

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL
IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband John, for his endless love, patience and support; and to our sweet baby Chase, I hope you are proud of your mama.

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List of Abbreviations

Central Intelligence Agency	CIA
Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation	CAEP
Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity	DMIS
English for Speakers of Other Languages	ESOL
Guatemala Human Rights Commission	GHRC
Institute of International Education	IIE
Intercultural Development Continuum	IDC
Intercultural Development Inventory	IDI
International Baccalaureate	IB
International Mindedness	IM
<i>Instituto Indigenista Nacional</i>	IIN
National Association of Multicultural Education	NAME
National Center for Educational Statistics	NCES
National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education	NCATE
Non-Governmental Organization	NGO
Transformative Learning Theory	TLT
United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization	UNESCO

Abstract

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

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The urgent call to internationalize teacher education in response to the impact globalization presents in our nation's classrooms, also calls for a fundamental shift in how the field of teacher education provides opportunities of professional learning for teachers. Traditional models of teacher education often fail to develop teachers with the types of international perspectives and skills that prepare them to teach in diverse school contexts. An extant body of research from the fields of study abroad, service-learning, and pre-service teacher education suggest the role of international immersion experiences as a potential viable pathway for developing cultural understanding, international mindedness, and globalized perspectives. What is missing from the literature is an understanding of how these types of immersion experiences relate to the professional learning of in-service teachers, particularly those who teach in culturally and linguistically diverse spaces. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to

investigate the perspectives of six U.S. teachers who participated in a weeklong immersion experience in Guatemala and how they made connections to their professional learning. Data were gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews and analyzed utilizing a constant comparative method. The findings suggest that participants viewed immersion as a vehicle for meaning making; reflected on surprises that emerged from the immersive experience; and developed globalized perspectives of teaching and learning. They also made connections to their teaching practice by developing empathy, challenging inequities in the classroom, and acknowledged gaps in professional learning opportunities. Implications for supporting the application of new knowledge to classroom practice are considered, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Chapter One

In the United States there are an estimated 4.5 million English Learners in the public school system (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). The fastest growing student population comes from non-English speaking countries and current trends in immigration suggest that there will be no majority ethnic group within the next 30 years (Colby & Ortman, 2014; Smith-Davis, 2004). These statistics demonstrate a population shift in U.S. classrooms while the majority of teachers and teacher educators remain monocultural and monolingual. Current statistics indicate that the majority of teachers are white females from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds (NCES, 2013). These cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic disconnects between teachers, teacher educators, and students pose significant issues for the future of education, considering most of the teachers today are not prepared to teach socially and culturally relevant curriculum for diverse groups of students, nor recognize the impact that globalization has on the lives of students and families (Merryfield, 2000).

The current call to internationalize teacher education and the incorporation of diversity-related standards into pre-service teacher preparation programs suggest that the traditional paradigm of teacher education is slowly shifting toward producing a more globally-informed teaching force that is equipped with the knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary to teach all students, and develop young people into globally-informed

citizens (CAEP, 2015; Levy & Fox, 2015; Merryfield, 2000; Shaklee & Baily, 2012).

International immersion experiences within pre-service education have been positively associated with students being exposed to new pedagogical approaches and educational philosophies, development of self-knowledge and confidence, professional competence, and greater understanding of global and domestic diversity (Cushner, 2007). However, many teachers currently in classrooms have missed this expanded approach to teacher education in their formative preparation and need opportunities for professional learning that facilitate the development of globalized perspectives of teaching and learning.

I assert that international immersion experiences are viable pathways for the professional development of teachers, however minimal research attention has been directed towards in-service teachers' participation in international immersion experiences, how they make meaning of their experiences, and then come to apply this expanded knowledge into their classroom practice. Therefore, this study is motivated by one overarching question: what happens when in-service teachers participate in an international immersion experience? In order to delve into this question, this study explores a selected group of teachers' perspectives of their participation in an international immersion experience and how it relates to their professional learning and application to classroom practice.

In this first chapter, I address my personal connections to the research setting and international immersion experiences, while providing a rationale for the study and situating my research within literature in the fields of teacher education and higher education. I also describe a pilot study conducted in 2014 that informed the development

of my dissertation topic. Then, I provide a statement of the problem, summarize my research goals and research questions, and discuss the significance of the study.

Personal Connections to International Immersion

I initially became interested in the intersections of cultural immersion and professional learning through my role as the coordinator for the university's Alternative Break program. The program is grounded in a framework that supports critical reflection and encourages students to address social issues through education and service-learning. Through this role I developed short-term, culturally immersive, service-learning experiences for undergraduate students. My work was heavily informed by literature in the field of higher education that supported and scaffolded experiential learning opportunities for students and the development of learning outcomes such as cultural understanding, empathy, and ideals of global citizenship. In 2013, I traveled to Guatemala for the first time with a group of Alternative Break students and observed how intercultural spaces of engagement served as a springboard for critical reflection and meaning making for the students. Furthermore, the culturally immersive context seemed to push students out of their comfort zone and create a space for them to reflect on what they were experiencing as they developed a more nuanced understanding of culture and discovered how their life experiences shape the lenses through which they view and interact with the world. Upon return, many students described their experiences abroad as life changing and felt their perspectives were now somehow broader, more inclusive, and more globally informed.

In 2014 I traveled to the Western Highlands of Guatemala with a group of volunteers with a non-governmental organization (NGO) to engage in professional development workshops with teachers who identified both linguistically and culturally as Mayan, and were teaching in the region's only bilingual primary school. My reasons for participating in this program were two fold - to strengthen my understanding of international education research; and to further develop my experiential understandings of cultural immersion in a location where an indigenous language was being not only taught in this bilingual school, but the language itself was part of revitalization efforts as it gained both stature in the broader community and acquired a print form. During my time there I collected data for a collaborative research project that explored Mayan teachers' perspectives of language revitalization. I was also interested in how the experience of cultural immersion shaped both myself and the other volunteers' understanding of teaching and learning. What emerged from this experience was a curiosity and fundamental questioning of how the volunteers, particularly those who were teachers in the U.S., responded to the experience and how this might relate to their professional learning as educators of diverse student populations.

During this time I was also developing my theoretical understandings of international education through my Ph.D. coursework. A recurring theme throughout the literature was the call to internationalize teacher education. This call is driven, in part, by our increasingly interconnected and globalized societies in which teachers must be globally competent in order to effectively teach all students and to equip these students with the skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century. There is an urgent need for local

and national education systems to mindfully prepare students to meet the challenges of our increasingly globalized society (Cushner, 2007; Merryfield, 2000; Tate, 2012); yet, despite the need for this expanded world knowledge, there is still a limited understanding of *how* teachers develop internationalized perspectives of teaching and learning in both themselves and students (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Perry & Southwell, 2011; Razzano, 1996). Furthermore, the conceptualization of internationalizing teacher education is evolving. I argue that the new nature of this call for internationalization should highlight the fact that teachers have often received their professional learning before the incorporation of these global goals. Now, more than ever, there is a particular need for in-service teachers to build on and expand their existing frames of reference to a more global landscape and effect change in their classroom practice.

In discussing the call to internationalize teacher education, Shaklee and Baily (2012) highlighted the consequences of utilizing a traditional model in teacher education, which has primarily focused on domestic views of multicultural education, stating: “the evidence about our growing U.S. student population shows that we are limiting teacher candidate preparation if we use a traditional model” and furthermore, in order “to strengthen and deepen teacher candidate knowledge, a greater emphasis on international perspectives on culture, traditions, religion, policies, and other dimensions of international student experiences should be a visible part of teacher education” (p. 9). A study by Duckworth, Levy, and Levy (2005) described the challenges of developing teachers’ understanding of multiple perspectives and cultural diversity. They stated that

the aim of future research in teacher education should be directed towards more globally-minded dimensions:

Although teacher beliefs about teaching can vary significantly from region to region, the most relevant question as it pertains to the current research can no longer be ‘what characteristics make up an excellent teacher [in any one region]?’ But rather, ‘what characteristics make up an excellent international teacher [prepared to teach any group of students in any region]?’ (p. 281)

Research conducted in the field of higher education and across areas of study abroad, service-learning, and more recently, pre-service teacher education, have explored the value of international immersion experiences for developing students’ cultural empathy and global perspectives. It has been argued that pre-service teacher education in a culturally immersive context is critical to the development of culturally responsive teachers (Levy & Fox, 2015; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Marx & Moss, 2011). Furthermore, internationalizing teacher education and providing opportunities for meaningful intercultural encounters allows teachers to more deeply explore and understand the myriad of factors influencing student learning (Shaklee & Baily, 2012). This topic has not been adequately addressed in the research literature, however, in the context of in-service teachers and professional learning.

My personal experiences with the university program, combined with the urgent call in the field of education to respond to the challenges and opportunities that globalization presents in classrooms, informed my decision to volunteer in the summer of 2014 and return to Guatemala with a group of NGO volunteers. These experiences

inherently shaped the questions I began to ask while participating in the professional development workshops. I first recognized that a majority of the volunteers were K-12 teachers in the U.S. This included the two NGO coordinators who collectively, represented a wide variety of skills, roles, and motivations for engaging with the NGO and the Guatemalan community. It led me to question why teachers would elect to participate in such an experience and in what ways, if any, did they connect this experience to their own understandings of teaching and learning? In what ways might this experience contribute to their growing sense of global understanding and international mindedness? How did teachers reflect on this experience and how did this influence, if at all, the choices they made in their classrooms?

In order to explore these questions further I conducted a pilot case study with one of the teachers I met during the 2014 trip. The aim of the study was to interview this participant and probe for insight into her thinking about the experience and any connections she made to the classroom. The following quote illustrates how participation in this immersion experience facilitated her expanded understanding of poverty, which, in turn, empowered her to better serve her students:

Traveling to a third world country and working with people there helps you to understand people and it helps you to problem solve and I think having those experiences of problem-solving and working with people who are not necessarily from your cultural background will help you to know how to work with your students. Because your students have all different background experiences that they're bringing to the table, educationally, and I think just having a greater

understanding of the variations is one way that, that kind of experience would help.

Throughout our discussions the participant shared how she connected these experiences to her expanded understandings of the cultural contexts in which each of her students lived and brought to the classroom. This represented a self-reflective shift, as described by Addleman, Brazo, Dixon, Cevallos, and Wortman (2014); from “teaching students *regardless* of students’ cultural differences to teaching that is *informed by and shaped by* students’ cultural differences [emphasis in original]” (pp. 112-113). This further led me to question the role of international immersion experiences in the continuum of professional learning for in-service teachers. Might this be a potential pathway for some teachers to develop a more globally informed understanding of teaching and learning, which is consistent with the current call for the internationalization of teacher education? As discussed in the next section, this question has recently been explored in pre-service teacher preparation. What is missing from the literature is a research-based understanding of how, and in what ways, this potential pathway can provide an opportunity for teachers to develop and act upon globalized perspectives to inform their teaching practice and expand the learning opportunities of their students.

Statement of the Problem

The call for an internationalization of teacher education is rooted in many sociopolitical and economic conditions that present an increased imperative for intercultural understanding, and for nations to engage in informed, culturally sensitive coexistence in our increasingly globalized world (Cushner, 2012; Tate, 2012; Zhao,

2010). Many educators have asserted that effective intercultural interactions are at the heart of global problem-solving and require not only the “ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with people whose attitudes, values, knowledge and skills may be significantly different from their own” (Cushner, 2007, p.27), but also hold an overall disposition that embraces an “openness to the other, an appreciation of the immense range and variety of human existence, an imaginative grasp of what both distinguishes and unites human beings, and the willingness to enter into a non-hegemonic dialogue” (Parekh, 2003, p. 16). In concert with this need for interculturally competent citizens, there is also an urgent need for local and national education systems to mindfully prepare students to meet these challenges, understand the reality of power relationships, and the necessity of settling differences peaceably (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Razzano, 1996; Zhao, 2010). Despite the need for this expanded world knowledge, there is still a limited understanding of how teachers develop globally informed skills and knowledge in both themselves and students, particularly when the sociocultural background of teachers is different from their students (Perry & Southwell, 2011).

When teachers represent the majority culture they can introduce a different, even competing, group of beliefs and norms to the classroom (Lee, 2010). This means that “students of color – especially Black and Latino students – are much more likely than White students to be taught by teachers who question their academic ability, are uncomfortable around them, or do not know how to teach them well” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 559). Not surprisingly, sociocultural disconnects between teachers and students have contributed to culturally-based misunderstandings in the classroom and often impair the

ability of teachers to serve diverse groups of children, which is represented, in part, by the well-documented achievement gaps between English learners and those of marginalized groups, and their white, middle-class peers (Duckworth et al., 2005; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Shockley & Banks, 2011). The successes and failures of closing the achievement gap highlight the importance of teachers and teacher educators who are committed and prepared to meet the unique needs of diverse students.

Research has shown how factors such as the social context of schooling, teacher and classroom sociodemographic characteristics, and teachers' prior experiences with diversity may influence a teacher's frame of reference and accompanying assumptions about diversity and cultural awareness, which can be manifested unconsciously in the classroom environment and instruction (Farkas, 2003; Levy & Fox, 2015; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Ready & Wright, 2011). White (2009) suggested that teacher education programs need to facilitate teachers' development of knowledge and skills in identifying, modifying, and extending their initial, critically unexamined frames of references. These programs should encourage teachers to critically examine issues of equity, access, and diversity in their classroom, which requires teachers not to simply state their value in diversity, but to go beyond their comfort zone in significant ways (Davis & Richards, 2007). Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005) suggested that in order for teacher education programs to be successful in improving the effectiveness of their teachers, they must facilitate a change in thinking towards different ideas about what they can accomplish and instill a willingness to generate different ideas of how to interpret

classroom situations and how to respond to them. In discussing epistemological considerations for how teacher education programs can successfully prepare teachers, Cushner (2007) asserted:

If we truly are serious about preparing teachers, and subsequently the pupils in their charge, to better understand the complex world in which they live and to develop the skills necessary to interact effectively with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, then understanding the manner in which people learn about culture becomes essential. (p. 35)

How do teachers develop cultural awareness and understanding? What types of experiences and contexts facilitate this development, and how is this related to internationalized perspectives of teaching and learning? The field of teacher education is still building our collective understanding about the types of professional learning activities, intercultural development, and personal transformations that occur throughout the iterative and lifelong process of learning for teachers (Coryell, Spencer, & Sehin, 2014; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Killick, 2012). Furthermore, research has focused primarily on teachers prior to entry into the workforce. There is a disparity in the literature on the role of international experiences and cultural immersion in the development of in-service teachers' understanding of culture and diversity and how this understanding is enacted in the classroom setting. On a broader scale, there is a lack of research on the continuing development of in-service teachers and their professional learning, particularly in the area of transformational change and the development of international mindedness in their teaching practice.

In order to better understand the continuing development of teachers, research might also need to focus on elements of transformative learning and non-formal professional development opportunities. In defining meaningful and transformative teacher professional development, Cranton and King (2003) stated, “it must involve educators as whole persons – their values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and their ways of seeing the world” (p. 33). Cushner (2012) furthers the definition by including the role of well-planned international or domestic intercultural encounters in facilitating the learning process. Yet despite the need for a greater understanding of how teachers learn about culture and develop global perspectives and apply this understanding to the classroom, we find ourselves in a time where “many teachers, however, have limited or no experience in crossing the many cultural boundaries around them” (McFadden, Merryfield, & Barron, 1997, p. 7). What is also missing is an understanding of the fundamental nature of the learning process and how the “everydayness and movement of our lives provides a rich context for developing a deeper understanding of the strong existential, emotional, and spiritual struggles involved in the process” (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 103). In order to do this, there is a greater need to understand the motivations behind teachers electing to participate in an international immersion experience, particularly as part of their continuing pathway as educational professionals. By developing a better understanding of teachers’ learning through their elected participation in an international immersion experience, the field of teacher education for both pre- and in-service teachers can better prepare future learning opportunities that address the current call to internationalize teacher education.

In summary, research has not adequately addressed the role that international immersion experiences might play in the continuing professional development of in-service teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the meaning that a selected group of in-service teachers make of their participation in such an experience. The aim of this study is to also understand how participation in this experience may be related to their professional learning as educators in the K-12 U.S. school system.

Research Goals

In Maxwell's (2013) interactive qualitative research design, he outlines five types of intellectual goals in which a qualitative design is useful for exploring. Two of these goals are particularly well suited for this study: (1) Understanding the meaning, for the participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in; and (2) Understanding the particular contexts within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions (p. 30). This study specifically addresses these by the following three goals: (a) to understand how teachers make meaning of their experiences and how this meaning making is shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur; (b) to help bridge a gap in teacher professional development research and contribute to our understanding of pathways to professional learning; and (c) connect our understanding of international immersion experiences, which has focused primarily on pre-service teacher education, to the field of in-service teacher professional development.

At the practical level, my primary research goal is to explore teachers' perspectives of what they gained from participation in this experience. By developing a

deeper understanding of how teachers recognize this experience as beneficial to their professional learning, the field of teacher education can utilize this knowledge to inform professional development opportunities for in-service teachers. Lastly, at a personal level, my research goal is centered on addressing my own interests in understanding the role of short-term, non-formal, international immersion experiences and professional learning. I have observed students and teachers, as well as reflected on my own experiences in these types of settings, and have seen how some individuals can be profoundly shaped by these experiences. I want to further understand how the unique context of the culturally immersive setting may shape teachers' meaning making and its impact on their teaching practice.

Research Questions

Two principal research questions guide this study: (1) What meaning do teachers, who participate in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience, make of their experience? (2) How did participating in the experience inform these teachers' understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice? The first question addresses emic perspectives of how teachers engage with and describe their elected participation in the experience. The second question addresses how new understandings about teaching and learning in an internationalized context may emerge as a result of participation.

Significance of Study

The call to internationalize teacher education and the role of international immersion experiences in this process has not been adequately addressed in the literature.

What has been addressed is the need for teachers who can prepare students for a changing, international world; however, in what ways might the field of teacher education respond to this need? Internationalized teacher education through learning opportunities such as traditional professional development experiences, certificate and master's degree programs, and teacher preparation programs have attempted to answer this call, but I argue that international immersion experiences are a potentially viable pathway to develop their global competence. This is especially true in the context of in-service teachers' professional learning. This study seeks to address these gaps by understanding the meaning a group of U.S. teachers make of their participation in a weeklong immersion experience in rural Guatemala. By connecting in-service teacher professional learning to international immersion experiences, it can be assumed that the unique context of the setting will shape the experience of the teachers, and inherently serve to inform their perspectives of teaching and learning. Will there be a change in their perspectives and their application of new knowledge in the K-12 setting? How might they articulate this evolving change?

Within the areas of study abroad, service-learning, and pre-service teacher education, the international immersive context has been associated with student learning outcomes such as development of global perspectives, cultural self-awareness, and empathy. It is unclear, however, whether this assumption has merit for in-service teachers in the U.S. K-12 school system. In this particular setting, the importance of this study is to explore the experiences of a selected group of teachers and provide an understanding of the ways in which participants connect their experience to professional

learning. This better understanding can then inform teacher educators about the effects this unique learning context may have on the lives of teacher participants.

Chapter Two

This chapter presents a review of literature that addresses the intersections of international experiences, cultural immersion, and professional learning for teachers. I do this through the lens of international education and theories of intercultural competence, transformative learning, and situated learning. Before I discuss the relevance of the conceptual framework to this study, it is important to situate this framework within the context of the research setting because I assume that the research setting inherently shapes the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Therefore, I first provide an overview of Guatemala, including historical and contextual factors that impact indigenous communities and educational policies that have shaped the school and community in which the participants' experience took place. Next, the impact of globalization on teaching provides a backdrop to the study by emphasizing the need for teacher professional learning experiences that support the learning of all students. The third section presents theoretical paradigms that lend understanding to how adults experience cultural difference and make meaning from those experiences. The final section discusses research findings related to intercultural experiences for teacher professional development.

Guatemala – A Demographic Portrait

Guatemala is a small country nestled between Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. The country is the most populous in Central America and home to approximately 14.5 million people, 40% of whom self-identify as indigenous (of Mayan descent) and 60% as Ladino (of mixed Amerindian-Spanish descent) (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). There are 23 recognized indigenous languages and Spanish is the official language of the government. Over half the country's population lives below the national poverty line and those who do are typically indigenous groups and rural populations, where 73% live in poverty and 28% in extreme poverty (CIA, 2014). Poverty rates are highest in the North, Northwest, and Southwest areas of the country where more than 90% of indigenous populations live below the poverty line (The World Bank, 2015). The country continues to struggle in the areas of health, development, and literacy, with almost half of all children under the age of five suffering from malnutrition. The Mayan groups in Guatemala have been oppressed and discriminated against for centuries and continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, malnutrition, and lack of access to education.

