, “When I was in Ireland for a while, I learned about the history of the place and their economical situation. That’s kind of helped me view how they appreciate certain things, their values. How I value things differently from them and why…”

**Empathy, Acceptance and Celebration**

When asked about how this experience helped to shape their beliefs about diversity, Julie found a way to directly apply the lessons learned from student teaching abroad to her career. Her experience went from teaching in Ireland to teaching on the south side of Chicago in poverty stricken schools shaped largely by how she was perceived as a white Caucasian woman in a district that was primarily black. She said:
I feel that this has shaped me to be more understanding and empathetic and less of “it’s my way or the highway” type of teaching. I typically count where the students are coming from because students are not the same as they were when a lot of our school books were taught and written. There isn’t this perfect system or a perfect student or this perfect house where mom and dad both love them…

She went on to say:

Being the outsider in Ireland and being accepted really helped me…I was the outsider in Chicago…They accepted the fact that I was trying to understand them and I welcomed them into my life so they welcomed me into theirs. I don’t know if empathetic is the right word, but that word keeps coming to me.

It was an education that I would not have gotten in Columbus, Ohio. It has helped me.

Mary felt that the experience in Brazil helped her with her new school because she is teaching now in South Carolina at a very diverse school. She said, “It made me really value and respect my students more and embrace them for who they are.” Tom is also now teaching in South Carolina and he thinks this experience enabled him to see “what types of students I would be dealing with in a different setting other than rural Ashland.”
When asked about this question, two interviewees who participated in student teaching abroad in 1983 seemed to have different interpretations about diversity. Carol emphasized more about how different teachers’ lives between the U.S. and Germany were. She said, “It was more an awareness of the diversity and different ways of life. Just the lives of the teachers are so different there.” Rachel said, “You know, that, 30 years ago, diversity all of that, was not taught like it is today.” She went on to say:

Maybe like 10 years ago, we were the English speaking school, we had the first Spanish speaking child…and he was placed in my class. I think it was hard because the principal knew that I had the experience of working with kids with all different languages and it would be O.K.

It is interesting to note that the two interviewees who student taught 29 years ago did not mention how they brought their experience into their own classrooms. However, this experience gave all 12 participants the feeling that they can open-up and embrace different students who come from different backgrounds, languages or have different ideas in their classrooms.

**Reported Outcomes of Student Teaching Abroad**

The third theme and the corresponding subcategories analysis answered my third research question. The third research question was: How do the former student
teachers draw on their international experiences in their teaching? In the main then, there are three subcategories that emerged from the data. However, one out of twelve interviewees has never had an opportunity to find a teaching job after coming back from student teaching abroad. When asked about how this experience prepared her for her career in education, the information and the reflection that she provided were limited besides saying she broadly experienced cultural diversity.

**Creativity and Discipline**

One of the main reasons the participants in this study chose to participate in student teaching abroad was because they wanted to experience diversity by being placed in a different school in another country so that they would be able to have first-hand experience and become more aware of the world around them. However, when asked about how they draw on this experience in their teaching, 11 interviewees shared very similar feelings. They felt that their prior preparation in terms of teaching, curriculum design and delivery, and teaching methods and classroom management was not sufficient for teaching overseas. This may have been due to the fact that the student-teachers were prepared to teach in U.S. classrooms, and when they began their overseas assignment they were not expected to deliver American curriculum. Carol explained her experience:
It is probably not the curriculum and methods and all that prepared me for my career in education. When I got back to the United States and went job searching and it ended up close to home. But, to look outside of my immediate area, not be afraid to try something in another part of the country…you know, where I was not familiar.

For Betty and Linda, both of them learned to be more creative in the classroom. For example, when Betty student taught in Germany, the lack of resources was a challenge, but she felt that the relative scarcity of resources made her become more flexible. She stated:

You know I didn’t have a lot, like I said, I didn’t have like a million resources if I were in Ashland…you have to be kind of creative when you have a little resources available. So I guess I think something I always try to work with in my classroom.

Linda’s experience was similar to Betty’s. She viewed student teaching abroad as spurring creativity by its nature:

The teachers who have the teaching abroad experience oftentimes bring more creativity to their classroom. When I went abroad I was learning about a whole new school structure…it’s a huge benefit to any school system for
someone to be able to rethink how they focus on things and how they approach different things.