McEwan and Trowbridge (2007) described three characteristics of Guatemala's education system that contribute to and perpetuate achievement gaps between indigenous and nonindigenous students as the following: (1) the educational system serves a linguistically diverse and poor population where at least one-third of students speak a language other than Spanish and access to bilingual education is limited; (2) indigenous parents have less schooling and lower incomes; indicators for children being less likely to

attend formal schooling; and (3) indigenous children attend primary schools of lower quality with fewer instructional materials, lower-quality infrastructure, and less qualified teachers (pp. 62-63). The authors examined achievement gaps in the subjects of Spanish and Mathematics between indigenous and nonindigenous students in rural primary schools from data collected from Guatemala's 2001 PRONERE (*Programa Nacional de Evaluación del Rendimiento Escolar*) survey. They found that the estimated gaps between the two groups were among the largest of any country in the Western Hemisphere. At least half of the gap was explained by differences in the quality of schools and suggested that lack of bilingual education may contribute to unexplained gaps between indigenous and nonindigenous students within the same school. In examining barriers to quality education for indigenous youth, Psacharopoulos (1993) similarly found that in both Bolivia and Guatemala, two countries with a high proportion of indigenous populations, providing basic education and the provision of schooling in the child's first language would greatly improve the human capital of indigenous groups.

The continued lack of access to quality education for rural indigenous communities in Guatemala is a product of institutionalized policies that have favored the Ladino population and created gaps between Mayan groups for hundreds of years (McEwan & Trowbridge, 2007). The role of language and access to bilingual education is so critical to the education of indigenous students in Guatemala that it lends importance to further understanding the historical and current contexts of educational policies. Furthermore, the country went through a 36-year civil war in the second half of the twentieth century, which exacerbated issues of equity and education, particularly for rural

indigenous communities. This next section provides an overview of Mayan language policies and how civil war specifically impacted rural indigenous communities and the Northwest region in which the research setting is located.

Indigenous education and civil war. A variety of language policies that supported or outlawed Mayan language use and mother tongue education in classrooms have gone through cycles of being implemented, overturned, and abolished. Mother tongue education refers to the use of a child's first language as the medium of instruction and has been identified as an important component of quality education (UNESCO, 2003). The indigenous Mayan civilization flourished in this region of the world until the Spanish colonization of Guatemala in the early 1500s (CIA, 2014; Helmberger, 2006). Through the process of *castellanización*, Mayans were taught Spanish for the purposes of converting the population to Christianity and for turning them into productive workers (Helmberger; Richards & Richards, 1997), which resulted in centuries of exploitation, oppression, and racism (Arias, 2006). After Guatemala won its independence in 1821, the Ladino government set policies and actions in place to maintain *castellanización* by establishing a nation state unified by one culture and one language (Bitar, Pimentel, & Juarez, 2008; Helmberger). The Mayans, or the "Indians," were blamed for the difficulties the country faced in creating a unified culture and language. Therefore, the Spanish language was used as a tool to assimilate and oppress Mayans and policies were established that prohibited accommodation or allowance for Mayan languages in the classroom (Bitar et al.; Helmberger).

In the 1940's, the *Instituto Indigenista Nacional* (IIN) was created to further address the “Indian” problem and enforced assimilation projects that supported Spanish as the language of power and prestige (Bitar et al., 2008; Helmberger, 2006). Mother tongue education policies were instituted as a means for Mayans to replace their native languages by gaining fluency in Spanish. Furthermore, IIN created a Roman character, Mayan language alphabet that was not inclusive of Mayan dialects but instead favored Spanish sounds and spelling patterns (Helmberger; Richards & Richards, 1997). Mayan languages that could not be easily translated into Spanish, including *Balam*¹ were left unwritten (Helmberger; Richards & Richards). In the 1960's, programs like the Bilingual *Castellanización* Program and National Bilingual Education Project were designed to further facilitate the transition from mother tongue to Spanish (Helmberger). During this time, guerilla and military forces began a violent civil war and “a simultaneous reign of terror on the part of the Guatemalan military aimed its animosity at civilians, particularly Mayan civilians” (Helmberger, p. 72).

During the country's 36-year civil war, Guatemalans were faced with a series of dictatorships, insurgencies, coups and military rule and indigenous communities were specifically targeted (CIA, 2014; United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 1997). The geographical area in the Northwest Highlands of Guatemala was an area of extreme violence during this time. In the early 1980's, military dictator Rios Montt targeted the area with his scorched earth campaign that eliminated large groups of indigenous

¹ All locations and names are pseudonyms. Balam is a common Mayan word for jaguar. The symbol of the jaguar was frequently used as a symbol of strength, fierceness, and valor in Mayan and Mesoamerican culture (Saunders, 1994). Balam is the pseudonym for the indigenous language spoken in the research setting.

civilians along with guerilla fighters (Guatemala Human Rights Commission [GHRC], 2011). It has been estimated that 70-90% of the villages were destroyed, leaving 200,000 people dead, thousands missing, and countless more with immeasurable psychological trauma and interrupted schooling (Arias, 2006; USIP). The Truth Commission designated these events as genocide of the Mayan people, which led to the historical trial of the former military dictator as the first leader in world history to be tried of the atrocities committed under his reign (GHRC; USIP). Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011) conducted a study that examined how Guatemala's civil war affected human capital accumulation and found "a strong negative impact of the civil war on the education of rural Mayan males and females, which supports the conclusion that internal armed conflict reinforces poverty and social exclusion among the most vulnerable groups" (p. 60).

When the civil war ended with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 a commitment to human rights and preservation of a multicultural and multilingual Guatemala was established, in part, by educational policies that supported bilingual education for all Mayan populations (Helmberger, 2006; Herdoiza-Estevez & Lenk, 2010). This commitment theoretically gave equal weight to both indigenous and Spanish languages, however bilingual education continues to be exclusively directed at indigenous students with the goal of obtaining fluency in Spanish. This implementation calls into question the integrity of such policies. Herdoiza-Estevez and Lenk questioned this commitment by asking: "Is there a real effort from mainstream society to build bridges toward indigenous peoples, or is this a unilateral project, meant exclusively to

bring indigenous peoples towards the mainstream” (p. 206)?

Over the past 30 years there have been educational changes, although these have not been systematic but rather decentralized and local in scale (McEwan & Trowbridge, 2007). Rural communities continue to face limited access to electricity, running water, and quality schools with modern infrastructure, bilingual education, and instructional materials. This has created a need for and dependency on schools to be run by the community they serve along with NGOs in order to provide instruction that is appropriate for the community’s educational needs, including diversity in culture and in the language of instruction (Gershberg, Meade, & Andersson, 2009). Many indigenous communities have started to initiate bilingual educational efforts by using Mayan language as the medium of instruction in the classroom.

The Etamabal School

Balam is an indigenous language spoken in a remote geographic location in the Northwest Highlands of Guatemala and only existed in oral form until approximately ten years ago when groups of NGO workers, teachers, and local community members began devising a writing system for the language. During this time a local community and U.S.-based NGO established the *Etamabal* School² in the small farming village of *Juyub*³, as an alternative to the local public school that used Spanish as the medium of instruction. The Etamabal School uses an additive bilingual model of education, beginning mother tongue education in pre-school then gradually shifting to dual language instruction in

² Etamabal means *knowledge* or *wisdom* in some Mayan languages.

³ Juyub means *mountain* in some Mayan languages. The Northwest Highlands of Guatemala are located in the *Sierra de los Cuchumatanes*, the highest non-volcanic mountain range in Central America.

Balam and Spanish. The hope of the community and the NGO is that the school will eventually merge with the public school and provide bilingual education for all students in Juyub.

The Etamabal School has electricity, running water, Internet access, a library, and more recently, an *estimulación temprano* (early childhood education) program. There are four classrooms in the two-story cement brick building for kindergarten through sixth grade. The early childhood program takes place in a building next door to the school made of wood planks and a dirt floor. Most of the families in the community live in similar structures, small wooden homes with mud floors. The men are typically sustenance farmers and families collect water from shared wells. Often times before dawn, the children will work in the fields or collect water and bring corn to the community mill to ground the kernels and make tortillas for the day. The high elevation and steep terrain of the *Sierra de los Cuchumatanes* and particularly in Juyub make farming difficult. The most common medical problem for men in the community is cuts from falling on the machetes they use to farm. For women, the most common medical problems are related to respiratory issues that stem from cooking over an open fire inside their homes.

The annual tuition fee to attend the Etamabal School is 25 quetzals (approximately \$3.25 US dollars), which is subsidized by private donations to the NGO. Due to a variety of factors many children drop out of school before sixth grade. Those who do graduate from primary school have little access to secondary education. There are no secondary schools in the community; therefore families must be able to afford

boarding school in a neighboring town or receive a scholarship from the NGO. Each year, the NGO provides funding through donations for three sixth grade students to continue their education. As one can imagine, the responsibility of selecting only three students to receive an opportunity for advanced education is a daunting process for the sixth grade teacher and principal who coordinate the selection process.

The NGO's main role with the Etamabal School is to provide funding for the daily operations and to implement professional development workshops in the areas of literacy and mathematics. These workshops present an opportunity for U.S. volunteers and Etamabal teachers to develop relationships through participating in meaningful intercultural encounters. It is within the Juyub community and behind the walls of the Etamabal School that the focus of this study takes place.

Globalization and Teaching

As nations continue to become interconnected and increasingly diverse, the growing necessity for internationally minded people is critical. Intercultural interactions have become a part of everyday life and constitute the need for coordinated efforts amongst diverse groups of people to solve our world's problems (Cushner, 2007; Perry & Southwell, 2011). There is an urgent need for local and national education systems to mindfully prepare students to meet these challenges. Goodwin (2010) outlined six characteristics of globalization in the 21st century that directly impact the work of teachers:

1. Human mobility on an unprecedented scale
2. Transnational employment and recruitment across skill sets

3. Large-scale displacement of millions of people and forced migration
4. New economies generating greater disparities between the poor and the rich
5. Countries competing for resources
6. Technological advances have cemented interdependence between nations (pp. 20-21).

These characteristics present the need for teachers to be able to effectively interact with families of diverse backgrounds and teach all students with socially and culturally relevant curriculum; especially those who may enter the classroom with unique and challenging needs (Cushner, 2012; Goodwin). The implementation of diversity-related standards into teacher preparation programs have attempted to answer the call to prepare teachers who can respond to the needs of changing communities and the challenges that globalization presents in classrooms. Goodwin describes the urgent need to address issues of educational equity and meeting the needs of all students as the following:

We have always lived in a diverse world; the only difference now is that globalization has brought the world's diversity into high definition – diversity is no longer 'out there' but right here. This means that none of us can ignore any longer the too many children who do not receive what they deserve, including a quality and caring education to help them develop into informed, thinking, moral, and empowered citizens. (p. 26)

In the United States, standards that regulate teacher preparation programs, such as The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), explicitly

address issues of diversity and teacher preparedness for supporting the learning of all students. For example, the NCATE Standard 4 – Diversity, states: “This goal requires educators who can reflect multicultural and global perspectives that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students and families from diverse populations” (NCATE, 2014). In 2013, NCATE and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council consolidated to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The CAEP accreditation standards recognize that diversity is not as a standalone issue, but rather an integral theme that should cut across all standards. The CAEP (2015) standards also recognize the need for all teacher candidates to experience education in diverse situations:

Moreover, no single candidate preparing for an education position can reflect, from his or her own location and personal experience, all facets of diversity. Regardless of their residence, personal circumstances, and preparation experiences, candidates need opportunities to develop professional capabilities that will enable them to adjust and adapt instruction in appropriate ways for the diversity they are likely to encounter in their professional lives. (p. 20)

What is also explicitly addressed is the sociocultural mismatch between teachers and students, asserting that “America *is* diversity” but that “the education workforce is far less diverse, with fewer than 20 percent of teachers being teachers of color” (CAEP, p. 20).

To illustrate the sociocultural disconnect between teachers and students, consider as an example the United States, where the increasing diversity of the population is not

reflected in the public school system. The percentage of ethnic minority students comprising the K-12 public school classrooms increased from 22.2% to 49% between 1972 and 2012 (NCES, 2015b) and the percentage of children identified as English language learners and who participated in programs of language assistance was 9.2% in school year 2012-2013 (NCES, 2015a). In contrast, the demographics of teachers continue to be less diverse, reflecting a majority of monolingual, middle-class white females (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Planty et al., 2009). The most recent data from the NCES indicated that in 2011-2012, 82% of full-time teachers were white and 76% were female (Snyder, 2014). Furthermore, when referring to diversity, this term does not just encompass racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic status characteristics, but also the beliefs, values, norms, learning styles, special needs, and cultural experiences that children and teachers bring to the classroom.

The impacts of globalization on teaching and the integration of concepts such as diversity, multicultural and global perspectives, and action words such as reflect, adjust, and adapt, into teacher preparation standards present a need for a cohesive conceptual framework to conceptualize the attributes of teachers who have the knowledge and skills to effectively teach in diverse classrooms. However, the challenges that sociocultural disconnects between teachers and students pose to the classroom also present a need for teachers to develop a more globally informed understanding of culture. Mahon (2006) described the urgent need for teachers to develop cultural awareness and understanding, stating: "It is time for education professionals to remove the invisibility cloak from

culture and to move beyond the fallacy that all students must be treated equally in order to be treated equitably. Then perhaps, truly, no child will be left behind” (p. 403).

Theoretical Paradigms

This section presents a theoretical framework that draws from the fields of multicultural education, international education, and intercultural competence, and two theories of adult learning, transformative learning and situated learning. This framework lends understanding to how adults experience cultural difference within a social context, such as teachers who participate in an international immersion experience, and develop new or transformed understandings, such as those related to globalized perspectives of teaching and learning, and enact these understandings in the classroom.

Multicultural education. The most prevalent field of research in the U.S. that connects culture to education is arguably the field of multicultural education (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). According to the National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME):

Multicultural education demands a school staff that is culturally competent, and to the greatest extent possible racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Staff must be multiculturally literate and capable of including and embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy. (NAME, 2015)

Davis and Richards (2007) suggested that multicultural education can be a transformative journey for teachers and presents opportunities to commit to social transformation.

Through the process of critically examining the nature of instruction, school climate, and

personal cultural values and beliefs, unequal educational opportunities can be exposed and teachers can plan and implement equal learning opportunities for all students (Akiba, 2011). Multicultural education also aims to develop cultural awareness and competence and promotes culturally responsive teaching, defined as utilizing “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

International education. International education is a parallel line of research to multicultural education and it can be argued that international education moves outside of the national boundaries of the United States and into a broader global context. International education, “focuses on the ways in which people are interconnected across national boundaries and stresses the reality that interdependence creates tensions as well as opportunities” (Razzano, 1996, p. 269). While multicultural education research focuses largely on in-country diversity and transformation of teachers, international education focuses on transformative teaching but also incorporates concepts of world peace, international mindedness, and intercultural understanding and sensitivity. In order to frame my understanding of the research questions and the teachers’ perspectives of their immersion experiences, I look to the field of international education and how globalization is impacting teaching in the 21st century. I situate this discussion within a historical context in order to glean an understanding of events and policies that have shaped the current call to internationalize teacher education.

Historical context. The concept of international education can be traced back to the 17th century when Czech philosopher John Comenius, deemed “the apostle of international collaboration in education itself” (Piaget, 1993, p. 3), advocated for a pansophic philosophy of education, critical thinking, child-centered teaching, and student exchanges across frontiers (Hill, 2012). Comenius’s view was not generally accepted, however, and by the end of the 17th century European nationalism and races to discover the “New World” were commonplace (Hill). The 19th century gave birth to national systems of education with a primary aim of promoting patriotic allegiance. Globalized ideas of education were generally treated with suspicion; however, authors such as Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, and John Dewey openly shared their ideas on global citizenship, international education, and experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Hill).

It was during the first half of the 20th century, after two world wars and the establishment of the United Nations and associated agencies, along with technological advances such as commercial air flights, television, and long-distance telephone calls, that international schools were born. In reaction to the horrors of war, “international education emerged out of idealism and out of the wish, through education, to contribute to the making of a better world” (Tate, 2012, p. 210). International schools that opened in the 1920’s, such as the Ecole Internationale de Genève and the Yokohama International School in Japan, were initially developed for the children of elite civil servants and diplomats (Hill, 2012). In 1951, the International Schools Association was established to provide support for the rising number of international schools around the globe. During this time, Jerome Bruner (1977) wrote *The Process of Education*; his

seminal work that promoted the idea of children as creative problem-solvers. Bruner is considered one of the founding fathers of constructivism as a pedagogical concept, and this concept is considered a foundation for the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum (Hill). At its conception in 1968, IB focused on “intercultural understanding, awareness of global issues, critical thinking skills, education of the whole person, and the provision of a university entrance qualification with world-wide currency” (Hill, p. 251). In a similar vein, UNESCO (1974) also published a set of guiding principles for international education, which included the following:

- (a) an international dimension and a global perspective in education at all levels and in all its forms;
- (b) understanding and respect for all peoples, their cultures, civilizations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic cultures and cultures of other nations;
- (c) awareness of the increasing global interdependence between peoples and nations;
- (d) abilities to communicate with others;
- (e) awareness not only of the rights but also of the duties incumbent upon individuals, social groups and nations towards each other;
- (f) understanding of the necessity for international solidarity and co-operation;
- (g) readiness on the part of the individual to participate in solving the problems of his community, his country and the world at large. (p. 2)

It has been argued that both Bruner’s work and UNESCO’s guiding principles influenced

educational policies in the U.S. and throughout the world (Hill; UNESCO).

In summary, the concept of international education and international schools has evolved throughout the centuries and particularly throughout the past century.

International schools were originally developed to promote world peace but were accessible only to children of elite diplomats, living in countries where they did not have citizenship and creating a pathway for these students to enter top universities in the Western world (Heyward, 2002; Hill, 2012). Today, these elite schools comprise a much smaller portion of schools around the world that offer an internationalized curriculum. For example, the IB program is now offered in over 4,000 schools in more than 130 countries and in 2012, 90% of IB schools in the United States were public institutions, the highest concentration of any country (Hill; IBO, 2015). Moreover, an internationalized education is no longer limited to international schools or schools that offer IB programs. In our increasingly interconnected world, an internationalized education is becoming relevant to educational institutions and communities across the world.

International mindedness. Haywood (2007) encouraged schools to think about how they recognize and support international learning in the classroom and suggested that international mindedness (IM) be incorporated as a key learning objective so that schools could apply IM to their curriculum in a wide variety of contexts. He identified five core components of international learning experiences:

- Curiosity and interest in the world around us, based on knowledge of the earth and on its human and physical geography;

- Open attitudes towards other ways of life and a predisposition to tolerance as regards other cultures and their belief systems;
- Knowledge and understanding of the scientific basis that identifies the earth's environment as a common entity of value to everyone;
- Recognition of the interconnectedness of human affairs (in place and time) as part of the holistic experience of life; and
- Human values that combine respect for other ways of life with care and concern for the welfare and well-being of people in general. (p. 86-87)

While Hayward developed an external framework that helped to conceptualize IM in classroom curriculum, Duckworth et al. (2005) conducted a study to investigate emic perspectives of pre- and in-service teachers' beliefs about international mindedness. Ninety-three students enrolled in a graduate program designed to prepare teachers for international settings were asked about their beliefs, opinions, and issues related to international mindedness. The majority of the participants shared similar beliefs about the importance of awareness of cultural influences on perceptions and behavior, acceptance of differences, openness of outlook, appreciation of multiple perspectives, and realization of interdependence between cultures and societies. Although participants were being prepared specifically for international teaching and their demographic profiles were not representative of the U.S. teaching force (many had extensive international experience and spoke more than one language), the study has important implications for understanding how a diverse group of teachers conceptualize IM as related to teaching.

The development of teachers who are internationally minded is a vital link to the

development of internationally minded young people. However, understanding teachers' perspectives of IM is not enough, we also need to know how those understandings are developed and acted upon in the classroom. Therefore, I look more broadly to the literature and research on intercultural competence and theories of adult learning that lend understanding to how teachers experience cultural difference and make meaning from those experiences.

Intercultural competence. I argue that the field of intercultural competence is directly applicable to the field of education; especially in light of the challenges and opportunities that globalization in the 21st century poses in classrooms. The benefit of applying intercultural competence theories and models to teaching and teacher education is that they can provide conceptual insight into how teachers develop international mindedness and cultural understanding of self and others in order to gather information and make decisions in the classroom that supports the learning of all students (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Wilson, 1982). When applied to the classroom, intercultural competence is the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways in relationship to various components of teaching and learning (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008). When applied to teaching, intercultural competence entails the skills needed to be able to effectively teach all students, while also facilitating young people in developing the skills and sensitivities necessary to interact and collaborate with diverse people (Cushner, 2012).

Education designed to develop intercultural competence, often referred to as intercultural education, has no readily definable discipline-based core, which has opened

the door for a myriad of concepts and terminologies that relate to the intersections of ‘intercultural’ and ‘education’ (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). These terms include but are not limited to: global citizenship, global consciousness education, education with a global or international dimension, global education, globally competence, world studies, international education, intercultural education, education for international understanding, and international mindedness (Cushner & Mahon; Hill, 2012; Kolar, 2012; Marshall, 2007). Despite a lack of consensus on the terms international education or intercultural education, a variety of initiatives and professional development activities have been developed in order to internationalize teacher education, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Within the vast array of theories and models devoted to intercultural competence (see Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009 for an overview), many have overlapping similarities that tend to focus on the individual as the unit of analysis and include the following components: motivation (affective, emotion), knowledge (cognitive), skills (behavioral, actional), context (situation, environment, culture, relationship, function), and outcomes (Spitzberg & Changnon, p. 7). Deardorff’s (2006) pyramid and process models of intercultural competence are particularly useful in framing discussions around the roles of *intercultural understanding* and *intercultural sensitivity*. Intercultural understanding comprises both the cognitive and affective domains of learning and includes characteristics such as cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of culture, sociolinguistic awareness, and culture-specific information, as well as positive attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery (Deardorff; Hill, 2012).