**Overseas experience and discipline**

For Jamie and Liz, the experience was valuable because they came away being able to more adeptly handle classroom discipline. Jamie said:

I really felt like I was ready to take on anything over here when it came to discipline issues, so I almost came back with really knowing that the kids here are very, at least in the district around this area, they come in, they sit down, they take notes…so I felt more confident after my experience that I know I can pretty much handle pretty much everything they threw at me afterwards.

Liz described her experience in New Zealand and how she brought the impact in her classroom. She said:

I would rather hear a story from my teachers about visiting some places and looking at the pictures in the book and say, this is what the place was like, and I think there is such a different element, and such different atmosphere can be created in the classroom when the teacher has been abroad…and has more reality to [bring to] what they teach, like different stories… I feel…
have impacted my classroom more than the teachers who have never left that city or that state.

Linda felt she drew on her overseas experience in her teaching. Her first teaching job after she came back from Australia was a readjustment:

Just working in the classroom in Australia was so messy, the first teaching job that I got I walked into an extremely messy classroom. Although I spent a lot of hours in my classroom prepping for my classes, at the same time I was like…do the best you can, if it’s not all perfect by the first day, it will eventually get there.

When I challenged Linda to compare herself with the teachers who have never done student teaching abroad she said:

I think you’re completely capable of being a teacher without that experience.

I do think that it will enrich your life and eventually it will seep into your classroom and enrich your students…having been abroad you learn it from a different perspective.

Annie was the only interviewee who student taught in Asia. When asked about whether she drew on her experience in her teaching, she said:

I think that it’s really important that if you plan to teach in the United States, some of your teaching should be done in the United States. However, those
skills are enhanced when you go abroad. As far as the assessment goes, honestly, I had more assessment experiences abroad than I did in the United States. Taiwan is a very assessment driven culture and so I had to plan, deliver, and grade many more assessments in Taiwan than I did in my student teaching here.

**Overseas experience and teaching life**

Mary described what she experienced in Brazil and how she transferred this experience into her teaching life back in the United States, “If anything, it definitely, because it was such a hard challenge…it definitely taught me to just…at the end of the day, relax, take a step back and reflect on how the day went and make changes for the next day.” Mary said. Despite the challenges she faced, she said:

I actually have more confidence now in myself as a teacher. No matter what happens…than I used to…I left Brazil thinking, oh my gosh, I survived 7 weeks with these kids. I made an impact on their lives and they made an impact on mine. We had great lessons and great discussions. If I can turn them around, give me any classroom. I’m ready for it. It definitely gave me more confidence in myself and in my instruction.
Sharing the Traveling Experience

Most participants mentioned that one of their methods to bring their overseas experience into the classroom was to share their traveling stories with their students. Betty said:

I think I tried to make a little bit more culturally diverse reading materials; a lot of times aren’t available at school. But, I try to expose them a lot more. I told them about my travel, I try to bring it to my classroom as much as I can.

I probed and asked Betty to give me some specific examples of how she brought the influence into the classroom. She went on to say:

I try to change things up by incorporating African American, Asian, African, Middle Eastern and European literature. This way we are able to discuss different cultures and different perspectives. I also really enjoy, especially in AP Literature, having round circle discussions on ethics and philosophy. This helps us expand our understanding of the world outside of school as well as how we can relate to the characters and bigger issues discussed in these novels. I think constantly questioning and evaluating our beliefs is an important thing we do as humans. It is especially what students are doing as they hit high school. By showing them different cultures through literature as
well as questioning how we fit in the world through thorough discussion, I
hope to expand their understanding of the world.

Jamie had struggled with the discipline issue when she student taught in
Ireland, and now teaches high school math in Ohio. She said she likes to share her
overseas experience with the high school students besides teaching them math
because “these kids are going to leave high school and they are going to move into a
bigger world, and while it’s not about standardized tests. There are so many different
kinds of people out there.”

Reorientation

Cindy received her Bachelor’s degree in 2009. At the time of the interview
she was teaching English in Austria and she was pursuing her Master’s degree there
as well. After analyzing and re-analyzing the data, I realized that this experience led
her to rethink her purpose of education, what an education system should do and the
direction a teacher should take. She said:

When I was in Ireland I learned about how their teachers were educated and
about their standards of education. They also have books, standards and what
needs to be taught and what the kids should know at the end of a year.
They’re very similar, but there are a lot of things they do differently also.
That made me want to go more in a political direction. Maybe [study] education reform…

When asked whether this experience helped her to do well on helping her students score well on standardized tests in the United States, her reflection on this issue seemed uncertain:

I think once you get more international perspectives and things, I mean in a way, you could even say that it clouds you…it clouds the direction you should be teaching. Are you preparing kids for how they’ll be dealing with things in their lives in a rural or urban environment? Or should you be testing them because they’ll have to pass an Ohio or U.S. standardized test? And, every student has their own needs, what’s more important? So, I don’t know.

Two teachers who student taught in 1983 shared similar comments when asked about how they brought their influence into their classroom. For Rachel and Carol, this experience mostly tended to help them to gain an awareness of different cultures which resulted in a perception of personal growth. This may be due to the time at which they completed their student teaching and how the concept of diversity was taught at that time. Rachel said, “You know, that 30 years ago, diversity all of that was not taught like today. I felt that because of the experience I
was way ahead of other teachers.” For Carol, this experience “was more an awareness of culture and different ways of life.” She said.

Finally, when asked about how Ashland University prepared them for student teaching abroad, the answers that the participants gave were diverse. Rachel felt that Ashland University prepared her very well but without detailed description, Carol, on the other hand, felt that she did not get too much help and preparation from Ashland University because she was the first group of student teachers abroad in 1983 and Morehead State University was the main institution that prepared them for the student teaching abroad program.

Betty expressed her opinion on this question, saying, “I realized that Ashland really prepared me to be a professional educator, not just being I am a babysitter or just like my kids’ friend…it was nice to know that I was trained to be more professional in the classroom.” Cindy was the person who had a more negative feeling when asked how Ashland University prepared her for her student teaching abroad experience. She mentioned that it would have been more helpful if the University could have provided some language classes or language exchange opportunities before she started her student teaching abroad because there were many international students on campus. She also mentioned that she felt frustrated
that the Office of Study Abroad Programs did not provide a special seminar on the specific country or arrange cross-cultural meetings before she started her trip.

Most participants mentioned that the Office of Study Abroad Programs prepared them well before they started their experience. Multiple participants mentioned that the packing list provided was helpful. Jamie said, “I talked with the Director of Study Abroad a couple of times; we worked through what I would need to think about …what even the small things like the packing list, the small things like that.” From the academic level, she said, “When it came to teaching, I felt so confident in all my education that I have gotten here, that I wasn’t worried about the teaching aspect of it.” Liz considered that she received more help and preparation for the trip from individuals. As for the actual classes that she took from the University she felt:

The actual classes were geared to teachers going out and teaching in Ohio, in regular school systems that we are used to…the majority of help came from those people who make extra efforts to help with things like packing lists…so I think AU helped more in connecting people individually than necessarily helping through the classes.

Linda made her comments based on the same interview question. She said, “As far as the actual travel, I felt well-prepared. The Director did a good job as far as
how to pack, what to expect once I got there.” As for the how the University prepared her for her student teaching abroad, Linda said, “I was confused, though, about what that really meant. Did I have to follow their teaching outline? Did I have to submit some kind of portfolio to them when I got there?” The students in Education program in Ashland University felt they started gaining practical teaching experiences earlier in their collegiate career than their friends who attended other universities. Mary and Tom both felt that was very helpful for them to prepare for their future teaching career. Mary said:

Just by throwing me into the classroom my freshmen year and slowly transitioning us to more responsibility and into a teaching job that helped tremendously. By the time I got to my internship I was already prepared to teach. My mentor was pleased with that…I know how to do that. I wasn’t afraid to get up in front of the kids.

Tom said, “Ashland prepared me very well because I took the courses and the experience that I got as well…in the field, we got to observe what it would be like. We also got to each of the kids too once a week that semester.” Most participants felt that the Education program prepared them well to teach in a typical school system in Ohio. As for how the Office of Study Abroad prepared them, the common statement that the participants shared was the Office prepared them well
for detailed things like packing and how to deal with homesickness, and the staff at the Office maintained the close contact with them when they were abroad.