Intercultural sensitivity comprises the affective and behavioral domains of learning and is defined as “ the ability to discriminate and experience cultural differences” (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). In this next section, I highlight the importance of cultivating awareness of one’s own worldview, building intercultural relationships, and adapting oneself based on this awareness and understanding in order to develop globalized perspectives of teaching and learning.

Intercultural understanding and worldviews. Developing a critical awareness of one’s worldview is an essential component to developing intercultural understanding. A worldview, according to Walker (2004), “is something that is embedded in the person, it provides the window through which people view the world in which they are living and with which they interact” (p. 433). The need for teachers to develop awareness and understanding of their worldview has never been so critical. Developing cultural self-awareness and awareness of one’s world-view are necessary in order to understand how these shape educational practices and assumptions about teaching, learning, knowledge, behavior, schools, students, and family. Critical reflective inquiry is an important vehicle for developing awareness of one’s worldview and has the ability to transform preconceived perspectives and shape new meanings. Wink (2005) describes the process of critical reflection as one that involves “learning, relearning, and unlearning” the ways past experiences have shaped frames of reference. Furthermore, cultivating self-awareness and understanding of others is a lifelong process through which self-reflection creates self-awareness, and this self-awareness is an initial step to developing intercultural competence.

Pusch (2009) indicated that becoming interculturally competent requires awareness of how culture influences your worldview and shapes behaviors and values. When interacting with someone who is culturally different from oneself, each experience provides a unique opportunity for an individual to reflect on his/her cultural position and how this influences assumptions, emotions, actions, and thoughts. Essentially, each intercultural experience has the potential to add another location to what Bennett (2009) described as an intercultural positioning system, which is first used to “locate ourselves, to develop our own cultural self-awareness through understanding our cultural patterns” (p. 127). Once we develop the skills to locate ourselves and develop cultural self-awareness, “only then can we begin exploring the gap between our values, beliefs, and behaviors and those of others” (p. 127). One of the aims of this study is to better understand how teachers experience cultural difference in an immersive setting and explore how they reflect on this experience and develop new understandings about themselves and others. Will teachers develop cultural self-awareness and a more nuanced understanding of their worldviews as a result of this experience? This question, along with the role of developing intercultural relationships with the Etamabal teachers, will be explored.

Intercultural sensitivity. In addition to the need for teachers to develop self-understanding and self-awareness, teacher education programs should also facilitate the development of intercultural sensitivity (Duckworth et al., 2005). Hammer et al. (2003) argue that intercultural sensitivity is a necessary precursor for demonstrating intercultural competence. The capacity to develop authentic, intercultural relationships is an

important component to developing the ability to experience cultural differences, and the ability to adapt behavior accordingly represents a greater potential for exercising intercultural competence. Deardorff (2009) discusses the role of intercultural encounters in the preface to *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*:

Building authentic relationships, however, is key in this cultural learning process – through observing, listening, and asking those who are from different backgrounds to teach, to share, to enter into dialogue together about relevant needs and issues. Respect and trust become essential building blocks in developing these authentic relationships from which to learn from each other. (p. xiii)

The question or issue of adaptation is naturally raised within the context of an intercultural encounter. The push and pull dynamic of adapting; negotiating your identity for the sake of the intercultural encounter, could be viewed as having a negative connotation to it, particularly when thinking about power dynamics in encounters among and between dominate and subordinate identities and when considering the differential benefits for all parties involved (Chi & Suthers, 2015; Collier, 2015; Martin, 2015). Bennett (2009) addressed this issue from a perspective he refers to as “interculturalist”; someone who views adapting in intercultural encounters as an additive process. An additive perspective of adapting to different cultural contexts shifts away from the “us” vs. “them” mentality and instead demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett). Particular to this study, the perspectives of a group of U.S. teachers who participate in an international immersion experience, including their

experiences in developing relationships with the Etamabal teachers, and how these relationships shaped their meaning making, will be explored.

Intercultural sensitivity development. The fields of multicultural and international education have stressed the importance of culturally competent teachers who are supportive of multiple perspectives, have an ability to construe differences among students, and utilize this skill to enhance learning by adapting curriculum to be socially and culturally relevant (Gay, 2000; Mahon, 2006; NAME, 2015). The ability to make distinctions of cultural difference and the development of this ability has been explained by one of the best-known paradigms for measuring intercultural sensitivity; Bennett's (1986, 1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and the more recent adapted framework, the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) (Hammer, 2012). The IDC theoretical framework for development of intercultural sensitivity identifies five stages, or mindsets, along a continuum: stages of denial, polarization, and minimization constitute monocultural mindsets; and stages of acceptance and adaptation constitute intercultural mindsets.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was developed to measure an individual's construction of cultural difference along this continuum. A number of studies have used the IDI to assess intercultural sensitivity and cultural mindsets in the field of education, although many have assessed undergraduate study abroad and high school students in international schools (e.g. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubard, 2006; Straffon, 2003; Vande Berg, Balkcum, Scheid, & Whalen, 2004). Mahon (2006) investigated teachers' understandings of cultural difference by administering the IDI to

155 full-time teachers in the Midwest. The results indicated that less than 2.5% of participants had IDI scores above the monocultural mindset stage of minimization. Mahon provided a plausible explanation for why the majority of participants minimized cultural difference, stating: "It is not surprising to find that many teachers do not attend to the difference in their students, because it is not something to which the teaching culture has socialized them to any great degree" (p. 401). An interesting finding of this study was that overseas experience was significantly related to IDI scores that agreed with ethnorelative ideas of acceptance and adaptation. The details of what constituted overseas travel for each participant was not provided, however this finding suggests that international travel is a potential pathway for teachers in developing intercultural sensitivity.

When describing the DMIS, Bennett and Bennett (2004) explained: "The underlying assumption of the model is that as one's experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relations increases" (p. 153). Accordingly, one of the major critiques of the DMIS, IDC, and IDI is that the models assume a stepwise progression toward developing intercultural sensitivity and do not account for the multiple phases of intercultural competence that might be at play at any given time in an individual's life experiences (Perry & Southwell, 2011). To address these concerns, Heyward (2002) built upon earlier models of intercultural learning and developed a multidimensional model for the development of intercultural literacy. He proposed the term intercultural literacy, as opposed to international education, based on the belief that this highlighted culture over nationality as the significant identity

construct. The model places cross-cultural experiences as central to the learning process of becoming interculturally literate and in facilitating an individuals' understanding of culture. It is important to understand these models of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural literacy because they have come to influence how researchers and teacher educators understand and develop professional learning opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers, and particularly for those that focus on components of intercultural competence and how these can be applied to the classroom.

In the next section, I outline two additional adult learning theories, transformative learning and situated learning, which are particularly useful in understanding how individuals experience cultural difference and make meaning through this process. These theories, when applied to international education and intercultural competence, provide a framework for investigating the meaning teachers make of their participation in an international immersion experience and what, if any, connections they make to their classrooms. For more than three decades, transformative learning theory (TLT) has evolved in relationship to adult learning. This theory is fundamentally based on the belief that adults strive to better understand the worlds in which they live by constructing new and revised interpretations of experiences (Taylor, 2008). Additionally, Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory describes how participation in social practices constitutes the process of learning. Through the social practice of participating in an international immersion experience, I am interested in participants' perspectives of their time in Guatemala and how new or expanded understandings about teaching and learning emerge from this experience.

Transformative learning theory. Jack Mezirow (1978) first introduced a theory of adult learning that explained the process of how adults changed the way they interpreted their worlds. His theory built upon theories of Kuhn's (1962) paradigm, Freire's (1970) conscientization, and Habermas's (1971) domains of learning (for a review of Mezirow's TLT, see Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow (1995) defined learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 49). Our meaning perspectives, or frames of reference, are structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences, shape perceptions, influence our judgment, and are developed through past experiences (Taylor, 2008).

When distortions in perspectives present themselves and constrain the way adults perceive, interpret, and feel about the world, a perspective transformation can occur through the process of critical reflection on preconceived assumptions (Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor, 2008). These distortions can present themselves as disorienting dilemmas, a series of events or a situation that disrupts the habitual frame of reference. Mezirow (1997) described disorienting dilemmas as experiences that are stressful and cause adults to question the very core of their existence. Through experiencing and reflecting on disorienting dilemmas, a perspective transformation can occur, which Mezirow (1981) described as the following:

Is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more

inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings [emphasis in original]. It is the learning process by which adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reason for them and take action to overcome them. (pp. 6-7)

The theory of perspective transformation, as argued by Taylor (1993), is a possible explanation for the perspective changes that adults experience throughout the process of developing intercultural competence. Furthermore, the process of experiencing a disorienting dilemma and developing perspective transformations is what planned, international cultural experiences can do; according to Kambutu and Nganga (2008):

They immerse participants in disorienting cultural situations that do not align with existing cultural schemes. Transformative learning occurs during reflection as the learner makes ‘sense’ of unfamiliar cultural experiences. While making sense, an individual is able to implement new beliefs, attitudes, and emotions about the world. Transformative learning is, therefore, an ideal approach to promote cultural awareness, understanding and appreciation. (pp. 941-942)

This study aims to understand teachers’ perspectives of their immersion in a new culture and new educational setting. Learning more about how participants reflect on and make meaning from their culturally immersive experiences could assist in better understanding how planned international immersive experiences relate to the professional learning of teachers.

Evolution of transformative learning theory. Mezirow's psychocritical perspective of transformative learning (e.g. 1978, 1981, 1995, 1997; Mezirow & Associates, 2000) has spawned a number of alternative conceptions about transformative learning. Taylor (2008) outlined alternative perspectives in the literature that focus on different goals of transformation (personal transformation/individual change or emancipatory transformation/social change) and the different roles of culture in transformative learning (universal views of learning or recognition of social and cultural differences). Transformative learning theories that focus on personal transformation include psychocritical (e.g. Mezirow's theory), psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental and neurobiological views.

A psychoanalytic perspective (e.g. Boyd & Meyers, 1988; Cranton, 2000; Dirkx, 2001; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003) views transformative learning as a process of individuation. Kovan and Dirkx described individuation as the following:

It refers to the process by which a person becomes "whole," through recognition and integration of conscious and unconscious elements of oneself. Jung referred to this shift of consciousness as "being called awake," of learning who one is apart from yet intimately interconnected with the collective in which one's life is embedded. (p. 103)

Psychodevelopmental perspectives view transformative learning across the lifespan and consider personal contextual influences and the role of relationships in epistemological changes. Neurobiological perspectives believe that the brain actually changes during the learning process and suggest that transformative learning: (1) requires a discomfort prior

to discovery; (2) is rooted in students' experiences, needs, and interests; (3) is strengthened by emotive, sensory, and kinesthetic experiences; (4) appreciates differences in learning between males and females; and (5) demands that educators acquire an understanding of a unique discourse and knowledge base of neurobiological systems (Taylor, 2008, p. 8).

Alternative perspectives that center on social change and emancipatory transformation include socio-emancipatory and cultural-spiritual views. Social-emancipatory perspectives address the role of social change in transformation and are rooted in Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientization*. Cultural-spiritual perspectives aim to foster transformation through narratives and the action of storytelling. Each of the alternative perspectives to Mezirow's transformative learning theory is worth noting because they add a diverse layer of understanding to how people experience and learn about culture, and the process through which people experience perspective transformations. Despite these more recent additions to TLT, one of the major critiques of this theory is that the predominant focus is on individual transformation and that social context and the roles of relationships are left out. Since the research setting is situated within a culturally immersive context that relies on intercultural relationships between and among U.S. volunteers, NGO coordinators, Etamabal teachers, and the Juyub community, I look to situated learning theory to lend an additional layer of understanding to my research questions.

Situated learning. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory describes how participation in social practices constitutes the process of learning and, according to

Coryell et al. (2014), “considers learning as a function of the environment, actions, behaviors and culture in which it occurs” (p. 149). Hodge (2014) argued that situated learning and transformative learning theories are complementary to each other by suggesting that immersion in new social practices facilitates perspective transformation. Building upon Wenger's (1998) notions of inbound and outbound trajectories within a community of practice, Hodge also suggested a transformative trajectory, one made possible by “the peculiar learning potential created by movement between practices that exhibit at least some tension or conflict at the level of shared assumptions” (p. 174). This tension or conflict is similar to Mezirow’s concept of disorienting dilemmas in that critical moments facilitate reflection and perspective transformation. This is particularly important in understanding how an international immersion experience impacts the learning of teachers because this experience presents a myriad of opportunities for participants to “move between practices” and shift between significant identity constructs. In the context of teachers being immersed in a new culture and educational setting, this immersion in new social practices may facilitate a perspective transformation and lend understanding to the meaning teachers make of their experience, and how this expanded understanding informs their teaching practice.

In summary, theories of intercultural competence, transformative learning, and situated learning provide a framework for understanding how people experience cultural difference and the developmental processes involved in critically reflecting on unexamined assumptions that surface as a result of the experience, and ultimately, transforming perspectives “to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of

experience and acting upon these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 6). This framework is an appropriate lens for investigating teachers’ perspectives of participation in short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience and the ways in which they connect this experience to their classroom practice. What is not clear in the research literature is what types of experiences are best suited to contribute to the intercultural professional learning of in-service teachers and the role of international immersion experiences as a potential pathway for professional development. Therefore, the following section reviews literature that addresses the intersections of international experiences, cultural immersion, and professional learning for teachers.

Intercultural Immersion Experiences for Teacher Professional Development

In our rapidly changing world, there is an urgent need for educators and teacher educators to develop the understanding and competence to work with changing international populations of students, and to prepare students with knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to interact in a global context. Yet many teachers still “have limited or no experience in crossing the many cultural boundaries around them” (McFadden et al., 1997). Critiques of the current landscape of teacher education and professional development suggest a need to rethink teacher education and consider the role of planned international experiences in contributing to the professional learning of teachers. However, there is little empirical research available on the role of international and cultural immersion experiences in the continuum of professional learning for in-service teachers. In this next section, I first look to research in the areas of service-learning and study abroad and how international immersion programs might influence

student learning outcomes, such as developing globalized perspectives and cultural understanding. Then I discuss the need for a new paradigm in teacher education and draw upon literature pertaining to intercultural immersion experiences for pre-service and in-service teachers' professional learning. I combine these areas of research in order to construct a multifaceted understanding of how teachers can learn about culture and apply this new knowledge to the classroom.

Service-learning and study abroad. In considering the role of higher education and international experiences for pre-service teacher preparation, Heyl and McCarthy (2003) stated: "A key role for higher education institutions must be to graduate future K-12 teachers who think globally, have international experience, demonstrate foreign language competence, and are able to incorporate a global dimension into their teaching" (p. 3). Two trends in higher education that address the role of international experiences in student learning are: education for civic engagement through service-learning (Campus Compact, 2013; Crabtree, 2008; Dey, Barnhardt, Antonaros, Ott, & Holapple, 2009) and internationalization through study abroad (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Stearns, 2009). Both study abroad and service-learning programs provide unique opportunities for students to transform their perspectives by engaging in experiential learning while immersing themselves within a community (Patterson, 2015). These experiences are often differentiated from "tourist-based curriculum", which typically provide a platform for comparison between familiar and unfamiliar cultural practices and can often reinforce ethnocentric perspectives and stereotypes (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). In order to avoid this type of negative

reinforcement, Tarrant (2010) advised that experiences abroad should engage students to think beyond personal needs and provide scaffolded experiences to facilitate development of global values, beliefs, and meanings.

Service-learning provides students with learning experiences in local and international communities through various opportunities such as community volunteering, civic engagement, and intense immersion experiences (Plante, Lackey, & Hwang, 2009). Jacoby (1996) defined service-learning as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development” (p. 5). Bringle and Hatcher (1995) expanded on this definition to include reflection on the service-learning experience as an intended component of the structured opportunities.

Many higher education institutions have service-learning programs that place students in local or international communities in a culturally immersive context. An immersion component to a course or program “requires students to dislocate and disorient themselves from the familiar and give themselves fully to the experience guided by community experts” (Bowman, Brandenberger, Mick, & Toms Smedley, 2010, p. 22). While immersed in a culture students live, eat, and sleep in the communities in which they work. In this immersive environment students learn to adapt and cope with their peers, as well as with social issues faced by the community (Bowman et al.). Research on immersive learning experiences has suggested that these opportunities help students connect coursework to community experiences, foster compassion and social justice

orientations, develop leadership skills, and enhance cultural understanding and civic mindedness (Berry & Chisholm, 1999; Bowman et al.; Campus Compact, 2009; Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004; Tonkin, 2004).

Additionally, the cultural immersion experience itself may not be enough to invoke desired student outcomes (Barker & Smith, 1996). Research on immersive service-learning programs have identified some key considerations when designing purposeful experiences. These include the intensity and duration of the community immersion, purposeful reflection, and pre/post trip education. In their seminal work on service-learning and higher education, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that students who participated in courses with concentrated blocks of time in community immersion had better outcomes than courses with less intense immersions. Bowman et al. (2010) found similar results when comparing the learning outcomes of students who participated in a short-term (2-7 days) versus long-term (8-10 weeks) course that included an international service-learning component. Students in both courses reported similar positive outcomes, such as developing more positive orientations towards equality, social justice, and social responsibility (Bowman et al.). The researchers attributed this to the courses' purposefully planned structure. Other researchers have also found that short-term immersive experiences can achieve these outcomes through purposefully and thoughtfully conducted programs (Kiely, 2004; McCarthy, 1996; Parker & Dautoff, 2007).

Other programmatic structures that have been associated with positive student outcomes include pre-trip preparation for encounters with social injustices, multiple

opportunities for reflection during and after the immersion, and connecting classroom content with community immersion experiences (Berry, 1990; Bowman et al., 2010; Eyler & Giles, Jr, 1999; Kiely, 2004; Plante et al., 2009). Research has also suggested that re-entry from immersive service-learning experiences is a potentially vulnerable time for students, therefore instructors should facilitate reflection and exploration of the social injustices encountered (Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004; Quiroga, 2004). In summary, this area of research strongly suggests that cultural immersion experiences, whether short- or long-term, can be a viable pathway for developing globalized perspectives, particularly when the experiences are carefully planned and inclusive of community experts.

Current research has also explored the role of study abroad in achieving various student outcomes related to intercultural development. In higher education institutions, study abroad is viewed as a significant factor in developing students global and intercultural competence (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). The benefits of study abroad, according to Cushner (2007), are its ability to impact all levels of learning: “The experience abroad, regardless of the level at which it takes place, offers the individual a unique opportunity for intercultural development as it involves both physical and psychological transitions that engage the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains” (p. 29). A large body of research suggests that these physical and psychological transitions include enhancement and development of cross-cultural skills, global perspectives, language acquisition, increased knowledge of host culture, and continued interest in interdisciplinary studies and international travel (Clarke, Flaherty,

Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Coryell et al., 2014; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Herbers & Nelson, 2009; Killick, 2012; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005).

Current trends have also shown that for students who do study abroad, a greater percentage are traveling in much shorter time frames (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2012). In the 2010-2011 academic year, 58% of students participated in short-term study abroad of eight weeks or less, while only 4% participated in the traditional long-term study abroad over the academic or calendar year (IIE; Obst, Bhandari, & Witherell, 2007). Short-term study abroad has become more popular because it addresses concerns regarding financial aid (Curry, 1999), lack of fit with academic programs (NAFSA, 2013), and perceived post-9/11 threat of violence against North Americans (IIE). Critics of study abroad, and particularly short-term study abroad, argue that students are oftentimes offered prepackaged programs that “provide instant culture without students having to sacrifice too much or work too hard” (Twombly et al., 2012, p. 24) and may even contradict program goals of developing more globally informed citizens (Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Stearns, 2009). In this context, critics contend that study abroad is more like educational tourism instead of a true intercultural experience (Zemach-Bersin, 2009).

A new paradigm for teacher education. In addition to research addressing international immersion experiences via service-learning and study abroad programs, discourse within the field of teacher education research that also support the role of international learning experiences for pre-service teacher learning suggests a fundamental gap in current teacher preparation practices. Traditional forms of teacher preparation programs typically offer topic-focused courses organized around teaching standards and

performance-based assessments that are arranged in sequential order and culminate in some kind of field practice (Goodwin, 2010). Goodwin suggested a new paradigm for conceptualizing teaching preparation programs that moves beyond focusing on specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions of quality teachers, but rather encompasses knowledge domains of teaching that “focus our attention on the kinds of teachers we need to prepare in order to achieve the quality education we say we want for all children” (p. 22). These knowledge domains include:

1. Personal knowledge: Integrate personal knowledge, preconceptions, and prior experiences into teacher education in order to facilitate meaningful reconstruction of personal knowledge as a way to transform behavior.
2. Contextual knowledge: International experiences such as study abroad are viable pathways towards pre-service teachers gaining greater intercultural knowledge and understanding of their students’ needs as nested within socio-cultural-economic-political contexts.
3. Pedagogical knowledge: Being able to incorporate knowledge of the informal curriculum into teaching, which includes an understanding of the home, community, and lived experiences of each child.
4. Sociological knowledge: Teachers must be able to confront issues of educational inequity through examining their prejudices and misconceptions in order to effectively teach all students, as well as understand how the rapidly changing global milieu directly impacts schools and what it means to teach well.