Overall, the analysis of the three main categories, personal growth and development, beliefs about diversity, and the participants’ reflection on their teaching, showed that the 12 participants seemed to evaluate the overseas student teaching experience similarly. In short, the data showed that they all perceived they were more aware of diversity, they became more flexible and open-minded, and they became more willing to adapt to new environments or situations. They also reported that an outcome of their overseas experience was that they were more willing to adjust their teaching so that the students could more easily learn from them. And, they tended to attempt to pass the things of value they learned overseas on to their students. This analytical process can be conceived of three discrete categories that are experienced in coherent, yet myriad ways. When taken together, the conceptual categories, including subcategories, produced a meaningful finding which relates to the original purpose of this research. There are certain effects of student teaching abroad that are perceived over time. The four conceptual themes and their connections among each theme can be found in figure 4.1 below.
Figure 4.1. Conceptual Themes and Their Connections

Effects over the Career

Inductive data analysis was utilized in this qualitative research. Based on the previous three conceptual themes and the subcategories that evolved from the data, it was clear that some of the reported effects of student teaching abroad persisted over time.
Personal Development

The first three main conceptual themes and their subcategories corresponded to the literature in Chapter II in this study. When taken together, the first three categories indicated that the student teaching abroad experience caused participants to report a high degree of personal development. Numerous times the participants mentioned that they felt this experience helped them become more confident in teaching. When asked about how the experience prepared them for their career in education, Jamie and Mary both mentioned that the experience helped them have more confidence as teachers. For example, Jamie mentioned that the experience in Ireland taught her to be more confident and prepared her to deal with students’ discipline issues that she doesn’t necessarily need to deal with when she teaches in the United States. However, Jamie also expressed that she would never teach in Ireland again.

In addition, the participants shared similar comments about becoming more adaptable. Liz, Linda, Julie and Tom expressed similar feelings of being adaptable and flexible. Liz mentioned that the experience helped her to learn how to adapt in a different environment and work with different people. She said, “I went back by myself [to the United States]...And then when I got my teaching job, I moved away, and I was by myself, and I didn’t know anybody, so, it’s kind of like…redoing my
student teaching.” Tom said, “It allowed me to be far away from home and try to get used to living out of my element. I think that that helped me because I know I can be able to adapt to any setting.”

It seems that the student teaching abroad experience helped the participants to develop an increased cultural awareness, intercultural communication skills, and self-confidence, however, the participants were unable to describe with specificity how the overseas experience affected their classroom practice once they came back to the United States. As for how these participants incorporated this experience into their teaching, it is not clear from the data exactly how this experience manifested itself in the participants’ later teaching assignments.

Because the purpose of this study is to find out whether the overseas experience persisted over a teacher’s career, the data from the two participants who student taught abroad in 1983 assume an important position within the sample. Carol has never had any non-English speaking students in her class since she came back from the student teaching abroad assignment and Rachel had her first Spanish-speaking student about 10 years ago. During the interview, both of them mentioned that the student teaching abroad experience helped them to understand different cultures and people in the world. Both Rachel and Carol were unable to
describe how the experience influenced their career or how they integrated the experience into their teaching over their career.

**Incorporating the Experience into Teaching and Administration Positions**

The data showed that Betty, Julie, Annie, Jamie, and Cindy were the participants in this study who were able to clearly articulate how the effects of student teaching abroad continuously and professionally persisted over their teaching career. As previously mentioned, Betty identified changes in her approach to teaching; for instance, she began to select literature for her class with the idea that she would expose her students to cultural diversity rather than only sharing her traveling stories. She explained:

> I think constantly questioning and evaluating our beliefs is an important thing we do as humans. It is especially what students are doing as they hit high school. By showing the students different cultures through literature as well as questioning how we fit in the world through discussion, I hope to expand their understanding of the world.

Julie also mentioned that she usually takes the students’ cultural backgrounds into account when she teaches:

> You can learn from the diversity of a different country or a different school even and take that into account when you’re teaching… I typically count
where the students are coming from because students are not the same as they were when a lot of our school books were taught and written.

Julie also shared that she has tried to be welcoming to new teachers because of the way that people in Ireland treated her. She made a statement that, “I learned a big life lesson other than teaching. I learned how to navigate a city on my own. We’re life long learners. We don’t need to shut ourselves off from the world.”

Annie developed more confidence with the assessment of student learning when she student taught in Taiwan. She was able to bring this experience back to her teaching. By sharing her overseas experience with high school students, Jamie tried to communicate to her students that there is a bigger world outside of the student’s town. For Cindy, the overseas experience caused her to rethink the purposes of education.

**Reflections from the Literature Review and Social Psychology**

The literature review in Chapter II found that the student teaching abroad experiences enhanced student teachers’ cultural awareness, caused them to report being more open-minded, independent, and confident, while changing their beliefs about diversity. It also led them to be more mature and flexible (Barnhart, 1989; Cushner 2004; Cushner, 2007b; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Hanvey, 1982; Merryfield,
Indeed, the literature showed that the experience changed student teachers’ world view and provided them an opportunity to understand the differences by first-hand experience. The experience also provided them an opportunity to examine the differences and similarities between American school system and the school systems in different countries. Even though the participants in this research reported many of the changes reported in the secondary literature, it is not clear whether the effects of the student teaching abroad experience persist over their teaching career professionally.

Among 12 participants, one participant could not find a teaching job after she came back from the student teaching abroad program. One participant lives in Austria studying for her Master’s degree. Three out of eleven participants do not currently live or teach in Ohio. Seven participants are living and teaching in Ohio after they completed their student teaching abroad program. Carol and Rachel, who participated in student teaching abroad 29 years ago, have been teaching in the same school in Ohio ever since.

All 12 participants completed their student teaching internship by teaching 6-weeks in the United States and 6-weeks in their host country. The student teaching
abroad program at Ashland University is designed as a short-term program. Given
the financial and personal considerations, short-term programs are beneficial.
However, from a social psychologist perspective, more intensive and long-term
programs could bring greater positive outcomes and results (Brislin & Horvath,
1997). The psychologists also suggested that an ongoing training and maintaining of
the skills and the knowledge that the student teachers learn from the experience
should be undertaken to ensure that the personal, value and cognitive changes
experienced abroad are maintained after they return.

After completing the student teaching abroad program, most participants
reported that they became more mature and aware of cultural differences. Even
though the participants reported an increase in awareness of difference, the
participants were unable to describe what they actually do in intercultural settings,
or how their interactions are actually shaped by their overseas experience. Whether
the participants’ reported openness to cultural difference was more of an
unimplemented slogan versus a regularly practiced belief was not shown clearly in
this study. Most participants expressed that they were more aware of different
cultures, different ways of life, and were themselves more open-minded; yet, seven
participants still could not provide details of how these changes caused them to act
or teach in ways which were different than they otherwise might have been without
the overseas experience. Ruben and Kealey (1979) described a similar phenomenon:

It is not uncommon for an individual to be exceptionally well-versed on the
theories of cross-cultural effectiveness, possess the best motives, and be
sincerely concerned about enacting his role accordingly, yet be unable to
demonstrate those understandings in his own behavior. (p. 15)

In this study, Betty, Julie, Annie, Jamie and Cindy were the five participants
who revealed the continuing influence of the overseas student teaching abroad
experience concretely as an integral part of their life.

Apart from these five participants, other participants described the outcomes
in less specific, more general terms: “to look outside of my immediate area, not be
afraid to try something…Confidence in trying something new.” said Carol. “Just
kind of going with the flow…and learning to adapt to a different cultures, way of
life, and the way of education…” said Liz. “I became very flexible in my classroom.”
said Linda. “I actually have more confidence now in myself as a teacher.” said Mary.
“I was able to be on my own for an extended period of time not get homesick or
stuff like that” said Tom. For the participants in this study, the influence that student
teaching abroad brought to the student teachers tended to resemble something more
like personal growth and development than a sustained change in professional habits or values.

**Summary**

The constant comparative method was the primary tool to analyze the data in this study. Twenty-one categories emerged after I re-read the participants’ transcripts and on-line blogs. Four conceptual themes and their subcategories were revealed after I first analyzed the data and combined similar categories. Open coding and axial coding were utilized when I started analyzing and breaking the data apart. This is a phenomenological qualitative study; therefore, epoche was emphasized through the entire study. I kept reminding myself to be aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions that I may have had during the process.

In this study, it was found that the student teaching abroad experience had a profound impact on participants’ personal growth and development. The experience helped them develop more confidence as teachers, more open-mindedness, adaptation, flexibility, and cultural awareness. All 12 participants felt that student teaching abroad was a positive experience even though their motivations to choose student teaching abroad were different. Some of them chose the experience because of their advisors’ recommendations. Most of them chose the experience because of their personal interests (e.g., they loved traveling and adventure and they wanted to
see different places and cultures). Five out of 12 participants were able to show that the effects of the student teaching abroad experience have persisted in their current teaching career. However, when comparing their experiences and outcomes with the literature, the data in this study does not clearly demonstrate that the effects of student teaching abroad are continuous or long-lasting.
CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter’s conclusion and recommendations are based on the findings in the previous chapter. First, a discussion with a summary of the findings is presented in this chapter followed by the recommendations. The recommendations are targeted towards both individuals and organizational units that interact with the student teachers: the study abroad programs, teacher educators and the student teachers at Ashland University and suggestions for future research. To complete this research, the transcripts and on-line blogs from the participants were analyzed and interpreted by using the constant comparative method in order to provide responses to the research questions. The participants included 11 female teachers and 1 male teacher. This chapter also draws together a summary of findings in this research.