If Goodwin was calling for a new paradigm in thinking about teacher preparation to respond to the challenges of globalization, Cushner (2007) called for new ways of doing teacher education by linking quality teacher preparation to the development of IM and experiences offered during the learning process. The following quote from Cushner captures the disconnect between traditional teacher education and the need for experiential learning in intercultural development:

Schooling in general, and teacher education in particular, continues to address culture learning primarily from a cognitive orientation. That is, students read, watch films, listen to speakers, observe in classrooms and hold discussions around issues of cultural difference. This continues in spite of the growing body of research that demonstrates the critical role that experience plays in enhancing intercultural development. The preparation of internationally minded teachers who ultimately impact young people in schools, thus, must address the interpersonal and intercultural dimensions of communication, interaction and learning. (pp. 27-28)

These two authors, along with a growing body of research on the internationalization of teacher education, suggest the need for a simultaneous change in both thinking about and doing teacher education that supports quality teaching in a global context (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cushner, 2007; Duckworth et al., 2005; Goodwin, 2010; Levy & Fox, 2015; Merryfield, 2000; Razzano, 1996; Shaklee & Baily, 2012; Tate, 2012; Zhao, 2010).

Wilson (1982) justified linking cross-cultural experiential learning to teaching as the following:

1. Teaching itself is a cross-cultural encounter
2. Cross-cultural experience aids self-development
3. Cross-culturally effective persons have characteristics desirable for effective teachers
4. Cross-cultural experience leads to global perspectives necessary for global education to happen in schools. (p. 186)

In a later study, Wilson (1993) provided a framework for addressing the impact of international experiences and intercultural relationships on pre-service teacher learning through the development of global perspectives and intercultural competence. Similar to Cushner's (2007) call for experiential learning that addresses interpersonal and intercultural dimensions of learning, Wilson claimed, "international experience impacts both substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding aspects of a global perspective and both personal growth and development of meaningful interpersonal relationships" (p. 21). Substantive knowledge, she explained, focuses on how the international experience contributes to intercultural understanding and a general awareness of global issues. Perceptual understanding addresses concepts of international mindedness and combating preconceptions and stereotypes. Personal growth encompasses the development of self-confidence and cultural awareness of self and others, and finally, interpersonal connections focuses on the role of intercultural relationships in facilitating an individual's development of global perspectives. A visual of her framework is provided in Figure 1.

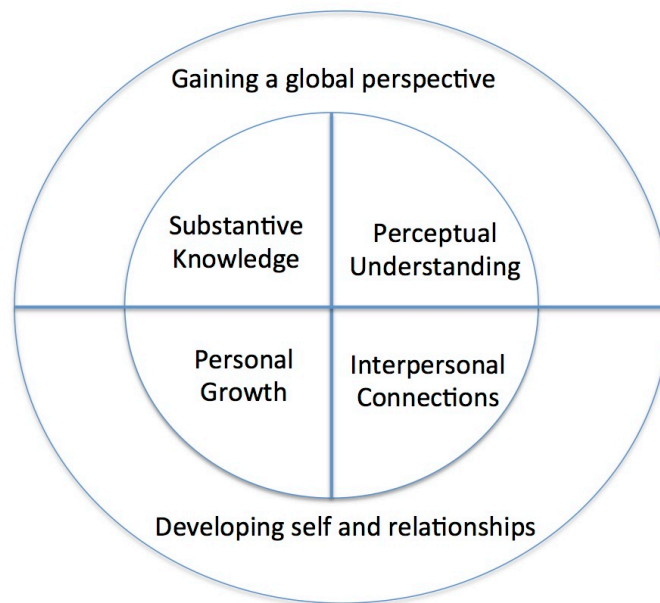


Figure 1. The Impact of International Experiences on Student Learning (Adapted from Wilson, 1993, p. 22).

Within each of the four inner aspects, there is a particular emphasis and rationale for examining the role of international/cross-cultural experiences in the development of globalized perspectives of teaching and learning, and a philosophical assumption that teacher educators should carefully scaffold experiences with these outcomes in mind. Due to the minimal amount of research available that specifically focuses on the internationalization of in-service teacher professional development, I argue that this framework is also applicable to, and provides a rationale for, understanding professional learning of in-service teachers via international immersion experiences.

Correspondingly, research conducted on international (often referred to as cross-cultural or intercultural) experiences for teacher professional learning suggest these

should be considered an integral and important part of teacher education because they are viable pathways in developing teachers' abilities to effectively support the learning needs of all students (Alfaro, 2008; Cushner, 2007; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Finney & Orr, 1995; Levy & Fox, 2015; Malewski et al., 2012; Marx & Moss, 2011; Merryfield & Kasai, 2010; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Sleeter, 2008; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). Kambutu and Nganga (2008) argued that opportunities for scaffolded experiences in international immersion settings for teacher development are unparalleled to traditional teacher preparation programs, stating, "carefully planned curricula that immerse participants in disorienting cultural situations are recommended because they culturally transform participants" (p. 940). This transformation and development of cultural awareness occurs through participants' direct interaction with concepts and themes from diverse multicultural perspectives (Williams, 2005).

In an effort to better understand how cultural and linguistic field experiences contribute to the intercultural learning of pre- and in-service teachers, Smolcic and Katunich (2017) conducted a review of literature examining 90 empirical studies that addressed how these experiences equip teachers with the capacity to work effectively with diverse student populations - a process they referred to as interculturality:

A dynamic process by which people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other's cultures. Over time this may lead to cultural change. It recognises the inequalities at work in society and the need to overcome these. It is a process which requires mutual respect and acknowledges human rights. (James, 2008, p. 2)

The researchers proposed four typologies of programs and summarized seven cultural learning outcomes that emerged from the literature. The four program designs are summarized as follows and will be described in more detail below: a stand-alone course or program, international study tour, overseas student teaching, and cultural immersion programs. Learning more about the types of programs currently offered to pre- and in-service teachers for intercultural learning and the types of learning outcomes associated with these programs is particularly important for situating this study within the landscape of current research and teacher professional development practices.

The first category that emerged from Smolcic and Katunich's (2017) review of literature included programs that had a stand-alone course as a component part of a teacher preparation program or targeted professional development program for in-service teachers with a focus on intercultural learning. Although it could be argued that these types of stand-alone programs are more in-line with a traditional model of teacher education, other studies have found positive outcomes relating to intercultural competence. For instance, Finney and Orr (1995) described the powerful role of cross-cultural experiences in challenging pre-service teachers' prejudices and misunderstandings of cultural beliefs. Their study examined a stand-alone course as a component of a teacher preparation program in Australia that required an experiential learning component with various Aboriginal agencies and school programs. The researchers identified important elements in structuring cross-cultural experiences, such as including the potential to demonstrate positive aspects of persons and cultures as a basis for questioning the inadequacy of stereotypes; opportunities to interact with persons

from so-called minorities as equals; and the cross-cultural experience should take place in the real world (not in a classroom or laboratory) (p. 333). In a similar vein, DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) examined the pre- and post-IDI test scores of 86 teachers who participated in a district-wide intercultural professional development initiative. As part of this initiative, teachers participated in values and identity activities, simulations, and workshops on topics specific to schools' needs, such as culture-specific topics, learning styles, and intercultural conflict styles. Trainings consisted of 2-3 hour workshops offered 1-2 times per year over a period of 5 years. Quantitative analysis of data revealed a significant, positive change in overall IDI scores and suggested that intercultural competence can be developed through school-based professional development programs.

The second category identified was international study tours. These programs are characterized by being faculty-led and typically do not include a teaching practicum or field experience in classrooms. Students travel to different sites and focus on learning about the host country's society, history, and culture but do not frequently include a local homestay, second language study, or extended interactions with local people. For example, Kambutu and Nganga (2008) examined the role of a 12-week international study tour in Kenya in promoting cultural awareness and understanding in 12 pre-and in-service teachers. Prior to departure, the researchers met with participants to discuss the goals of the intercultural experience, recommended readings, and invited guest speakers. While in Kenya, participants engaged in lectures, focused reflection, and journaling. The study results suggested that the experience had a positive impact on developing participants' deeper level of cultural awareness, understanding, and appreciation of host

cultures. In contrast, Patterson (2014) investigated the experiences of 18 U.S. teachers who participated in a three-week study tour in China. The researcher addressed critiques of the often-made assumption that travel equates to cultural transformation, stating: “The most detrimental assumption one could make in undertaking professional development abroad is that simply getting on a plane and receiving a stamp in one’s passport will guarantee some form of professional growth” (p. 277). He found that the greatest barrier for professional development lies in the participants’ mindset and approach towards the experience; not taking ownership of their learning and expecting the program facilitators to make the experience as beneficial as possible.

The third category outlined by Smolcic and Katunich's (2017) was overseas student teaching, in which pre-service teachers complete teaching requirements in an international setting. This type of experience does include cultural immersion but often lacks structured reflection or intentional analysis of culture. In Cushner’s (2007) review of literature on study abroad and overseas teaching, he asserted that sustained, direct intercultural immersion experiences were shown to positively impact professional and personal development in a variety of ways, including exposure to new pedagogical approaches and educational philosophies, self-awareness and self-efficacy, develop personal confidence and professional competence, cultural sensitivity, and greater understandings of global and domestic diversity. The cultural, pedagogical, and ideological dissonance that can occur when students have the opportunity to teach in different sociocultural contexts may help facilitate this development (Alfaro, 2008; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007).

The fourth category identified was cultural immersion programs and field experiences. These programs were categorized by (a) cross-cultural community-based learning or daily life experience in another cultural context, (b) explicit teaching about, exploration of, and reflections on culture in that setting, and (c) some form of structured field teaching experience in a formal or informal educational setting (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017, p. 51). An example of this type of program is reflected in the qualitative study conducted by Alfaro and Quezada (2010), which examined the role of international teaching and professional development experiences for enhancing in-service teachers' global mindedness and culturally responsive teaching skills. Participants included 21 in-service teachers who participated in an 8-week international bilingual teacher certificate program. Data analysis of teachers' reflective journal entries, program evaluations, and anecdotal notes suggested that the bilingual teachers grew personally and professionally from the international teaching experience; developed sensitivity to diversity issues; enhanced self-efficacy through cultural and worldview self-awareness; and developed clarity about the ideology that drives their work. The researchers concluded; "providing a pathway for practicing teachers to globalize their perspective and approach to teaching offers a foundation for new professional development pedagogies of the future" (p. 57).

Smolcic and Katunich (2017) further analyzed 22 studies that specifically addressed the impact of cultural immersion programs on teacher attitudes, dispositions, and teaching practices. Similar to the research setting for this study, the majority of studies that fell into this category were short-term immersion experiences that included interactions within a language context that differed from the native language of the

program participants. Through their analysis of literature they identified seven core learning outcomes often associated with participation in these types of cultural immersion experiences: building knowledge of culture; building awareness of the role of culture in teaching, school structures, and educational systems; developing cultural and societal self-awareness; creating a sociopolitical awareness and critical consciousness; understanding the process of second language learning; acquiring and demonstrating skills and attitudes that support cross-cultural interactions; and personal growth. Since the incorporation of cultural immersion into teacher professional development is a relatively recent phenomenon, this review of literature lends understanding to the role of cultural immersion experiences and carefully scaffolded curricula as a potential pathway for contributing to in-service teachers' professional learning.

Summary

This chapter presented a conceptual framework pertaining to the role of international immersion experiences in the professional learning of teachers. I first provided a demographic portrait of Guatemala and a historical perspective of the treatment of indigenous groups and educational policies have shaped the research setting. Next, I described how globalization directly impacts teaching and the need for teachers to develop global competence in both themselves and their students. I also described how the fields of multicultural education, international education, and intercultural competence, in addition to adult learning theories of transformative learning and situated learning, lend understanding to how adults experience cultural difference within a social context and develop the ability to support the learning of all students. I offered a

discussion on the role of intercultural experiences for teacher professional development and showcased different areas of research, including service-learning and study abroad, highlighted their most salient characteristics, and provided students' benefits. Also, I illustrated the importance of a new paradigm for teacher education that highlights the role of cultural immersion and international experiences as an integral part of pre- and in-service teacher professional learning. Finally, I mentioned a typology of cultural immersion field experiences for teachers and key learning outcomes. In the next chapter, I will present the research methods that were used in this study.

Chapter Three

The urgent call to internationalize teacher education in response to the impact globalization presents in our nation's classrooms, also calls for a fundamental shift in how the field of teacher education provides opportunities of professional learning for teachers (Cushner, 2007; Goodwin, 2010; Shaklee & Baily, 2012). International immersion experiences have been shown to enhance students' understandings of pejorative language, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, misinformation in curricular materials, develop sensitivity to diversity issues, and enhance cultural and worldview self-awareness (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cushner, 2007; Kambutu & Nganga, 2008; Merryfield & Kasai, 2010). However, limited research is available on the role of international immersion experiences for the professional development of in-service teachers. Furthermore, the perspectives of teachers who participate in such an experience and how they reflect on and make meaning from their experiences, and apply this meaning to their classrooms, is virtually unknown. Therefore, this study seeks to understand a selected group of in-service teachers' perspectives of their participation in an international immersion experience. The research questions guiding the study are:

- 1) What meaning do teachers, who participate in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience, make of their experience?

2) How did participating in the experience inform their understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice?

I chose a qualitative approach to address the research questions because this approach is especially useful in understanding the meaning, for the participants in this study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in; understanding the particular contexts within which the participants act; and the influence this context has on their actions (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perspectives of the meaning they constructed regarding their participation in an international immersion experience and how they connected this experience to their professional learning. Qualitative data were collected primarily via in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and also included emails and documents from the participants and NGO coordinator that provided contextual information about the trip. Data were analyzed in an effort to address the following three research goals: 1) understand how teachers make meaning of their experiences and how this meaning making is shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur; 2) to help bridge a gap in teacher professional development research and contribute to our understanding of pathways to professional learning; and 3) to connect our understanding of international immersion experiences to the field of in-service teacher professional development. By developing a deeper understanding of how teachers recognize this experience as beneficial to their professional learning, the field of teacher education can utilize this knowledge to inform professional development opportunities for in-service teachers.

Researcher Inquiry Stance

The epistemology framing this qualitative case study is constructivism; highlighting that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered and that people's beliefs are shaped by their assumptions and prior experiences (Maxwell, 2013). This perspective emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality while being highly sensitive to the individual lived experience. Specific to the study, this inquiry stance is particularly useful for focusing on the multiple realities constructed by the participants, in regards to their participation in an international immersion experience, and the implications of those constructions on their understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice (Patton, 2002). This qualitative case study also reflects a belief that each of the participants experienced an individual reality that may be different from other participants and mine, and that these realities will drive the inquiry process.

As discussed in Chapter One, I have a personal connection to short-term, non-formal, international immersion experiences and the research setting. My interest in these types of experiences for professional learning stem from my observations of students and teachers, as well as reflections on my own experiences, in this type of setting. My constructivist inquiry stance acknowledges "that my standpoints and starting points influence how I see the project data and what I see in them" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 168). Therefore, I aimed to create interpretive understandings that consider how mine and the participants' standpoints and positions impact these interpretations, rather than an objective reporting on findings (Charmaz).

Additionally, my researcher inquiry stance is informed by ontological realism, which Maxwell (2013) describes as “the belief that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions and theories” and that “this world doesn’t accommodate to our beliefs” (p. 43). This inquiry stance, combining epistemological constructivism and ontological realism, is what Maxwell refers to as critical realism. This inquiry stance, therefore, recognizes that the participants’ experiences were rooted in a world that exists independently of themselves, but also acknowledges that their perspectives and interpretations of this world represent complex social phenomena.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to explore teachers’ perspectives of their participation in an international immersion experience. Qualitative case study design is particularly useful for the exploration and in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena. I draw upon the work of two prominent researchers in the field of case study research - Robert E. Stake (1995) and Robert K. Yin (2009), because they represent varying epistemic commitments on case study methodology (constructivist versus more positivist, respectively), and their seminal works have informed my researcher inquiry stance and research design.

Case study inquiry, according to Yin (2009), is particularly useful when (a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within real-life context” (p. 2). In contrast, Stake (1995) purposefully omits a succinct definition for case study, but instead offers a description of case study in terms of the cases selected to study, which he

describes as specific, complex, integrative systems. A major point of contention between the authors' viewpoints is the role a priori hypotheses in guiding the research methodology. Stake calls for a constructivist approach, utilizing the research questions to guide the researcher into the study but not to determine a priori what will be found, and Yin argues for the prior development of theoretical propositions in guiding the data collection and analysis processes. For this study, I specifically included a discussion on my personal connections to the phenomena of interest and the research setting (in Chapter One), as well as provided a conceptual framework (in Chapter Two), in an effort to demonstrate how my identity and experience may guide the data collection and analysis processes.

The aim of qualitative case study research is to thoroughly understand the case(s), which are bounded by time and activity and seek patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships (Yin, 2009). The boundaries help define the case, or unit of analysis, under investigation and clarify the beginning and end points of what is to be investigated. Furthermore, boundaries help determine the scope, breadth, and depth of the research design and have important implications for the research methods. The unit of analysis for this study was *U.S. teachers' participation*, which is bounded by time – the weeklong trip in summer 2015, and activity – an international immersion experience in Guatemala that was coordinated by a U.S.-based NGO, and included visiting the rural community of Juyub and participating in literacy-focused professional development workshops in the Etamabal school. This case study was intrinsic in nature because the goal was to understand this specific group of teachers' perspectives of what this

experience meant to them and how they made connections to their teaching profession. It was also instrumental in nature – as it was driven by the need for general understanding of how in-service teachers develop globalized perspectives of teaching and learning from participation in immersion experiences, and my belief that insight may be gained by studying a particular group of teachers who participate in this type of experience (Stake, 1995).

In this next section, I will discuss the methods for this qualitative case study, including selection of site and participants, data collection, and data analysis. I conclude with a discussion on validity and addressing validity threats.

Site Selection

In selecting a research setting, it was important to find a site that represented both a non-formal international immersion experience, and an opportunity for in-service teachers to participate in the experience and engage in meaningful intercultural encounters. These qualities were selected based off of research literature (as described in Chapter Two) that addresses components of quality international immersion experiences for student and/or teacher learning. Furthermore, since I am focusing on understanding the participants' individual stories of participation in such an experience and how it relates to their professional learning, it was also important to select a research site that I was familiar with. I wanted to be able to experientially understand what the participants were describing and to be familiar with the context of the specific international immersion experience. Therefore, I selected a research site with which I was personally

familiar and an international immersion experience in which I had previously participated and whose context I understood.

Professional development workshops. As elaborated on in Chapter Two, the Guatemalan teachers at the Etamabal School have worked with a team of multi-national educators to establish a program of bilingual literacy. The project's long-term goals are to provide bilingual education to students in rural communities that value their culture and incorporate mother tongue instruction, as well as empower local Mayan teachers to become professional development coaches to their peers in other rural schools. Each year, the U.S.-based NGO that sponsors the Etamabal School implements a weeklong professional development workshop focused on literacy and provides partial funding for the purchase of materials for guided reading instruction. The team that provides the workshops is typically comprised of two NGO coordinators, a local transportation guide, and a group of no larger than twelve volunteers. During the time spent in Juyub, the volunteers live fully immersed in the community and culture; they sleep, eat, and work inside the classroom walls of the Etamabal School. In July 2013 I traveled to Juyub with a literacy professional development team and experienced first-hand how the workshops are implemented. Every morning we rolled up our cots, moved our suitcases out of the way, and watched the children line up to enter school while we ate our breakfast on the back porch and prepared to engage in teacher professional development aimed at improving bilingual literacy practices through research-based methods.

The NGO coordinators set the agenda for the workshops and what is to be completed. They communicate regularly with the Etamabal teachers in order to develop

curriculum that builds upon the previous years' agendas. The NGO coordinators also communicate with the volunteers pre-trip to gauge individual interests and skillsets and match volunteers with projects while on site. During the school day, volunteers observe classrooms, play outside with the students during recess, and assist the Etamabal teachers with various tasks. Once the children leave for the day, the Etamabal teachers, NGO coordinators, and volunteers reconvene to be briefed on the professional development activities and goals for the day. The volunteers and Etamabal teachers then work together to complete the tasks designated to them. The opportunity to be immersed in a new culture and educational setting presents a unique opportunity to understand teachers' perspectives of how this experience contributes to their professional learning and explore how teachers might enact this new knowledge into classroom practice.

Participant Selection

The scope of this study is twofold – to explore and better understand how participants construct reality and make meaning of their participation in an international immersion experience and the impact of their constructions on their understanding and practice of teaching; and also, to connect this understanding more broadly to the field of teacher professional development and contribute to our understandings of international immersion experiences as a potential pathway for professional learning. Therefore, the purposeful selection of information-rich cases, participants who have lived the experience under study, is critical (Patton, 2002). Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2012) discuss participant selection as being more complex than a simple or isolated decision; “it is intricately connected to the ways in which a researcher perceives an issue, the events

related to that issue, the purpose of exploring the issue, and the knowledge one hopes to gain about it” (p. 703). As described above, I believe that the NGO-coordinated trip focused on providing literacy professional development for bilingual teachers in a rural, Mayan village is the ideal setting to investigate U.S. teachers’ perspectives of participation in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience.

Since the case for this research study is bounded by this particular experience, my participant selection focused on recruiting participants from the most recent literacy professional development trip, which took place in summer 2015. I believe that focusing on participants who have the most recent memories of the experience would provide rich, deep information about the phenomenon of study that could not be accessed from other choices (Maxwell, 2013). There were a total of seven U.S. teachers who participated in the summer 2015 trip and six responded to my request to participate in the study.