Summary

This study was constructed based on four research questions:

1. What did the student teachers learn from the experience of teaching abroad?

2. How did student teaching abroad challenge the student teachers’ beliefs of diversity both during and after the experience?
3. How do the former student teachers draw on their international experiences in their teaching?

4. To what extent do these effects persist over the course of a teacher’s career?

These questions were answered in Chapter IV. The summary of the findings is included as follows.

Based on the findings of this research, the participants all expressed that the experience of teaching abroad was a meaningful and positive experience for them. The participants also demonstrated a positive attitude and developed a more sophisticated understanding of their own culture and cultural difference.

Common outcomes were described by the participants. Participants perceived themselves as becoming more independent, confident, flexible, adaptable, empathetic, open-minded, and aware of cultural differences. Some of them experienced frustration and loneliness during the very first few days when they were abroad. By asking for assistance, both from University personnel and from the people in the host country and the student teachers’ corresponding cultural adjustments, the students were able to turn the experience into a pleasant one at the end.
The first three main conceptual themes directly related to my main research question: To what extent do these effects persist over the course of a teacher’s career? The result of this study did not provide sufficient evidence to support a theory that this experience persisted over the student teachers’ teaching career after they came back from the student teaching abroad program. More importantly, the data were unable to provide substantial evidence that the effects of student teaching abroad experience persisted over a teacher’s career once they returned to the United States. All participants are aware of the exposure to cultural difference and the corresponding cultural knowledge that they gained from the experience; yet, most of them were unable to provide a specific example of how they actually convey and integrate this impact into their classroom and their teaching careers.

**Conclusion**

This study was a qualitative study that sought to understand and describe the experience of student teaching abroad and to discover how the outcomes of this experience persisted over the course of a teacher’s career. The participants were former students of Ashland University who elected to participate in an international student teaching program. The sample size was limited with 12 participants’ experience described. Yet, the number of the years that participants have been teaching was relatively diverse. The participants also shared similar backgrounds in
that most of them are from the same area in Ohio. Because of this, drawing conclusions about the generalizability of the results to other similar programs in other areas is difficult. The focus of this study was to describe and understand the experience of teaching abroad, outcomes and persistence of the experiences from a participant’s perspective. This study did not explicitly examine the system of teacher education in the United States.

The benefits of student teaching abroad that the participants showed in this study are mostly confined to personal growth and development rather than any discrete effect related to curriculum, teaching or the classroom in general. This personal growth should help the participants become better individuals regardless of whether their career is as a classroom teacher. Another benefit of the experience of student teaching abroad could be that the candidates were more marketable in their job-search after they graduated. The results showed that 4 out of 11 participants are currently teaching outside of Ohio, one participant lives outside of Ohio and does not work as a teacher. In addition, the results from the interviews of participants in the study do not provide strong evidence to support the idea that the student teachers would become more interested in searching for a job outside of their hometown even though they gained a valuable international work experience. The results do,
however, support the idea that the participants felt they could find a job more easily because of their overseas experience.

Discussion and Recommendations

The Value of Student Teaching Abroad Experience for Student Teachers

Through the student teaching abroad program the student teachers were able to reflect on different aspects of education and how the differences between educational systems produced different results. Among these aspects, the student teachers gained an understanding of different cultures, their professional responsibilities and abilities and classroom management skills, among others.

The participants’ sense of understanding their own responsibilities and abilities permeated the categories and connected them together in this study. The participants were placed in different socio-economic situations and worked with the students, staff, and teachers from different countries and educational backgrounds during their student teaching abroad. The participants observed different school systems and the different patterns of interaction between teachers and students in other countries. This experience resulted in one participant rethinking the very meaning of education for her. The participants all described a similar professional journey during the student teaching abroad experience. At the beginning they questioned their abilities. Towards the end of the experience, they had all gained
confidence in their abilities to teach and manage a classroom. The participants all returned to the United States with more confidence and cultural awareness. These are some of the benefits that the student teachers who have only a domestic, U.S. placement will be unable to experience in quite the same way. It is entirely possible that student teachers with only domestic placements have similar results, however, that question is beyond the purview of this study. The participants in this study indicated that this international experience caused them to step out their comfort zones and see things from different perspectives in ways that they would be unable to do if they had only had a domestic placement.