As shown in Table 1, all six of the participants were female; five identified as white, non-Hispanic and one identified as white, Hispanic. Three participants were between the ages of 20 and 30; one between the age of 30 and 40; and two were 50 years and above. Four of the participants identified as speaking Spanish fluently: Alicia, who was born in South America but spent most of her life in the U.S., grew up speaking both English and Spanish in her home; Ana and Noelle are native English speakers and studied Spanish in school; and Ella is a native English speaker and also spent her early years living in El Salvador where she developed proficiency in Spanish. Two of the participants changed jobs between the time of the trip (July 2015) and the time of their participant interview (December 2015/January 2016): Brenda started graduate school to

pursue a master's degree as a technology specialist and Ella became a math coach at a Title One elementary school. Both of these participants were included in the study because of their teaching experience and their motivation for participating in the international immersion experience was due, in part, to their interest in connecting their participation to their professional learning goals. Pseudonyms were selected by the participants and used to protect their identity and confidentiality.

Table 1
Profile of Interview Participants

Name	Age (range)	Gender	Race / Ethnicity	Years of Teaching Experience	Grades & Subjects Taught ^a	Other languages spoken ^b
Alicia	50+	F	Caucasian/ Hispanic	25	1 st grade Spanish/ Same	Spanish
Brenda	20-30	F	Caucasian/ Non-Hispanic	4	3 rd grade/ Graduate school	American Sign Language
Ana	50+	F	Caucasian/ Non-Hispanic	2	K-5 ESOL/Same	Spanish
Noelle	20-30	F	Caucasian/ Non-Hispanic	3	MS Spanish/Same	Spanish
Ella	30-40	F	Caucasian/ Non-Hispanic	8	Graduate school/ K-6 th math coach	Spanish
Elizabeth	20-30	F	Caucasian/ Non-Hispanic	4	6 th grade reading/ Same	None

Note. K = Kindergarten; ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages; MS = middle school

^a At time of trip (July 2015)/At time of interview (December 2015/January 2016)

^b Self-reported fluency in languages other than English

Data Collection

Consistent with case study design, data collection focused on obtaining information about individual behavior, attitudes, and perspectives. Specifically relating to the research questions, data collection focused on topics related to participants' perspectives of their participation in the international immersion experience and how they viewed this experience as informing their own teaching practice. The data collection source primarily used in this study was semi-structured interviews.

Interviews. As Stake (1995) so aptly stated, “the interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). For this study, data gathered from semi-structured, focused interviews were the primary source of data analysis and interpretation. Focused interviews are semi-structured, open-ended and conversational in manner, and follow a set of questions derived from case study protocol (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, open-ended questions yield in-depth responses from participants about their experiences, perspectives, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. The flexibility of this approach is important because it allows for both emic themes, derived from the individual's experiences and personal understandings of participation, and etic themes, derived from the interview protocol and conceptual framework, to be included.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews using the Participant Interview Protocol (Appendix C) were arranged during December 2015-January 2016 timeframe. The interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes and audio-recorded. After each interview was completed I transcribed the recording verbatim. The interview guide that I developed for the pilot case study conducted in Fall 2014 served as the basis for the

development of the interview protocol utilized for this study, and was revised to include more detail about cultural understandings both pre- and post-trip and to also gain a deeper understanding about how they made connections to their classroom practice. After reading journal articles that examined the impact of international study tours on in-service teacher professional development, such as those by Kambutu and Nganga (2008) and Patterson (2014, 2015), I added questions about how the participant thought about and planned for the trip, as this creates an opportunity to explore their cultural understandings. I also added questions that more directly addressed connections made to the classroom, such as ‘How can you see yourself translating (or how have you translated) your Guatemala experience into the classroom?’ and ‘How has your participation influenced your own professional development?’ These open-ended questions were designed to develop an understanding of the participants’ perspectives by engaging them in reflective dialogue about their experiences in Guatemala and the Etamabal School.

In addition to the interviews, there were a number of emails exchanged with the NGO coordinator that provided details about the trip. A major influence on my decision to select this research site for the study was the long-term relationship the NGO and NGO coordinators have with the Juyub community. For over ten years, the organization has worked with indigenous communities in various community development initiatives providing healthcare services, education, and economic development projects. The NGO coordinators play a leading role in creating a space for relationship building between the Juyub community, NGO, and volunteers. Their extensive knowledge about the

community and the strong relationships they have built with the Etamabal teachers makes them key players in shaping the experience of the volunteers. They also have a central role in organizing the travel itinerary and implementing the professional development workshops. This additional information allowed for a richer understanding of the professional development workshops and how the context of the setting informed volunteers' experiences. I consider these emails to be documents as pertaining to this study because I frequently referred back to their content to support my understanding of the research setting and travel itinerary. I also asked each participant during the interview if they had any documents they would be willing to share regarding their experiences, such as journal entries, pictures, and itineraries. It was completely voluntary for the participants to share any additional information in the form of documents. One of the six participants shared entries from a journal that she kept during the trip.

The supporting information obtained from documents is relevant to my interpretation of the individual participant's experience and to my understanding of the case. I did not utilize any specific analytic techniques to gather and analyze data from these documents, since the purpose of these documents was solely to support my understanding of the case and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences.

Procedures. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at George Mason University (Appendix A), I contacted one of the NGO coordinators who participated in the summer 2015 trip and obtained a list of volunteers and their email addresses. The criteria for selection of participants for this study were volunteers on the

2015 trip who were also K-12 teachers in the United States. There were a total of seven volunteers who met the participation selection criteria. I emailed each of the seven volunteers an invitation to participate in the study and the pre-participation survey (Appendix B). Six of the seven volunteers indicated they would like to participate in the study and emailed the completed pre-participation survey. As mentioned earlier, two of the six participants changed jobs between the trip and the interview. Ella was not a K-12 teacher at the time of the trip, however I decided to include her in the study because she had extensive teaching experience prior to and after the trip. Brenda was not a K-12 teacher at the time of the interview but had four years of teaching experience and was pursuing a master's degree to become a school technology specialist. She was also invited to participate in the study because of her experience as a teacher and continued interest in the teaching profession.

The next phase of the study involved scheduling the semi-structured interviews. The date and time of the interviews were at the discretion of the participants and they were notified that no preparation of any kind was required in advance. The interviews were conducted in-person, via Skype ® (which is a Voice over Internet Protocol technology), or via phone depending on the preference and proximity of the participant to the researcher. Four of the participants requested in-person interviews; one participant requested via Skype ®, and one requested via phone. There are important implications for utilizing various methods for conducting interviews on the data collection and analysis processes. One benefit of interviewing via Skype or phone was that it enabled me to obtain participants that would not otherwise be able to participate in the study.

Since the criteria for selection of participants included all of the U.S. teachers who participated in the summer 2015 trip, and there were only six out of seven teachers who agreed to participate, it was critical that I included all of their voices in this case study. Other potential benefits of not interviewing face-to-face include the opportunity for participants to remain in their own comfortable setting and for my ability to discreetly take notes. It is also plausible to consider that interviewing via Skype or phone also affects the ability to establish rapport, discern non-verbal cues, and adapt interview questions based on my formative assessment of the interview data. Therefore, the choice to elicit various platforms for interviewing participants may impact the ability to interpret and compare data across the participants. After examining the benefits of including all six of the participants in this study, in contrast to only interviewing those who could meet face-to-face, I determined it was more pertinent to include all of the participants. The methods used to combat these potential validity threats are described below.

The informed consent process was differentiated for in-person versus remote interviews. For the in-person interviews, a paper copy of the informed consent form was provided at the beginning of the interview. Participants were informed of the nature of the research, that participation was voluntary, and then asked to sign the informed consent form if they agreed to participate. For the remote interviews, I provided the informed consent form via email and detailed how to complete the form. I also explained the nature of the research, that participation was voluntary, and scheduled the interview once the form was completed.

The Participant Interview Protocol (Appendix C) served as the guide for the one-on-one interviews. As the interviews proceeded, I also attended to related topics, themes, and categories generated by the participants in order to facilitate reflection on their experiences and deepen their understanding of the meaning they made from their participation, as well as provide insights on how they connected this experience to their classrooms. During the course of the semi-structured interviews, ongoing member checks were conducted by restating and summarizing the information provided by the participants. I also probed participants to explain their meaning regarding specific statements made during the interviews and asked them to provide specific examples of topics they discussed. My familiarity with the research setting and experiential understanding of the literacy professional development workshops helped me build rapport with the participants. This allowed for the opportunity to obtain honest and open responses and prompt them to critically reflect on their experiences. At the end of each interview, the participants selected a pseudonym and were assured that every effort would be made to protect their confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Maxwell's (2013) qualitative data analysis strategies were utilized to systematically review, code, and analyze the data. These included researcher analytic memos, coding and thematic analysis, and connecting strategies. After each interview was completed, I prepared analytic memos with key ideas and interpretive commentary about the conversations that took place both during and after each interview (Charmaz, 2011). These memos also included key phrases I wrote down during the interview and a

description of the participant's responses throughout the interview, such as non-verbal expressions and emotions. The researcher analytic memos were also utilized to facilitate my reflection and document emergent interpretations, questions, and themes, which further informed the analysis.

Additionally, an iterative constant comparative method was employed in the data analysis process. The constant comparative method is a systematic yet flexible method that involves simultaneous data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2011). Researchers make comparisons within and across the participants' data at each level of analysis, including comparing fragments of data with each other, data with codes, codes with themes, and themes with themes (Charmaz, p. 172).

Throughout the data analysis process I emphasized three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective. These phases are not marked by clear beginning and end points, but rather describe an iterative process in which each phase is both informing and being informed by the other phases. The codes are conceptual tools that fragment the data, define processes within them, and make comparisons between data (Charmaz, 2011). Throughout the entire process of data analysis I read and re-read, coded and re-coded all of the interview transcripts. Each code or theme interpreted from the data were compared for similarities and differences within and across the participants. The constant comparative method utilized for this study is described in detail below.

During the open coding phase of data analysis, I utilized three coding techniques: in-vivo, descriptive, and line-by-line (Saldaña, 2013). In-vivo coding entails using the actual words of the participant, known as emic codes, and is particularly well suited for

studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding, according to Corbin and Strauss, is a basic step necessary to move towards conceptual ordering and helped me move beyond the initial content of the transcripts and begin to identify topics and themes. I also utilized a line-by-line coding technique as a tool for early analysis. This technique entails looking for what is happening in the data, coding each fragment of data in short, active terms, and is useful in helping researchers detach from preconceived notions and see the data anew (Charmaz, 2011).

The second phase of axial coding entails establishing relationships between the codes and emerging themes identified in the open-coding phase. Throughout the analysis process I wrote memos and drew diagrams to explore, define, and analyze the themes, as well as looked for discrepant data. The analytic memos gave me direction in deciding what to pursue and helped shaped my analysis. The third phase of selective coding generates more abstract themes that unify and integrate themes representative across the participants.

Analytic tools. Throughout the data analysis process I utilized a variety of analytic tools to facilitate the coding process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe the use of analytic tools as a strategic and purposeful way to facilitate the qualitative data analysis process. Analytic tools can help researchers avoid standard ways of thinking about phenomena, stimulate the inductive process, allow for clarification or debunking of assumptions of researchers as well as those of participants, and identify properties and dimensions of categories (p. 67).

The use of questioning as an analytic tool entails asking questions about certain pieces of the data and brainstorming about a range of possible answers in order to better understand the perspective of the participant. Questioning also allows the researcher to probe deeper into the data, and “when we probe and develop a concept it becomes not just a ‘label’ for a piece of data, but a whole new set of ideas about a phenomenon” (Corbin & Strauss, p. 71). Asking sensitizing questions within and across the participants, such as “when, how, and with what consequences are they acting, and how are these the same or different for various actors and various situations?” allowed me to probe into the relationships within and across codes and themes to explore the process of meaning making and how this informs teachers’ perspectives of themselves as educators and their teaching practice.

The use of thinking about the various meanings of a word, as an analytic tool, is useful for digging deeper into the meaning behind participants’ narratives. This means that as the researcher, I made careful judgments as to what statements required a more in-depth analysis and utilized the process of writing memos to thoughtfully explore my interpretation of the data, while balancing my experiential understanding and interpretation of the research setting. I also employed the analytic tool of looking for words that indicate time, in order to inform my understanding of the meaning making that happened along a continuum of learning. Looking for words that indicate time “often denote a change or shift in perceptions, in thoughts, events, or interpretations of events” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 83). It was particularly important to pay attention to shifts in

perspectives and how this shaped their understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice.

Validity

As the sole researcher relying heavily on participant interviews, researcher subjectivity and reflexivity must be carefully considered throughout the research process. Research subjectivity is concerned with the influence of the researcher's implicit and explicit values and expectations on the research study, and reflexivity is concerned specifically with the influence of the researcher on the participant (Maxwell, 2013). These two concepts are particularly relevant in the participant interview process. Within a qualitative paradigm, subjectivity and reflexivity are two concepts that cannot necessarily be controlled for, however they must explicitly addressed. Furthermore, as Miller (2008) posited, the validity of research is enhanced by ensuring that procedures are coherent and transparent, results are evident, and conclusions are convincing. Therefore, I utilized several strategies to address potential validity threats, which are detailed below.

On the outset of Chapter One, I detailed my connection to the research setting and my interest in international immersion experiences for professional learning. I felt it was important for the reader, and for myself, to explicitly state my personal connection to this research. By including this information, the reader can have a better understanding of how the data were analyzed and interpreted (Merriam, 1995).

During the interviews, I restated and summarized information for the participants and questioned my interpretation of their narratives. This practice enhanced the trustworthiness, credibility, and validity of the findings. Also, during the coding process,

I read the transcripts over and over to see if my own words or interpretations influenced the participants' choices of words or thoughts. Throughout data analysis I continuously returned to the transcripts to ensure that my interpretation of the codes and themes were representative of the participants' words and experiences. The process of developing verbatim transcripts of participants' interviews allowed me to discover emic codes and themes, derived from the narratives of the participants, and not rely solely on my interview notes or interpretation of important topics discussed. Furthermore, in Chapters Four and Five, I draw heavily on verbatim quotations from the participants to provide findings that are reliable, original, and authentic.

In an effort to address potential validity threats, I also searched for discrepant evidence or negative cases, which, according to Maxwell (2013), calls for the rigorous examination of both supporting and discrepant data to assess conclusions drawn from the data. I constantly solicited feedback from committee members to help with the identification of validity threats, discern possible flaws in my logic or methods, and assess the quality and validity of the findings. I also engaged in peer examination by providing a sample of interview transcripts and preliminary findings to solicit feedback and help identify possible biases and assumptions. Lastly, I believe that the six participant interviews provided what Maxwell refers to as "rich" data; data that is detailed, provided a holistic picture, and represents multiple perspectives.

Summary

Chapter Three presents the research methods utilized to conduct this qualitative case study on teachers' perspectives of their participation in a short-term, non-formal,

international immersion experience. The research questions guided the research design, site and participant selection, data collection and data analysis, and steps taken to attend to validity were discussed. The next chapter will present the findings in accordance to the two research questions.

Chapter Four

This study investigated teachers' perspectives of their participation in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience. The importance of this study was to explore the experiences of a selected group of teachers and provide an understanding of the ways in which they connect their immersive experience to professional learning. This better understanding can then inform teachers, teacher educators, schools, and school districts about the effects this unique learning context may have on the lives of teacher participants. A qualitative case study design was utilized to explore how teachers engage with and describe their elected participation in the immersion experience and how this participation informed new understandings of teaching and learning. The results obtained from this research were derived from data collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six teachers who participated in a weeklong immersion experience in Guatemala.

This chapter will first provide additional information on the participants' backgrounds. This background information expands upon initial information as revealed during their in-depth interviews and is important to understanding the remainder of the findings because these stories are part of the lived history of individual teachers, which also informs their responses to and engagement with such an experience. Second, I will

present the themes that emerged when analyzing the remainder of the data. Findings are organized according to the following two overarching research questions:

- 1) What meaning do teachers, who participate in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience, make of their experience?
- 2) How did participating in the experience inform these teachers' understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice?

Expanded Background Information

This first section provides a more in-depth understanding of each participant's background. This expanded information include details of their lives as revealed during the interviews, including their prior experiences with international travel, volunteer work, and professional learning opportunities. Details also included their various professional roles within and outside the field of education, motivations for participating in this trip, and other relevant details that highlight the complexity of what this experience has provided the participants. Although inclusion of the participants' backgrounds were not initially intended to address the research questions themselves, they have been found to provide important information about the participants which, in turn, has now also served to inform a deeper analysis of the data and a deeper understanding of the individual teachers' responses to the experience. As noted earlier, all names used are pseudonyms.

Alicia. Alicia was born in South America but spent most of her life in the United States. The majority of her professional career has focused on teaching in Spanish immersion schools. It was her longtime interest in dual language instruction that fueled her motivation to participate in this trip. She was particularly interested in the language

revitalization efforts within the Juyub community, which she described as “amazing work for humanity.” She felt compelled to be an active participant in the language revitalization process because she believed that “children should be educated in their native language first” and that native languages should resist being replaced with languages of power. Her understanding of Guatemala stemmed from what she read in books about the role of language and power in the marginalization of indigenous communities. She described being aware of the power structures that would be implicitly present between the American volunteers and indigenous teachers and often shared how she was hesitant to impose her teaching ideology in their classrooms.

She talked about times when she provided professional development workshops for other teachers in her region. She felt, however, that these experiences were somewhat incomplete. She described how the idea of traveling to another country to provide teacher education presented a more enriching opportunity “because of the travel possibilities and it was a country I had never been to, so I viewed it as something bigger and deeper than what I had done in the past.” Throughout our interview she expressed frustration with the state of education in the United States and with the lack of professional learning opportunities for teachers that addressed root causes of inequities in the public school system. Alicia noted, “I feel like we live in a country and county with so many resources and I don’t think we’re meeting the needs of all the children and... it doesn’t make any sense to me.” She further elaborated, “Everybody knows there’s this huge achievement gap and there’s a lot of talk on what to do but nobody really gets down into the weeds of what needs to be done.” She detailed that throughout her extensive

teaching career she experienced shifting agendas imposed by policies and administrators, and the subsequent competing responsibilities imposed on teachers. Towards the end of her interview, she shared: “The one thing I'm happy about is I've taught for so long that I knew how it was different and kind of feel sorry for teachers coming in right now thinking this is all it is.”

Elizabeth. Elizabeth grew up in a small, predominately white middle-class town that was “very sheltered as far as immigration goes” and realized that her personal experiences with schooling contrasted sharply with the realities many of her students face today. She works at a middle school serving primarily Latino students and hoped that through her participation in this trip she would “discover more about where my kids come from.” She felt it was important for teachers to seek out professional learning opportunities that would help them better understand the backgrounds of students that were different from their own. In college, she studied abroad in Eastern Europe and traveled throughout Asia, and described this immersive experience in Guatemala as her first opportunity to teach abroad and was “excited to meet like-minded teaches.” She had concerns going into the trip because she had studied Spanish in high school but was not fluent and was unclear about the curriculum and how they would teach the Etamabal teachers. She spent time preparing for the trip by building a “toolbox” with instructional materials and lesson plans. Her understanding of Guatemala stemmed from *Caminar*, a young adult book she had read about the Guatemalan civil war.

For Elizabeth, this trip also represented an opportunity to further her commitment to promoting literacy. She viewed literacy as the “gateway to freedom and achievement

and all things good” and was passionate about helping students with reading, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. She felt it was important to build a sense of community and incorporate globalized perspectives into her classroom, and she shared that she did this through her voluntary participation in Global Read Aloud, a program in which students across the world read the same book simultaneously and participate in online forums together.

Brenda. Throughout her life, Brenda had traveled around North America and Europe for vacations and family events and studied abroad in Western Europe. During the interview she talked about the importance of incorporating these global experiences into her professional practice, sharing: “Every experience I’ve had, every place I’ve traveled I’ve infused in my teaching and it’s made me a better teacher.” As an elementary school teacher in a Title One school that serves a large population of Latino students, Brenda described herself as someone who was a “culturally responsive and sensitive” teacher. However, during our interview she shared candid stories of being overwhelmed by all the responsibilities placed on teachers and moments when she would send documents home in English, knowing that they should at least be translated to the primary language spoken at home.

Her motivation to participate in this trip developed from two overarching interests: first, to “see where a lot of my students’ families were coming from” and connect this deeper cultural understanding to her teaching, and secondly, to gain experience as a teacher educator. She had decided to transition from a teacher to a “teacher-leader” role by pursuing her master’s degree to become a technology specialist.

In preparing for the trip, Brenda reflected on how she would balance working with the Etamabal teachers while valuing the culture of the community. She described the responsibility she felt to teach instructional strategies from her U.S. perspective while also being aware of the cultural context that surrounded their professional learning workshops.