Whether the student teachers were able to improve their teaching skills by student teaching abroad is difficult to say because the student teachers were trained and prepared to teach curriculum in school systems within the United States. Although they were able to teach the curriculum that was expected to be delivered in the host country, they were not expected to deliver the American curriculum. Carol summarized the perspective of all of the teachers in this study when she commented that “the student teaching abroad program definitely helped them to become a better person, but probably not the curriculum and methods and all that.”

Out of the entire sample, five participants were able to articulate concrete examples of how their experience has impacted their later teaching career. This is a
key result of this research. Though the other participants were pressed for examples of how they drew on their overseas experience at later points in their career, they were unable to provide these examples.

It is quite possible that the experience impacted them and at a later point in time, they could not remember or articulate the ways. Fields (1989) has commented on how memories diminish with age, and participant accounts become less reliable over time. However, there were only 2 participants in the sample who had been teaching for more than 9 years. The majority of the interviewees were teaching for three years or less. Given the composition of the sample, it seems much more likely that the overseas teaching experience impacted on these teachers in their subsequent careers was limited.

The reasons that the overseas experience did not impact the careers of a majority of the participants are not a question that is within the boundaries of this research. There are, however, a few plausible hypotheses which may be explored in later work on this topic. It is possible that the length of the experience was not sufficient to engender long-term change for the participants (all of the participants were teaching overseas for 6 week periods). It is also plausible that since the participants had little pre-departure preparation (in terms of culture, differences in educational systems, language, etc.) any gains they were likely to experience would
only be made after getting over a period of initial culture-shock (Rhinesmith, 1975). Another potential reason the overseas experience was not impactful may have had something to do with the characteristics of the participants themselves (culture, beliefs, etc.), although, if this were the case, it was not apparent in the interview data. This research outcome is a major finding and deserves further inspection.

The literature on how student teaching abroad programs persist over the student teachers’ career is sparse, nevertheless, the results of this study indicated that the participants gained an awareness of cultural differences and diversity while student teaching abroad, but whether they actually integrated their experience into the classroom or not is unknown. Researchers recognized that overseas field experiences usually brings positive effects to student teachers; yet it is unknown whether and to what extent these short-term reported effects persist in their future teaching careers or the degree to which this type of adaptation in behavior still would have occurred regardless of having an overseas experience (Brislin & Horvath, 1997).

The student teaching abroad program included a six-week domestic internship and a six-week international internship. Wilson (1993b) suggested that when viewed over a long-term, student teaching abroad or study abroad could provide positive effects on teachers’ careers while increasing their interest in
international affairs. Prospective teachers who have no practical experience with diversity (such as the diversity that most overseas placements would entail) might consider joining a seminar or requesting a student teaching placement in a diverse setting within the United States.

**Recommendations for the Office of Study Abroad Programs**

One of the objectives of the study abroad program is to create a greater capacity for the student teachers to understand other cultures. However, the experience of student teaching abroad can bring both positive and negative attitudes towards the host culture only if certain conditions are met (Allport, 1958; Cushner, 2004; Kissock, 1997). The support from the United States plays a critical role when the student teachers are abroad. For example, if the student teachers do not gain full support or preparation from the Office of Study Abroad Programs, they tend to feel more frustrated and have negative emotions toward other cultures and countries. They also struggled more with loneliness, isolation, and culture-shock during their student teaching abroad. In addition, the Office of Study Abroad needs to maintain close contact with the placement in the host country. If the student teachers do not have positive interactions with the people in the host country, the student teachers tend to have more negative attitudes towards the host culture. The Director should
also work with the faculty closely and encourage the student teachers who would 
like to gain cross-cultural experience to attend related seminars.

Most participants in this study expressed positive attitudes about the Office 
of Study Abroad Programs at Ashland University; yet, the role of Study Abroad 
Programs could extend beyond helping student teachers prepare packing lists and 
strategies to deal with culture shock. Pre-experience seminars related to the actual 
destination prior to the student teachers travelling abroad would have the effect of 
engaging the student with the specific culture and history of the place they are 
preparing to teach. Inviting people who have already completed their student 
teaching abroad to share their experience with student teachers who are preparing to 
go abroad should reduce the student teachers’ anxiety and uncertainty about the 
experience. These measures should also increase the chances that the experience is a 
successful one.