Ana. Ana teaches at a diverse elementary school that also serves a large number of Latino students. She regularly seeks out professional learning opportunities and had recently completed a Math for English Language Learners course. Ana is relatively new to the teaching profession but has a longtime interest in language and literacy. Prior to becoming an ESOL teacher, she worked in a library and volunteered with tutoring programs that provided services for both children and adults whose first language was not English. She received her bachelor's degree in modern language and linguistics and graduate degree in intercultural communication with a focus on Spanish language and culture. It was during her graduate studies when she first traveled to South America. This "amazing experience" allowed her to "validate" her studies by connecting what she learned in school with the hands-on experience of being immersed in communities and cultures in South America. Ana described the opportunity to travel to the remote town of Juyub as different from her previous travels, since these had always been near a major city. Her primary motivations for participating in this trip were to learn about "the language of the people in Juyub" and "wanting to help people [the Etamabal teachers] and learn at the same time."

Ella. Ella is a doctoral student with a master's degree in international education. She has studied abroad in Eastern Europe and Africa and speaks conversational German and Swahili. After receiving her national board certification she traveled throughout the world to provide professional development for teachers in South Asia, Africa, and Central America. When I first invited Ella to participate in this dissertation via email, she responded:

I have lived abroad on and off since I was two years old, so living in a developing country doesn't have the same effect on me as it would another teacher.

Additionally, I've taught abroad both short-term and long-term, so again this wasn't a novel experience for me.

I explained to her that I was interested in learning about the experiences of all teachers who participated in the summer 2015 trip to Guatemala, in which she responded that she would like to participate.

Ella learned about the opportunity through her Ph.D. listserv and contemplated going on the trip for years. During this time she frequently communicated with the NGO coordinator. She described how important it was for her to share similar beliefs about literacy and how literacy professional development workshops should be implemented. She felt that she shared a "balanced literacy perspective" with the NGO coordinator and this supported her decision to participate. Through her conversations with the NGO coordinator she also learned about the language revitalization efforts of the Etamabal teachers and was excited to explore her interest in second language acquisition within this context. Although she had extensive experiences traveling and teaching in other

countries, she felt this was an opportunity to “expand my horizons and see what it would be like to work with people from an indigenous culture.” During her interview she often talked about how she lived in El Salvador during her childhood years and tended to generalize her experiences there to other people and situations occurring in Latin America.

Noelle. Noelle grew up spending time with family friends who were from Central America. She learned to speak Spanish through these encounters but “lost” the language until she began to formally study Spanish in high school. She has a master’s degree in international development and was a Latin American studies minor. Her knowledge of Guatemala stemmed from these studies when she read about the civil war and many different indigenous groups and languages. In graduate school she also completed an internship in South America and worked on a health project in Africa. During her interview she shared how it was important for her to continue “getting in international work, so I wanted to go abroad” and that she wanted to “get exposure to different forms of education internationally.” She viewed this trip as an opportunity to achieve both these goals and apply her teaching skills to implementing the professional development workshops for the Etamabal teachers.

Noelle often discussed her lack of opportunity for professional development as a foreign language teacher and felt there was little support for her content area. She oftentimes had to search for opportunities on her own. This led her to become interested in being a teacher educator and provide professional development workshops for new Spanish teachers in her region. Through participating in this trip she hoped to “gain some

experience with teacher professional development in an international setting” and “also to gain more insight into literacy.” She felt that because literacy was not a core content area for foreign language teachers, she needed to prepare for the trip by meeting with the literacy specialist in her school. This helped her develop a better understanding of the formal language related to literacy, which she hoped would allow her to better connect with the other volunteers.

In summary, the participants’ expanded background information was presented in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of the educational experiences and professional lives of the U.S. teachers who participated in this research. This lends important understanding to the unique ways that the participants made meaning from this experience. For each one of them, this immersive experience was a chosen endeavor; nonetheless, their responses to this experience were genuine and provide important insight into how they were able to make meaning and use this rich experience to inform their professional learning.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Table I shows the demographic information of the participants. All six of the participants were female; five identified as white, non-Hispanic and one identified as white, Hispanic. According to the demographic question relating to age, three of the U.S. teachers were between the ages of 20 and 30, one was between the age of 30 and 40, and two were 50 years and above. Teaching experience of the participants is as follows: Ana (2 years), Noelle (3 years), Brenda and Elizabeth (4 years), Ella (8 years), and Alicia (25 years). In terms of languages spoken fluently other than English, four of the six participants spoke Spanish, one was fluent in American Sign

Language, and one participant only spoke English. During the interviews, all six of the participants discussed international travel, however this immersive experience was their first time traveling within a developing country to a remote geographical area characterized by a strong indigenous presence. This was also their first time traveling to Guatemala, except for Ella, who had visited when she was a young child. Next, the findings derived from the participant interviews, according to each research question, are presented in the following sections.

Research Question One

What meaning do teachers, who participate in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience, make of their experience? In response to Research Question One, three overarching themes emerged from analyzing participants' interview data: *immersion as a vehicle for meaning making*, *expanded globalized perspectives*, and *expanded perspectives of teaching and learning*. Specifically, I read and analyzed each participant's interview transcript, which resulted in theme creation, and then looked at data from all the participants, collapsed the themes, and these three broad themes emerged. Within each of these themes, subthemes emerged that have helped me further organize the findings for presentation.

Immersion as a Vehicle for Meaning Making

This theme is presented first for two reasons: (1) Understanding how the participants viewed immersion as a vehicle for meaning making is key to understanding the remainder of the presentation of findings. The participants frequently referred back to their immersive experience when detailing more specific aspects of their meaning

making, which will be described in more detail throughout this chapter, and (2) All six of the participants talked about specific aspects of the immersive experience that prompted them to make meaning of their surroundings and make connections to their own lives. While the participants did not specifically call this experience a vehicle for meaning making, all of the data led toward this immersive experience as a catalyst for learning and meaning making. For example, Brenda's comment captured this point clearly as she addressed how her participation in the immersive experience directly informed her understanding of teaching and learning. Specifically, she talked about how the experience of being immersed in languages (Spanish and Balam) which she did not speak directly informed her understanding of working with students and families in the U.S. whose first language was not English. She shared, "I guess it put it back into perspective of how important those things [using visuals for second language learners; translating letters for parents into Spanish] actually are and now it's really internalized and an important part of the way I teach because of that experience [in Guatemala]."

As the interview data will show, this trip was also an opportunity for the participants to immerse themselves in another classroom, work side-by-side with teachers from another culture, and observe their pedagogical styles. The interview data suggest that the participants talked about the immersive experience as being a vehicle for meaning making in two principle ways: *cultural immersion* and *Etamabal School immersion*. Furthermore, all six of the participants described being *surprised* by what they observed and experienced. These subthemes are further described in detail below.

Cultural immersion. All of the participants talked about how being immersed in a new culture was an enormous aspect of their experience. Cultural immersion was an important vehicle for helping them to learn about life in Guatemala and become more proximate to complex social issues, particularly those experienced by indigenous communities. For instance, Alicia initially described the marginalization of indigenous communities as stemming from “people’s unwillingness to accept the diversity in their own country.” However, once she was inside the Juyub community, she shared how this type of cultural immersion was like nothing she had experienced before: “...it’s completely different when you see it first hand, in that sense I don’t know what could have prepared me for coming face-to-face with that.” Throughout the interviews the participants shared their travel itinerary with me, which allowed them to experience two succinct parts of the culture. They were able to experience life in the remote indigenous village of Juyub, while also visiting “tourist hot spots”, such as the famous city of Antigua, which is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and *Lago de Atitlán*, a beautiful volcanic lake lined with small indigenous towns. During this part of the trip, participants went zip lining, slept in nice hotels, and shopped in markets.

The trek to Juyub was arduous, requiring a 10-hour bus ride through mountainous terrain and climbing 6,200 feet through the *Sierra de los Cuchumatanes*. The roads are often small, windy, and lack maintenance. The landscape is breathtaking and unlike anything the participants had seen before. The following excerpt was taken from Ana’s journal, which she offered to share with me during her interview. The excerpt illustrates

the impact of cultural immersion through the eyes of Ana and captures the sense that the other participants also conveyed in the interviews:

Sunday 7/5: Travel to Juyub. The trip to Juyub was long. We went up, down, around, like a roller coaster. We saw rural areas with oxen, pigs, horses, and sheep; a boy herding sheep across the road, women in long red skirts-pencil style, identical. There was a religious procession with a statue. We made a few stops, visited a church, took pictures, got coffee. Saw parrots with umbrellas above their perches. We left at 8 am and I think we arrived at 6 or 7. I lost track of the time. Families and teachers greeted us. We slept on cots in sleeping bags. I heard dogs barking and roosters crowing in the middle of the night.

For Alicia, traveling to Juyub was “kind of magical” because it reminded her of being in her native country: “There were moments [in] the countryside [when] you could almost smell and taste and feel the same kinds of things, the wood burning and the chickens running around and the pigs, [it] is like rural South America.”

This culturally immersive opportunity also challenged participants’ worldviews. Although all of the participants had traveled internationally, and four had previously traveled within Central and South America, this immersive experience allowed them to observe and listen to stories and perspectives of community members whom they never would have met if not for participation in this immersive experience. Once inside the Juyub community, participants lived, slept, and ate within the walls of the Etamabal School and experienced living conditions that were very different from their life circumstances at home. For example, they often went without hot water, electricity, and

were woken by eager children who arrived early to school. Brenda described “how excited the kids were to come to school”, so excited, in fact, that “they would show up early, I actually had a kid wake me up one day, it was kind of frightening but also just awesome to see.” All six of the participants described an incident when they were woken in the early hours of the morning by the squeals of a pig being butchered and families lining up to receive their portion.

During the interviews the participants shared specific details of their itinerary while in Juyub and talked about how different these experiences were for them. For instance, during lunch breaks they would walk around the community and visit different sites, which included the local coffee cooperative, watching traditional weaving in a community member’s home, and observing women from the village prepare traditional *boxboles* (a traditional dish of leafy greens stuffed with corn dough) for lunch. One participant described being followed in the streets by young children chanting “¡Americanas, Americanas!” [Americans, Americans]. Elizabeth conveyed the following about her experience visiting the weaver’s home: “When we met [the NGO coordinator’s] friend who lived in the small house with many, many people...that really stood out to me as wow, this is a common way that people live in this town and probably in the country.”

The interview data indicate that language barriers were a constant presence for all the participants. The NGO had hired translators to accompany the group but due to an unforeseen complication they were no longer available. For Brenda and Elizabeth, the two participants who did not speak Spanish, this meant they were reliant on other group

members to translate for them. According to Brenda, “I felt like I was useless at times because of the language barrier, when I wanted to say something or do something I would have to bother someone.” Furthermore, although Spanish was the primary medium for communication, everyone they encountered in Juyub was communicating in a second or third language. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, the mother tongue language of Juyub and for most of the Etamabal teachers is Balam. This created a complex dynamic of learning to read non-verbal cues and relying on observations to develop understanding about the people they encountered. Ella described moments when she would rely on visual cues to interpret teachers’ pedagogical styles because they were often speaking to the children in Balam. Elizabeth added, “For me it was a lot of visual observation and trying to read people with no basis of what I was reading because it’s a totally different culture.”

In addition to culture as a vehicle for understanding this immersive experience, so was their immersion in the Etamabal School. Presented next are the findings from the second subtheme that unfolded during analysis of the interview data.

Etamabal School immersion. The participants provided many details about their educational experiences and observations while in the Etamabal school. Alicia recalled being surprised by the enthusiastic welcome the group received from the Etamabal teachers:

They seemed so genuinely happy to see you and to welcome you there and that was something that I didn’t expect...it was such a warm and exciting welcome

that I was taken aback by that, but it made me feel very happy to be there, to see their response.

As participants settled into their life within the school they talked about becoming familiar with the cultural norms in the educational setting. Five of the six participants shared being surprised by the “the level of respect they all had for one another” when they observed interactions between the students and teachers. They shared observations of how the younger children removed their shoes and politely asked “*¿con permiso?*” [with permission] before entering their classrooms and how older children swept floors and handed out cups of *incaparina* (a government sponsored rice-based nutritional drink) to the younger children at lunchtime. Some of the aforementioned examples were captured by Elizabeth’s comments:

[I was] peeking out of the 6th grade classroom, seeing all of the cute small children ask permission to enter the room, that is amazing; seeing the kids brush their teeth and line up and seeing them all line up their shoes, seeing everything for the first time, even seeing the 6th graders work to pass out the cups for their nutritional drink and sweep the floors and operate, and seeing them and being like, oh that looks like one of my students too. I also will never forget seeing the smallest 3 year olds climb the stairs by themselves to go to the pre-k program on their own and watching it all operate, so awesomely.

Alicia placed emphasis on the differences she observed between the daily routines of U.S. and Etamabal students:

That's how I felt. It was so different. I mean everything from the way the kids come in to their breakfast when they serve them their little cup of whatever from the government. Everything was so different that I was fascinated by all those different parts of it.

The days were scheduled in two parts – in the morning each U.S. teacher was paired with an Etamabal teacher. The U.S. teacher would observe and/or participate in the Etamabal teacher's class depending on their language proficiency level. In the afternoons, all of the U.S. and Etamabal teachers came together to work on predetermined literacy topics for professional learning, such as effective ways to incorporate morning messages and interactive writing strategies. Ana described this well as she affirmed her positive experiences collaborating with all of the teachers:

There were a lot of good experiences. I liked having the workshops with the other teachers because you got to hear the other teachers, their opinions, their perspectives, they were sharing with us. I think that was one of the best experiences. We all worked together and everybody had different styles.

The following morning, the U.S./Etamabal teacher pairs would reconvene in the classrooms and implement the component of the lesson plan they had worked on the afternoon before. The structure of the afternoon group sessions evolved organically during their time in Juyub and was often interrupted by unforeseen circumstances. For example, all of the participants talked about the absence of two Etamabal teachers who were required to attend a recertification exam in another town and missed two full days of workshops. There was also news of a possible protest that would have blocked part of

the Pan-American Highway, therefore the NGO coordinators made the decision to leave Juyub one day early to avoid this situation. These unforeseen circumstances were an important learning experience for the U.S. teachers, both educationally and culturally, because they developed an understanding of how different the educational structure was in Guatemala, and this was influenced by the shortened timeframe with both the Etamabal teachers and in Juyub. For Noelle, Alicia, and Elizabeth, they were not sure what to expect prior to the trip and were concerned about being a constructive resource for the Etamabal teachers. Brenda thought their work “felt unfinished” because she expected to “get more accomplished...I thought we’d change more in that time.”

The interview data suggested that relationship building with the Etamabal teachers was a complex terrain that the participants had to navigate. These relationships appeared to be constrained by the short timeframe, language barriers, unknown cultural norms, and varying worldviews. For example, Noelle found that competing cultural norms made it “really difficult” to be a resource for the Etamabal teachers because she wanted them to ask for help on specific topics but felt they were hesitant to request assistance. She noted, “I think this is a cultural thing, she [the Etamabal teacher she was paired with] was just very open and was like I just want whatever you can give me, which is very different obviously then what you would expect here in the United States.” Brenda described how these constraints impacted her ability to develop relationships: “I felt like a lot of the other teachers got closer quicker and also the language [barrier] and the time that I had with her was limited.” Ella described the resistance she felt from the Etamabal teacher she was paired with and conveyed the following about their

interactions: “[The Etamabal teacher] said just tell me what I’m doing wrong and I’ll change. [I thought] that feels like a trap. It’s not that you’re doing anything wrong, it’s just I have some different ideas that I can share.”

Despite these constraints, five of the six participants discussed how the relationship building process also flourished, through engaging in dialogue, sharing personal stories, and finding common ground. For instance, Ana’s remark encompasses the positive experience of collaborating with the Etamabal teachers when she commented:

I felt like I got along really well with the teacher that I worked with. She was very helpful and I thought some of the other teachers, when you’d hear them talking in the workshops, some of them were funny, they had a sense of humor, but everybody was very nice and nobody was cranky and miserable and everybody tried hard to collaborate, I can’t really think of a negative thing.

For the sixth participant, Ella, who often talked about the difficult experiences she had with the Etamabal teacher she was paired with, she described positive experiences when observing other classrooms: “When I got to visit some of the other classrooms I saw really cool things happening and I was excited about that.” Initially, Brenda found it difficult to develop relationships with the teachers and recounted a moment when she was able to share her experiences working in a deaf school: “They [the Etamabal teachers] were just blown away that for one, deaf kids were in school there [in the U.S.], and that I was able to teach in a classroom with multiple disabilities.” This led to further

conversations between the teachers about how children with special needs are included or excluded from school systems in the U.S. and Guatemala.

In summary, the interview data revealed that immersion in a new culture and new educational setting served as vehicles for meaning making for all of the participants. Furthermore, all six of the participants talked about comparing these experiences to their own familiar contexts of being teachers and/or teacher educators in the U.S. and reported being “surprised” by what they observed during the immersive experience. This subtheme is further described below.

Surprises. As participants immersed themselves in a new culture and educational setting, they talked about the important “surprises” that presented themselves. These surprises suggest that the teachers were crossing boundaries between the familiar and unfamiliar. A detailed look at the interview content revealed that all of the participants often talked about surprises when they were addressing immersion as a vehicle for meaning making. Therefore, to further investigate this emerging theme, I analyzed the interview transcripts for passages that referred to ideas associated with being surprised by their experiences in Guatemala. This approach to further analysis provided a deeper understanding of what emerged as surprises for the participants as a result of their immersive experience and how this informed their meaning making. After re-examining the interview data, analysis determined that there were over 100 passages where participants talked about the surprises that emerged for them. Within this theme, three subthemes emerged that further organize the findings: *level of instruction*, *way of life*, and *being teacher educators*. These emerging themes are presented in further detail below.

Level of instruction. All of the participants admitted that the level of instruction they observed in the Etamabal classrooms surprised them. The Juyub community is situated in an isolated part of the country, characterized by extreme poverty and lack of resources. Despite these circumstances, the participants were “shocked” about the “level of the teachers and instruction”, particularly when observing dual language instruction and lessons in subjects such as math and literacy. When Ana reflected on her observations of math instruction, she shared, “I didn’t realize it would be like that. It was almost like Common Core.” She further conveyed, “I thought they were way more advanced than our second graders in my school. It was verging on multiplication.” In describing her surprise of the mathematical and literacy pedagogical skills of the Etamabal teachers, Ella, who is a part-time math coach, added, “I can’t even get my teachers here [in the U.S.] to do that all the time” and “even with teachers with much more education, they might not try it.” Both Brenda and Alicia emphasized their surprise in how young students engaged with dual language instruction and developed fluency in Balam and Spanish. As Brenda described, “it shows you cognitively how at that young age they’re just able to adapt that second language so quickly, it’s amazing.”

Noelle, Alicia, and Elizabeth noted the “level of autonomy” of students in classrooms that ranged from preschool to 6th grade. Alicia’s illustrative quote reflects how the participants personalized these surprises by making comparisons to their own classrooms back home:

They [the Etamabal students] don’t have the luxury of sitting around or having somebody organize their playtime, their lives are so different from the lives of

the children that we teach. I also think that the [Etamabal] school has done a great job of setting those expectations that this is what you're going to do, you're going to come in, sit down, and I feel like we could do more of that here [at her school].

Alicia further expressed her surprise when noticing the attention span of children in the kindergarten classroom and their fine motor skills:

I was very surprised at that because...I watch kids in my first grade class and they have trouble holding a pencil ...and you think boy with all the things we have here that supposedly prepare kids for school, how is it that they're [Etamabal students] so far ahead of our kids in that respect?

Some of the aforementioned examples were also expressed by Brenda's comments:

What else stood out to me – how excited they were to come to school, how eager they were to learn, the independence of the kids, I wanted to video it and show it to every parent in [my school]. The independence of these kids and their tactile, fine motor skills. We [the participants] were talking about it and maybe it's because the young girls start weaving at such a young age, they're always working with their hands but the young kids that were able to tie their shoes and the way they were holding their pencils at such a young age, that also stood out to me.

Way of life. Five of the six participants described instances where they were surprised by the conditions in which the community lived. This included confronting complex social issues such as poverty, civil war, and the marginalization of indigenous

communities. Elizabeth emphasized her surprise that resulted from being more proximate to poverty than she had been before, sharing, “I can’t get over the poverty that exists there and the way that so many people live. It’s not something I realized that still existed.” Brenda often described how this experience opened her eyes to the realities people face living in rural communities within a developing country and made connections to Latino students in her classroom: “[This experience] put more of a visual in my head about what they might go home to, or when they go to [Central America] over the summer...what a stark difference that is.” For Alicia, this experience contextualized information she had only read in books about the role of language and power in the marginalization of indigenous groups in Guatemala:

I knew what I had read way back, reading about Rigoberta Menchú and the struggle of the indigenous people and the situation. I knew a little bit of the history of that particular region, and... I think that peoples unwillingness to accept the diversity in their own country has made language stand in the way of development for many of the indigenous people and that’s true of every country, not just Guatemala, but the way it plays out in Guatemala is just more by language than any other [discriminating factor].

Four of the six participants were surprised by how hardworking the Etamabal teachers, students, and community members worked. Their views made reference to statements such as how hard people had to work in order to survive and how eager the teachers and students were to learn. This is exemplified by Noelle’s remark:

I saw how incredibly willing to learn they were, which was really inspiring and refreshing. Teachers that were extremely hard working and it made me reflect on my teaching experience and thinking about how other teachers in other parts of the world [are] doing the same or similar things.

The immersive experience prompted her to further reflect on students' motivations and make comparisons to her classroom:

I think about how micromanaged a lot of our students are and how the students who are at the [Etamabal] school were there because they wanted to be there. I would have so many students that I think if given the choice, they would just not come to school unfortunately. Whereas these students they came and they were wanting to learn, even if they struggled with things you could tell they wanted to be there.

Ana, a second year ESOL teacher, noted how developing an understanding of life in a Central American village and being subsequently “surprised at how hard the people worked there” could shape teachers' perspectives of students in their own classrooms. She said: “They'll [U.S. teachers] have a different perspective of their ESOL students, where they came from, you might make a connection to what [those] students have experienced, you might be a little more tolerant of different things that the students do.”

Being teacher educators. A major part of the participants' role on the trip was to assist the Etamabal teachers with implementing literacy-focused professional learning topics into their classrooms. Four of the six participants discussed being surprised by their experiences of being teacher educators and talked about the tension they felt

between wanting to create set objectives for the workshops and having to implement these into unfamiliar contexts. This representative quote from Brenda captured the tension well:

I thought we'd get a lot more done, which was also a great experience to see how slow change can really occur especially when there's all these million other cultural things into play and resources and things like that.

When participants talked about their experiences collaborating with the Etamabal teachers to implement professional learning topics, responses were varied and generally positive in nature, indicating the important role of collaboration and relationship building in transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. For example, Brenda shared how she initially struggled with making a meaningful connection with the Etamabal teacher she was paired with and had to figure out how to navigate these barriers. She found that by sharing her personal experiences of teaching in a school that supports students with multiple disabilities, she was able to build relationships, which in turn, supported her teacher educator role:

I brought it [teaching students with multiple disabilities] up a lot. You could tell she [the Etamabal teacher] was curious because she'd ask one question and then be quiet, almost afraid to ask more and so I would just talk and she would ask questions occasionally and comment, but I felt it was necessary to tell. I wanted to share with her where I'm coming from.

One participant, however, often made reference to the difficulties she faced in establishing rapport with the Etamabal teacher she was paired with, who she perceived as

being resistant to change. She shared how this difficult experience led to introspection and uncovering previously held biases:

I would say it was hard because I spent most of my time with [the Etamabal teacher] and I spent most of my time trying to think about how to make [the teacher] move an eighth of an inch. So I guess in that, personally reflecting on my coaching style, which I continue to do, it's not necessarily a strength of mine so I continue to work on that. I think from some of the other [Etamabal] teachers I saw really cool things happening and it reminded me not to underestimate people just because they don't have a master's degree in education, it doesn't mean that they can't provide really great instruction.

In summary, the interview data suggested that meaning making was greatly informed by the disequilibrium participants faced when being immersed in a new culture and within a new educational setting within this culture. This experience presented an opportunity for a group of U.S. teachers to cross boundaries between the familiar and unfamiliar and make meaning from the context of the people they encountered and the classrooms they observed. Through being immersed in new settings, participants were often surprised by their surroundings, particularly when describing the level of instruction they observed in the Etamabal School, the way of life in Juyub, and the experience of being teacher educators. Immersion as a vehicle for meaning making, as the first overarching theme, provides a foundation for understanding the findings presented throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Presented next are the findings for the second overarching theme, *expanded globalized perspectives*, and the two subthemes that unfolded during analysis of the interview data that further organize the presentation of findings: *knowledge of world conditions* and *perspective consciousness*.

Expanded Globalized Perspectives

During the interviews participants shared reflections on their cultural and educational immersion and details about the surprises that emerged from these experiences. These reflections seemed to indicate that participants developed a deeper understanding of the world around them and expanded their globalized perspectives through their experiences. For example, Noelle connected her participation in this immersive experience to the development of globalized perspectives when she shared: “I want to continue to do these sort of things to keep a global perspective and to continue to better myself as a teacher and keep an open mind.” When I prompted her to describe what she meant by global perspectives, she detailed, “I would say having an understanding of different areas of the world, different cultures and people, and how they interact and live on a daily basis.” She further elaborated that having an open mind improves teaching because “it helps them [teachers] realize all the different ways that students learn.” This sentiment was also echoed in Alicia’s description of how the immersive nature of the trip was integral to expanding her globalized perspectives and overall meaning making process. She noted:

It’s good to keep in mind how different people live in different places. It’s just a reminder of how there’s so many amazing things and so many rich things in this

world. Unless you go away and get to experience them, you don't necessarily see them.

Using coding strategies in the analysis of the interview transcripts and making connections between the codes, there were two principle ways in which participants described and engaged with their expanded globalized perspectives: *knowledge of world conditions* and *perspective consciousness*. These two subthemes are discussed next.

Knowledge of world conditions. The interview data suggested that participants gained new or expanded understandings through their cultural immersion about issues they only knew about on the surface and cultures they had only read about in books. Their views made reference to statements that reflected an expanded understanding of world conditions and complex social issues, such as civil war and poverty. This is exemplified by the following conversation with Elizabeth:

My view of Guatemala...I feel so white and degrading, I can't get over the poverty that exists there and the way that so many people live. It's not something I realized that still existed. I also loved the history of the different colors and different shirts and skirts. The men in Juyub don't wear their traditional outfits because of the war and they've lost that part of their culture but in the bigger cities they do still because they weren't as worried about the guerillas and soldiers during the war. For me, and I'm still learning, I can't remember if it was in *Caminar*...but just how the United States funded that war and caused that war, that's crazy to me, that's just my limited view of politics in general. My view of Guatemala is, I don't know, it was so eye opening because so many people it

appeared worked so hard. I've read studies that the Latino/Hispanic cultures have the happiest people because they're close in community, they're close with their families, everyone's living together. I definitely saw a lot of happiness in this small, impoverished town so for me that was also a lesson or affirmation of the study. There's just so many different parts of Guatemala that are all so different. I guess I learned that it's way more complex than I ever thought it would be and there's so many different parts of it that were so different and so intriguing.

Three of the six participants talked about their expanded understanding of the Guatemalan civil war and the devastating impact it had on indigenous communities like Juyub. Ana recalled a moment when the Etamabal teachers opened up and shared painful memories from the war: "One person said, I think [the Etamabal teacher] was in the back of a pickup with his aunt or uncle and then the soldiers came and dragged them out of the truck and killed them right there on the road." She also described a moment when she became aware of the unmarked mass grave located next to the school, stating, "the one thing that was most surprising was that area next to the school where all the bodies were." These "very poignant" reminders of how civil war impacted the community prompted further discussions between the teachers. The interview data revealed that the participants learned about intergenerational trauma and cultural norms that shielded younger generations from the realities of war. This is reflected in the following statement from one participant: "One of them [an Etamabal teacher] was saying that the younger generations don't have any idea what happened, they don't talk about it."

Two of the six participants described how their knowledge of world conditions, particularly related to issues of poverty, was changed as a result of this intense immersive experience. Brenda and Elizabeth made reference to the travel itinerary and the stark differences and class divides they encountered between their time in Juyub and the other tourist destinations. Brenda recounted the following after visiting Antigua and *Lago de Atitlán*:

I like them. I had fun but they were very touristy. It's like wow when I go to other touristy places in different countries they're surrounded by just as much poverty but this time I actually got to see it. It's almost like a blind spot in the country. I just wondered about how things work differently in different parts of the country.

This assertion was further expanded upon by Elizabeth's remark in which she described becoming aware of the class divides within Guatemala and how this contributed to her confronting her own privilege: "I mean now I'm thinking about the guilt I had and I was thinking even before we left the country when we went to...*Panahachel* (a town located on *Lago de Atitlán*), I even had the guilt there, just seeing the divide among the country."

Perspective consciousness. The "awareness of self and other's worldview and factors that influence the development of an individual's worldview" (adapted from Hanvey, 1976 as cited in Case, 1993, pp. 319-320) was a recurring theme that emerged throughout the participants' interviews. For example, Alicia described how this immersive experience expanded her awareness of different worldviews, sharing, "There are just differences in the way people see the world and it seems so obvious but then

when you go and you work there [in Juyub] you live that experience and it's so different." Ana added that this experience helped her "realize that everybody's different and they might do things differently but there isn't a wrong or right, it's sometimes your cultures [are] just different."

Data revealed that four of the six participants emphasized the importance of "not imposing" their beliefs on the Etamabal teachers and their classroom practices. They made comments related to the importance of valuing the culture of the community when working with the Etamabal teachers. This is illustrated by Noelle's comment:

[I did not want] to impose my beliefs or the educational structure versus the cultural values that we have in the United States on their system. I wish I had a better understanding of what their system was and how things were done and how we could work with the system that they already have to improve the teachers.

Brenda expanded this sentiment by mentioning the balance she strived to achieve in valuing the cultural context that surrounded her experience of being a teacher educator. She described this as the following: "[We had to] teach them [the Etamabal teachers] what methods we know and instructional strategies but also preserving their culture. It's kind of a line that you have to preserve in a way." Alicia added that knowing the history of the community influenced her approach to working with the Etamabal teachers: "I felt like the people as a whole and the group had been victims of people coming in and trying to change them and telling them what to do." She frequently mentioned being "cautious" and "reluctant" to "jump in and start" working with the teachers. Her following remarks encompass the importance of perspective consciousness – being aware of both her and

others' worldviews – in tailoring teacher education to the specific cultural contexts of the classroom:

For example, there's some things that I could see right away, my first impression was that, I was assigned to a kindergarten teacher and of course coming with the frame of reference of kindergarten in this country, I thought oh wow the children are sitting for too long. Maybe she could break up the chunks of time they all sit down, but I was glad I never said anything at first because I wanted to wait and see and then what I learned in the week is that those children have a much longer attention span than our children here.

In summary, theme two findings suggest that participants expanded their globalized perspectives through their immersive experience. By reflecting on the surprises that emerged from this experience, the participants described their meaning making in two principle ways: knowledge of world conditions and perspective consciousness. The immersive experience created the opportunity for participants to become more proximate to complex social issues such as civil war and extreme poverty. The interview data also suggested that participants were concerned about imposing their beliefs and encountered tension between providing professional learning workshops and navigating spaces that represented varying worldviews. Presented next are the findings of the third overarching theme, *expanded perspectives of teaching and learning*, and the subthemes that unfolded during analysis of the interview data to further illustrate this overarching theme: *reaffirming*, *questioning*, *new understandings*, and *reflection*. These four subthemes are described in detail below.

Expanded Perspectives of Teaching and Learning

The data indicate that as participants had an opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture and observe classrooms in action, they became more familiar with classroom routines and teaching practices and made connections to their own professional contexts. For instance, Ana's remark encompasses the value she perceived in observing other classrooms:

It [the immersive experience] opened my eyes to another culture, another way of learning, in fact it made me even want to possibly go to another country and see what they do in their classes, not just Guatemala but other countries because not everybody is the same. I think it's really interesting to see what is working in their classrooms.

Another illustrative quote reflecting how this immersive experience expanded the participants' perspectives of teaching and learning includes Alicia's comment:

I think that in some ways, it was really a true exchange because it gave me a lot of things to think about, which wasn't unexpected for me, I knew it was going to be enriching but I didn't know in what ways. I guess I would say that it's so enriching because you get to think about your profession in a totally different context. Yet there are so many commonalities of preparation and getting to know the children and wondering about this little guy who is not keeping up with the others and dealing with all of that. It's really an interesting way to look at your own profession. To go into another context and then come back and sort of see it through almost another lens.

The findings that unfolded during analysis of the interview transcripts suggested that all six of the participants expanded their perspectives of teaching and learning as a result of their elected participation in this immersive experience. Even though the ways in which participants discussed their expanded perspectives reflected great diversity, their responses clustered around the following subthemes: *reaffirming*, *questioning*, and *new understandings*. Furthermore, *reflection*, as a vehicle for meaning making, emerged as a recurring subtheme throughout the interviews. These four subthemes are described in further detail below.

Reaffirming. The opportunity to collaborate with “like minded” U.S. teachers was “amazing and incredible” for five of the six participants. This emerged during the interviews when the participants shared their views on the benefits for teachers participating in this type of immersive experience. Elizabeth’s comment captured this point clearly as she addressed the isolation she often felt in the teaching profession:

There was a lot of like-minded people [on the trip] and I think there was a moment where we were all talking about some of the problems in [our school district] and we were like, we’ve got to remember this moment of how many of us want the best and care, because there’s so many people at various schools who just don’t do a good job, don’t care, and I think the like-minded bonding was another perk that I didn’t even anticipate.

For these participants, the knowledge that they were not alone and other teachers shared similar values reaffirmed their commitment to teaching in a variety of ways. Noelle emphasized this point when she commented: “I really strive to make my class a [place]

where students want to be and want to be learning. I'd say this [immersive experience] reaffirms that for me." She further elaborated how her participation reaffirmed her commitment to "making the material we're learning relevant to things in their lives or ways they can use it." Alicia emphasized how the opportunity to observe instructional practices in the Etamabal School reaffirmed ideas and beliefs regarding the learning capabilities of young children:

I had been thinking a lot about this idea of being self-guided because I teach first grade and they're so young and for a long time my team and I discussed how they come from kindergarten...and how the children sometimes don't do things for themselves. They sit and wait around for somebody to move them along because they're used to this...sometimes we've talked about what could they do at the end of kindergarten to help in this. I feel like even more strongly now that children are capable of so much more than we allow them to do and definitely seeing that there [in the Etamabal School] has convinced me of that, that I was sort of leaning toward before.

Two of the participants discussed how this immersive experience reaffirmed their beliefs regarding teacher education. For Ella, the experience of observing instructional practices in an impoverished, rural village and subsequently being surprised by the advanced level of instruction "reinforced" her belief that "just because you don't have a lot of resources doesn't mean you can't do a lot of good instruction." She further explained how the immersive experience reaffirmed her belief that, as a teacher educator,

there needs to be a “different focus”; one that emphasizes differentiated instruction over material resources:

You don’t need a SmartBoard to be a good instructor. What you need is to respond to your students’ needs, you need to be aware of your students’ needs and you need to be responsive to them and you need to adapt what you’re doing to meet their needs. So it just reinforced that for me.

Brenda added how this experience revealed commonalities in teacher education that cross cultural boundaries. She shared, “making the personal relationships and connections and having to work with teachers to change and having them have positive experiences with that change seemed universal.”

Questioning. During the interviews, four of the six participants made reference to making comparisons between the Etamabal classrooms and their professional contexts, and subsequently, questioning current practices and norms in their educational settings. Alicia, an expert teacher with over 25 years of experience, commented on how experiences within the Etamabal School led her to question educational practices back home: “For me it was interesting because it brought to light all these questions about how we do things here [at her school].” She detailed how the experience of being surprised by what she observed in the classrooms, particularly related to the fine motor skills of the young Etamabal students, led her to rethink how “we are too quick to label them [U.S. students] with fine motor problems” and “it made me question whether we don’t give them enough hands on experiences right now...maybe we’re seeing more fine motor issues then need to exist in the population.” As the following remark illustrates, this

experience also led her to further examine the role of technology in the classroom and question the expectations, or lack thereof, placed on young students:

I said to them [administrators at her school] two things that stood out for me is that one – the attention span [of the Etamabal students], and I think that’s directly related to, well, unfortunately all the technology we have here is creating shorter and shorter attention spans; and then [second point] fortunately I think they [the Juyub community] still preserve that face-to-face communication value...just the art of conversation and interaction that we, I think, are losing in many ways. We see it with our white middle-class kids all the time. In writing when you prompt them and have conversations before you get them writing, they used to be richer and now the kids seem, they’re not as rich and we suspect that part of it is because three year olds are on iPads and you hear and you see that kind of thing and it just makes you wonder.

Another demonstrative quote reflecting how participants observed instructional practices in the Etamabal School and questioned their own ideas about teaching and learning includes Ana’s comment:

Then all the kids drew pictures too. A lot of times in the U.S. kids are like ‘I can’t draw that, I don’t know how to draw that’ these kids never said that. They would all start drawing, nobody whined about having to draw they just started drawing right away. I thought that was interesting.

Two of the participants mentioned that the immersive experience led them to question other aspects of the teaching profession. For example, Noelle emphasized the

significance of collaboration between all the teachers and questioned the structure of professional learning opportunities at her school:

Seeing that also in terms of the teachers working together, how we did in the workshops at the end in the afternoons. At my school we do grade-based, routine-based things but it always seems to be very forced. Maybe finding a common thing that people want to work on with their teams or with people in their content area and having the time for that, as opposed [to] having forced common time on things that aren't necessarily as applicable.

Ella, who worked as a part-time math coach, added how her difficult experiences with the Etamabal teacher she was paired with guided her thinking about her role as a teacher educator:

One thing that [the Etamabal teacher] made me think about was why are teachers in a classroom, why are they where they are? And for every person I think it's a different reason, even from day to day it might be a different reason right? I think I try to use more questioning to get to the teachers to figure out where they are and where they want to go as opposed to trying to impose myself on them.

These representative quotes illustrate how the participants' experiences in the Etamabal classrooms led them to reflect on their observations, reframe this knowledge to their professional contexts, and question current practices and norms.

New understandings. The interview data also revealed that all six of the participants talked about new understandings of teaching and learning as a result of their participation in the immersive experience and activated this new knowledge into their

professional roles in a variety of ways. For instance, Alicia described her observations of the Etamabal students' fine motor skills, the incorporation of self-guided learning in the younger classrooms, and the second language acquisition abilities of the children. In comparing these observations to her own students and teaching practice, she declared, "I can push the children [in her classroom] more" and "I feel even stronger about that than I did before because you can see the results [in the Etamabal students]." A comment voiced by Ana summarized how this immersive experience informed her professional learning, as well:

I'm more aware than ever of the importance of professional development and collaboration with other teachers. Collaborating with teachers from another culture provided a rich experience for me. I appreciated the support of the U.S.

teachers in the program. As a new teacher, this was a valuable experience for me.

Even though participants' incorporation of new understandings into their teaching practice reflected great diversity, they clustered around three main areas that illustrate their expanded perspectives of teaching and learning: *Guatemala*, *literacy topics*, and *working with other teachers*.

Guatemala. New understandings of Guatemalan geography and culture were mentioned throughout the interviews by three of the six participants as a factor that influenced their interactions with students and families in their schools upon return home. For instance, Alicia's comment reflected how she infused her experiences in Guatemala into developing relationships with parents of her students:

The first thing that I'm grateful for is that because we have so many families from Guatemala, so now when they tell me they're from Guatemala I ask right away where, and not just to be polite, I actually have a much better idea and it's so nice being able to say I visited and it's beautiful. So I like that because it's given me an added dimension to interacting with the parents of a lot of my students.

This sentiment was also echoed in Noelle's description of how she incorporated her immersive experience into creating an inclusive classroom by "really making sure that my classroom is a place that they want to be." She illustrated this by sharing the following example:

Using my experiences to share with my students, to make them more engaged, whether it's showing them pictures or different things from Guatemala. I had a video that I had the [Etamabal] students make for them so they were able to better connect.

For Ella, who lived in El Salvador as a child, this experience reminded her of the great diversity that exists within Latino culture. She conveyed the following about how this experience informed her thinking about new students in her classroom:

[I am] being more aware that maybe I don't know so much about where they're coming from. I guess if they're from El Salvador I still presume I know but if they're from Honduras or Guatemala being more aware of the fact that they could be from a more indigenous culture.

Literacy topics. Two of the six participants described specific pedagogical strategies that they either intended to make or had made in their classrooms. These

strategies were informed by their experiences in the Etamabal School. As a result of this experience, Ana, a novice ESOL teacher, shared, “I’ve become more aware of the value of group work in the classroom, therefore, I encourage more student talk and less teacher talk in my classes.” She further elaborated on how she incorporated the literacy professional learning topics into her teaching:

I’ve reflected on my experience and apply what I’ve learned to my classroom.

For example, I use the same structure for morning message that we practiced in the afternoon teacher workshops. I continue to use pairs and group work with my students. I plan to use pictures as sentence starts for stories as well.

In addition, Elizabeth, a middle school reading specialist, noted how the experience of collaborating with primary school teachers, from both the U.S. and Guatemala, was a welcomed opportunity to expand her knowledge outside of her content area. She shared: “I think for me it was refreshing because elementary people know what they’re doing, they’ve got it going on, so for me it was nice to see, learn more of that perspective.” She then incorporated these new understandings into her own professional context, which is demonstrated by the following example: “We worked with morning messages while we were there and that’s an elementary model that I wasn’t familiar with so I do that now, a modified version that fits into the adolescent classroom.”

Working with other teachers. Lastly, two of the six participants described how this immersive experience expanded their understanding of working with other teachers. Ella utilized this experience to reflect on her own coaching style. She recounted how she integrated new understandings that emerged into her role as a teaching coach:

I decided going into the job this year that I was going to spend a lot more time, put a lot more effort and investment into building relationships. For instance, there is one super resistant teacher, she's been teaching for a long time, she doesn't really want to change, and I haven't made any efforts to change her instruction but I have spent a lot of energy into building a relationship with her and before the end of the year I'm gonna get her to do something differently. I hope. I think knowing that just because I say someone should do something differently that's not really a reason for them to change their practice. I think I probably already knew that but [my counterpart] was a nice strong reminder of how easy it is to fail when you forget to take the other person into account.

She further conveyed her intention of "using what I've learned from my experience with [the Etamabal teacher she was paired with] to make sure that I'm validating her [a U.S. teacher she is coaching at her school] and where she's coming from." In addition, Brenda noted how her participation in the immersive experience resulted in "gaining more knowledge about working with teachers." Similar to Ella, she emphasized the importance of building relationships in order for teachers to be receptive to change.