**Recommendation for Teacher Educators**

Many of the classrooms in the United States today are becoming more 
diverse, making the development of a teacher’s appreciation for different cultures, 
ethnicities, religions, and languages an imperative. Most participants in this study 
felt that the University has prepared them well for their future teaching career. Yet, 
there seems to be a disconnect in terms of the way that students are prepared as
teachers (international education and cross cultural education are only briefly addressed in the curriculum), and their student teaching abroad experiences, where they are submerged in a culturally different and challenging environment. It is obvious that the preparation that Ashland University provides to the student teachers focuses on preparing them for the school systems and classrooms of Ohio. Although the University has emphasized the importance of internationalization and the intercultural competence, the specification of anticipated outcomes of internationalization within the education curriculum seems vague.

“Experiences alone do not make a person a multicultural or global educator” (Merryfield, 2000). The long-term effects that the student teaching abroad experience brings to future teachers will be limited if this experience does not require reflection or contain ongoing training and development of the dispositions they learned while abroad. The University plays an important role as a mediator. Research indicated that the student teachers were able to identify many critical incidents or unfounded prejudices during their field experiences, but once similar incidents happened in their own classrooms, they typically were unable to recognize and address similar situations (Bassey, 1996; Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell, & Middleton, 1999; Deering & Stanutz, 1995; Goodwin, 1997). This study may provide teacher education units a guide to examine how multicultural/diversity
education can be placed properly and more effectively within the current curriculum when overseas student teaching is a possibility. Will it bring a more significant impact to the student teachers and make the student teaching abroad program more successful if the student teachers have an early experience with diverse classrooms and immersion in multicultural education? Is the body of faculty constructed diverse enough in terms of their professional interests to bring in global perspectives both to the college of education and the students? Will it be more helpful for the College of Education if some training or assessment tool for the multicultural education can be used in order to guide the development of a related curriculum?

Some participants perceived that the student teaching abroad policy is not clear enough for them and results in confusion. For example, the participants mentioned that they were not observed enough by their mentor teacher. Others said their progress during their student teaching assignment was not tracked effectively. One participant felt that it would be helpful for the University to provide related language or culture classes before they started the program. Most participants felt that a placement longer than the six-week program could be more helpful for them in immersing into another culture and have a greater impact on their life and teaching. The student teaching abroad program has value and benefit for student teachers; yet, whether the influence and impact persist over the individual teacher’s
career in a profound way depends on teacher’s ability to assimilate what they learn overseas with their professional knowledge. It also depends on whether their newly acquired dispositions receive external stimulation and reinforcement. Besides the first-hand experience of cultural diversity, the integration of multicultural education into teacher education curriculum should be a priority because it allows for future teachers to begin wrestling with the concepts of culture, language and difference prior to beginning their overseas experience.

**Limitations and Future Research**

None of the 12 interviewees in this study were minorities and most of them came from similar middle class backgrounds and small town and suburban environments. Ashland is a very homogeneous area; the result that was presented in this study might be a good comparison for another project that is based in a more diverse location. In addition, future studies should include more individuals from minority backgrounds. Seven out of 12 participants were teaching for less than 5 years at the time of this study. Including a greater variety of participants in terms of length of teaching experience may bring different results for future research. As noted, there were 11 female and 1 male teacher who participated in this study. While this reflects the reality that females play a predominant role in the teaching profession, male experiences could be emphasized more in future investigations.
Because this is qualitative research, the question of generalizability is always an issue (Merriam, 2009). The findings in this phenomenological study are primarily based on the participants' experience and my interpretation. I am unable to assert that all student teachers in other areas would share the same experiences as the student teachers from my present sample. Although I believe that the present findings provide conclusions that are consistent with the data that have been collected from different sources, other research methods, for example, other qualitative or quantitative endeavors could help construct a wider range of research for the future study.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

1. What were some of the reasons you chose to do an overseas student teaching experience?

2. Can you please describe your teaching experience in another country?

3. What are the best things you have taken away from the experience? And what are the worst things you have taken away from the experience?

4. What have you learned about yourself from the experience of student teaching abroad?

5. What did you learn about others from the experience of student teaching abroad?

6. How do you think this experience helped to shape your beliefs? (Follow-up question: diversity)

7. How did the experience prepare you for your (future) career in education?

8. How did Ashland University prepare you for student teaching abroad?

9. What would you say if I told you that I spoke with several area school administrators and they believed that students who taught abroad were less likely to be able to help their students score well on standardized tests than students who had taught only in the United States?

10. Can you give me an example of something you have done as a teacher that shows the influence of your experience teaching abroad?
11. How have you kept in contact with people in (country)?

12. If you were to do your student teaching abroad experience again, what would you do differently?