Reflection. The concept of reflection was mentioned throughout the interviews by all six of the participants in a variety of ways, particularly when referring to developing their expanded perspectives of teaching and learning. The data suggested that throughout the immersive experience and upon returning home, reflection played an integral role in their meaning making process. Although reflection was often spontaneous and informal, many found value in reflecting with other like-minded

teachers and developed new understandings of their own teaching practice. For instance, Brenda's remarks embodies this when she commented:

In the case with the U.S. teachers talking about the difference [between U.S. and Etamabal students] and the kids and the independence, I didn't notice the fine motor skills until someone else pointed it out to me and then we talked about it together...it was helpful to make sense of different things when we could reflect together.

For Noelle, the immersive experience provided a springboard for reflection on how to engage diverse learners. This sentiment is echoed in the following comment:

I definitely think just getting a different perspective on teaching in different cultures. Not only will you be able to reflect on the teaching aspect of it but just being able to step back and look at it as a whole...whether...they have a diverse classroom, students from different countries, or with different cultural backgrounds and being able to get a better understanding or respect for that.

Three of the participants described the spontaneous nature of group reflection that occurred between the U.S. teachers. Ana detailed how group reflections generally took place over mealtimes when the participants talked about "different styles of teaching, different techniques in the classrooms, things like that. Comparing Guatemala to other places." Brenda further described how spontaneous group reflection was an important facilitator for making meaning of the immersive experience:

We engaged in a lot of reflection together and talking about it and sense making of it all, and I think it helped me be a better second language teacher, but there

wasn't any structure to it. I would imagine it wouldn't be as valuable to someone who didn't have that type of reflection and group talk with everyone.

Ella's comment echoed how the informal nature of the U.S. teachers' group reflections was a positive experience, adding: "I think it was very informal but I think sometimes reflection is better when it's informal because it can be more genuine."

Summary

To answer Research Question One, interview data were analyzed to allow the participants' perspectives to emerge with regard to how teachers engage with and describe their elected participation in an immersive experience. The investigation of the meaning teachers made of their short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience resulted in the identification of three major themes: *immersion as a vehicle for meaning making*, *expanded globalized perspectives*, and *expanded perspectives of teaching and learning*. The findings indicate that immersion into a new culture and educational setting prompted participants to be surprised by many of their observations. They reported being surprised by the advanced level of instruction, confronting social issues of poverty and marginalization of indigenous communities, and the experience of being a teacher educator. The findings also indicate that participants developed and expanded upon their knowledge of world conditions and awareness of their and others' worldviews. Equally, the data suggest that participants developed new understandings of teaching and learning and activated this new knowledge into their professional roles in a variety of ways. These included connecting their knowledge of Guatemalan geography and culture to their classrooms, implementing new literacy-related pedagogical strategies,

collaborating with other U.S. teachers, and engaging in reflection. The next section of this chapter will report on the findings that answer the second research question regarding how participation in this experience informed the participants' understandings of themselves as educators and their teaching practice.

Research Question Two

How did participating in the experience inform these teachers' understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice? In response to research question two, three overarching themes emerged from analyzing participants' interview data: *empathy*, *challenging inequities*, and *professional learning considerations*. Within each of these three broad themes, subthemes emerged that have helped me further organize the findings for presentation. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews offered an in-depth perspective of how new understandings about teaching and learning emerged as a result of the U.S. teachers' participation in this short-term, non-formal, immersive experience in Guatemala. The first overarching theme is described in detail below.

Empathy

The findings that unfolded during analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that five of the six participants often discussed the concept of empathy. A detailed look at the interview content revealed these participants often talked about empathy in two principal ways: when describing their motivation for their elected participation in this immersive experience and when detailing the benefits they gained from their participation. These two subthemes are described in detail below.

Motivation. Four of the six participants described their motivation for participation as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the diverse learners in their classrooms. These U.S. teachers were working, or had worked, in schools that served a large number of Latino students, many of which were from Central America. Some representative responses that made reference to empathy driving their motivation to participate included: “I wanted to discover more about where my kids come from”, “make a connection to what the students have experienced”, and “get a better sense of where their families are coming from.” Another illustrative quote reflecting how these teachers were motivated by their desire to better understand diverse students and families includes Elizabeth’s comment:

I work with a lot of white teachers and I feel it’s really important to be empathetic and sympathetic to...I’m realizing that what the environment I went to school in and where I grew up; no where near were the people struggling as much. I just wanted to see it for myself and feel it and understand it more.

When I prompted Elizabeth to elaborate on how developing this understanding would make her a better teacher, she shared:

I don’t know if you’d call it best practice but in a lot of educational literature it’s drive around the neighborhoods of where your kids live and that type of thing, and yeah I can drive around [the neighborhood] but that’s not where they’re originally from and that’s not what they know. In some writing assignments kids will describe their home town [in Central America] and say how beautiful it was and how they want to go back and so I guess I just wanted to be able to visualize

one small town and country that possibly they could have come from. Make me more sensitive to their needs.

Benefits. The interview data also revealed that participants often talked about empathy as something they gained from the immersive experience. For instance, three of the six participants described their participation in the immersive experience as “life changing.” Brenda’s remark encompasses the concept of developing empathy through participation in the immersive experience when she described a conversation she had with her colleagues upon returning home:

I did explain it to the teachers when I came back...I felt like explaining it is detracting from the actual experience. I can’t have words to explain it. I don’t want to detract from it and even just showing the pictures I wanted to be like, it’s better in real life. I explained it as a life changing experience and I think that all teachers should be able to do that if you’re teaching such a diverse population...you can read about it in books and watch videos and movies but going there is different, it’s [a] completely different experience.

Another illustrative quote reflecting how the teachers developed a deeper understanding of life in a rural, Central American village and made connections to their students includes Elizabeth’s comment:

I think [this immersive experience is] life changing in the sense that I’ll never forget what I saw. The poverty, but also the happy little kids running around and screaming *¡hola!* Seeing the stray dogs, hearing the roosters and pigs dying in the middle of the night and other things. I guess I would call it life changing because

it was life changing. I think it made me understand a lot more of what happens in those countries; even [when] I saw a very small snippet of it.

Both Brenda and Elizabeth elaborated on how this experience was “eye opening” and an important experience for teachers to consider, especially when working in schools where many students and families are from Central America. Elizabeth further emphasized how the immersive experience was important for “understanding life in one of the poorest parts of a Central American country.” She felt that developing this understanding helped her connect to her students in the following way:

Having the visual in my head of the different parts we did see with the bus ride, I remember saying after the trip I have so much respect for the people who actually make it into the country and can stay. Whatever chicken bus they had to take to get to the airport in the first place and figuring out all of the logistics of it and then coming into the country and living in a place like [the location of her school]. I’m hoping they have family here to help them settle in. Not taking that trip myself but seeing the route that maybe those families would take in coming here helps me feel like I can understand a little bit more of that background.

Alicia added that her participation was “life changing” because:

It’s good to keep in mind how different people live in different places. It’s a reminder of how there’s so many amazing things and so many rich things in this world that unless you go away and get to experience them, you just don’t necessarily see them.

She further elaborated, “I think one of the issues in teaching is that a lot of us come with our middle-class values but we don’t know what it’s like to live with very little resources.” For Noelle, this was also an opportunity to “have a better perspective of where my students are coming from,” both the students she previously worked with in El Salvador and currently worked with in the U.S. She noted,

To see...the kids who were being raised by their grandparents [in El Salvador] because their parents had gone to the U.S. when they were little, and the behavior problems that we saw with them there because grandma’s like I’m tired, I already raised my kids. Then when I came here [to teach in the U.S.] we had the kid who just arrived to the country, who’d been raised by his grandmother. So to see both ends of it from the classroom teacher’s perspective was really interesting. I wasn’t necessarily expecting to make that connection.

These illustrative comments suggest that many of the teachers were motivated to participate in this immersive experience because they wanted to better understand the lives of immigrant children and English language learners in their classrooms.

Participants also discussed how participation in this experience was “life changing” because they were able to directly experience life in a rural, developing country and make important connections to the diverse students and families represented in their classrooms. The second overarching theme, *challenging inequities*, will be examined next.

Challenging Inequities

The second overarching theme further addressed how participants made connections between their participation in the immersive experience and developed an understanding of themselves as educators and their ability to challenge inequities in the classroom. Alicia recalled how she viewed her participation in the immersive experience as an opportunity to directly impact her ability to teach of diverse learners:

When you go to a country, when you go to the developing world, I think it's very eye opening, and it should be eye opening, but it shouldn't be. I think you've got to understand that you're being enriched and educated as well. It's not so much going in order to see how lucky you are, it's more going and understanding and trying to figure out *how you can be a bridge in your classroom to these different worlds* [emphasis added].

The interview data suggested that as teachers reflected on their immersive experience and made important connections to their own professional contexts, they developed an awareness of “being more sensitive to the inequities [they were] was putting in the classroom” and challenged their role as agents of change in their educational settings. This statement is best represented in the following remarks made by Brenda:

So many of my families come from these rural areas of these countries and it really made me think about how different our world is and how much they're probably dealing with. It really made me think about the inequalities of different things and it made me think differently about things like sending home homework. I'm sending home homework to these parents here [who have recently immigrated to the U.S.], and to the same child whose parents have been

in America for many years and they're head of the PTA and they're very well educated and they have money to hire a tutor. It just really made me think about the inequality when sending home homework like that. Not even that, just things in general [like] children needing to wear a white shirt for the chorus recital. That big cultural gap of being more mindful when I'm talking to parents.

When I prompted Brenda to consider what actions she took as a result of being more mindful of "that big cultural gap", she noted:

Before it used to be, if I can, I'll get it [homework and other school related documents] translated into Spanish. It's sad, I feel horrible admitting it, but if I can get it into Spanish I will but if I couldn't I would just send it home in English. And because I didn't have a lot of involvement from the Spanish speaking families, I would assume sometimes they don't even read it, but that's not fair. I need to make sure it goes home in both Spanish and English and if I have a family that doesn't speak Spanish I have to do the best I can to get it in their language or maybe invite them in for meetings [if] face-to-face is more valued.

The findings that unfolded during analysis of the interview data suggest that these participants discussed challenging inequities in three principle ways: *power of language*, *confronting stereotypes*, and *new understandings of privilege*. These three emerging subthemes are presented in further detail below.

Power of language. During the interviews, four of the six participants made reference to developing an awareness of assumptions they made about English language learners and discussed how their expanded knowledge of language informed their

teaching practice upon return home. In particular, the teachers' evolving viewpoint on students from Central America and children whose first language is Spanish indicates that due to their participation in this immersive experience, they realized that language plays a far more complex role than they had previously understood. This statement is best represented in the following comment made by Brenda:

I think it [participation in the immersive experience] also gave me more patience. Once you know that a child...just came to America a couple months ago you grow some understanding for some difficulties they may be having. To hear that, oh he just came from Guatemala two months ago, that has a different meaning now. Before it was – oh he's not going to learn English, how am I gonna teach in English, how am I going to integrate him into the classroom? Now, more [of my] questions are – how can I preserve his culture and slowly make this transition as easy as possible? Now it seems like a way more complicated thing.

Alicia added that her experiences of observing dual language instruction at the Etamabal School led to a major revelation about the assumptions she made of children's language skills:

I made the typical mistake that ESOL teachers make all the time, that they hear the kids say a few phrases in English and they think – oh they speak English – but they really don't. Because you tend to pick up a lot of the language that's repeated daily, language you need for social interaction, very quickly and very well but it's the academic language that takes so much longer...I thought oh my

goodness with all my years in second language acquisition how did I fall into that same trap?

Elizabeth shared that a major benefit for teachers participating in an immersive experience “would be to gain perspective, to understand a different culture, experience a different culture, one that’s different from ours, learn about new people, learn about new environments.” When I prompted her to elaborate on how gaining perspective connects to teaching, she noted:

In order to help a student succeed, you need to understand part of their background to get them from level A to level B. There’s this big debate in education with all of the testing going on. You can look at their test scores and you can look at their reading level score and you can look at all these other numbers that are attached to their name but until you’re like, oh they recently came from Guatemala and their family doesn’t speak fluent Spanish. They only speak their native language, which isn’t even Spanish and they’re not quite fluent in [that language] either, they don’t have a base first language. Until you understand that and see that a little bit you can’t really help them, you just look at them like a black and white image of a child who needs improvement. That’s my belief at least.

For Noelle, this immersive experience exposed her to the great diversity that exists within Guatemala. In reflecting on how this expanded understanding of culture connected to her teaching practice, she shared: “Something I hadn’t considered was the indigenous aspect

of it and the fact that their Spanish might not even be strong.” She further elaborated on the difference between her mindset before and after the immersive experience:

I always make that stupid generalization that El Salvador is like all Latin America so we have students come and they don’t speak Spanish very well or they don’t speak to me, they don’t respond to me when I speak to them in Spanish.

Previously I’ve always been like, I don’t know what’s wrong with them but this year now I’m like maybe they don’t know Spanish that well. It’s a different understanding of where someone’s coming from.

Confronting stereotypes. Four of the six participants mentioned how this immersive experience led them to confront stereotypes and breakdown assumptions about Latino culture. During their interviews, Brenda, Noelle, and Alicia reflected on this experience as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes often voiced by their colleagues. For instance, when I asked Brenda how participation in an immersive experience could benefit teachers, she shared:

More patience. More tolerance. I get angry with teachers sometimes that get mad or upset with parents or kids that do things differently or I see too often teachers that say they’re bad parents and they’re not, it’s so frustrating to me. I think it [participation in this immersive experience] would take a negative spin off of a lot of their thinking. I feel like they have a negative lens and they need to be more tolerant sometimes. I’m stereotyping, I mean not everyone is like that but there are teachers like that. I almost want to say, you go live with them for a week and

then see how that adjustment would be. And you're only there for a week [in Juyub] and this is what some people know their whole lives.

Noelle's comment echoed how spending one week in Juyub can be a powerful learning experience for U.S. teachers. She elaborated:

Oftentimes we're told that Latinos don't value education or that it's not a family oriented culture because they have the wrong values because they value video games, this is what I've heard from teachers, but I think that seeing the way people are in Juyub just for a week I think can change that.

Alicia also addressed the importance of the immersive experience in facilitating teachers' confrontation of stereotypes often held about Latino students, particularly whose families recently immigrated from Central America: "It blows my mind the way people, teachers complain, 'they won't do their homework', and you think if you only knew their context. It's just not what they most need to deal with at this time."

New understandings of privilege. The statements voiced by Elizabeth and Brenda, both fourth-year teachers who do not speak Spanish, indicate that they experienced feelings of guilt both during the trip and upon returning home. Their comments suggested that as they sought to integrate their immersive experiences with their life upon returning home, they were confronted with complex emotions and developed an understanding of their own privilege. For instance, Elizabeth's illustrative quote captures this sentiment well:

When I came back it was definitely culture shock. I was like, Americans are the worst. I felt bad for everything I had. I felt guilty, but even telling my friends about it with pictures, it's so hard, it's so hard.

Brenda suggested that being immersed “somewhere that [had] a lot of poverty” led her to reflect on this experience and confront her own privilege, sharing that she felt “lucky and very fortunate but also at the same time selfish and indulgent.” Similarly, Elizabeth addressed the guilt she felt upon returning home: “I had a lot of guilt, being middle class, being white, and realizing that all of these things in my life were because I was born in America. I had a lot of affordances versus what these people [in Juyub] had.”

It is important to point out that when both participants discussed feelings of guilt, they also talked about the importance of reflection in processing these emotions.

Elizabeth described how she “missed a few of the reunion opportunities” with the other participants and struggled to make sense of the guilt she felt. She noted, “I have no idea if anyone else experienced this.” On the contrary, Brenda reported that she “talked a lot after the trip” with other participants and commented on the importance of peer-to-peer reflection: “It was nice having someone to talk to after the experience who was relatable about it.”

The data showed that participation in the immersive experience revealed important considerations about the power of language and how a lack of understanding contributed to inequities in the classroom. In addition, the teachers broke down stereotypes about Latino culture and English language learners in the U.S. and considered alternative ways to interact with diverse students and families upon their return home.

Lastly, the interview data revealed that two of the participants confronted notions of privilege and discussed how reflection contributed to their understandings of feelings of guilt. Next, the third overarching theme will be examined.

Professional Learning Considerations

Examining the interview data also uncovered the evolving beliefs participants had regarding their views on professional learning needs of teachers and how these needs should be addressed. Five of the six participants expressed their views on the “great need to educate teachers in this country [the U.S.]” while also detailing how “it takes a special kind of person” to participate in an immersive professional learning experience.

Participants talked about professional learning considerations in two principal ways: “*the right kind of teacher*” and *reimagining teacher education*. These two subthemes further organize the presentation of findings and are described in detail below.

“The right kind of teacher.” Five of the six participants mentioned several times the tension between the impactful role immersive experiences could play for teacher professional learning and their hesitation to suggest this type of experience for teachers who did not meet certain criteria. According to Ana, the “right kind of teacher” was someone who was “flexible enough to be able to rough it a little bit” because traveling to a remote area required “sleeping on a cot in a classroom [which] may not be everybody’s idea of fun. Taking cold showers, electricity going out, or any kind of weather conditions that were unexpected, some people might not like that if they’re used to comfort.” Elizabeth described how the right kind of teacher would be flexible, open minded, and easy going. Noelle added that teachers would need to “appreciate the values

of another culture.” Alicia’s words reflect her assessment of a person’s ability to appreciate and learn from an immersive experience:

I think it has to be structured in a way that I would want to be careful, that first of all people are showing respect to wherever it is they’re going and that they come from, they come at it with a willingness to understand and different contexts, not just to come home and say oh aren’t I lucky that I have running water and electricity all the time.

Participants also shared their views on how important a teacher’s “mindset” was in either creating a barrier or facilitating their professional learning experience. Alicia’s comment provides a strong example of this notion:

...what I don’t like is this very condescending view of – oh we’re so lucky we have everything and let’s make everybody like us, that’s not where I want to go. I’m tempted to say I think it should be mandatory that every teacher, if they’re going to teach, would have to do something like this. I would be reluctant because then it turns into this savior missionary and I think that has many of its own problems and it’s been done before. Finding ways to open people’s eyes to the realities that some children are living through. If we’re really going to educate everybody then we have to understand how different people in our society are living...I think more people should go but I would want the right people to go, that’s my dilemma.

In addition, Ella shared her views on how a teacher’s mindset can impact the experience, when she reflected on her novice teacher educator experiences in Africa and working

with the Etamabal School teachers: “I think it could be a problem having people who think that they know something because they teach in the U.S. and have a master’s degree, and they come abroad to coach someone who has many more years of experience than them and actually might know more.”

Reimagining teacher education. Four of the six participants discussed “what teacher education is lacking” in a variety of ways. The interview data suggested participants felt that the professional learning and collaborative opportunities available at their schools did not directly address the importance of how to effectively teach diverse learners and failed to connect teachers in meaningful ways. Alicia’s words vividly capture this sentiment and detail how her participation in this immersive experience shaped her beliefs about professional learning for teachers:

I think it was a chance to get away from education as a business and I think that’s how unfortunately the school districts have become. These big bureaucracies and teacher training is a business and so people package things and they come and present and it’s not that they’re not good, it’s that they’re not, it’s that style of teacher training. You can’t just come in and present, people have to actually go back and discuss and do. I think people forget about that this is such a human interaction endeavor.

When you go to a place like Juyub and you don’t have all the packaging and it’s just the afternoon workshops. It’s you and the teachers and maybe some chart paper and you need to communicate this. It was wonderful because you have all

the ingredients; you have willingness on the part of the group, and you have another willingness to share on the part of the group that arrived, and it's this wonderful exchange where as here [in the U.S.] I feel like there's always these agendas. We're doing this because the superintendent's latest kick is [to] give second graders iPads, or there's always some agenda somewhere that's not necessarily the bottom line, which is this child came to you at this level and how do we get them to move forward in the greatest way possible. I don't feel like, teaching here sometimes it's not a lot about that anymore, which is so sad.

Elizabeth emphasized the need for teacher education to find ways to engage teachers who express resistance to integrating new practices. She described the dichotomy between teachers "like me who are open to incorporating new techniques in their classroom" and those who "want to sabotage" new ideas. On a similar note, Noelle noted difficulties in collaborating with teachers during professional learning opportunities at her school. She noted:

At my school we do grade based, routine based things but it always seems to be very forced. Maybe finding a more common thing that people want to work on with their teams or with people in their content area and having the time for that, as opposed [to] having forced common time on things that aren't necessarily as applicable.

She further detailed the lack of professional development opportunities for foreign language teachers: "I didn't have a whole lot of professional development support for my context area, for Spanish in my district, I was always having to go out and search for

professional development opportunities on my own.” In addition, Brenda noted the need for teacher education to provide resources for teachers that focus on incorporating equitable teaching practices while balancing other priorities. She described the tension she felt in trying to balance “another big priority” and how her participation in this immersive experience prompted her to reexamine priorities in the classroom, she shared: “It put more stress on thinking about teaching such a diverse group, so much is asked of teachers it’s overwhelming.”

Summary

Research Question Two examined how teachers’ participation in the short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience informed a deeper understanding of themselves and their teaching practice. The findings suggest that teachers described changes in their beliefs and teaching practices in three principle ways: empathy, challenging inequities, and professional learning considerations. The interview data indicate that the participants wanted to better understand where their students were coming from. Therefore, empathy was a motivator for participation, and was also expanded upon as a result of the immersive experience. Furthermore, teachers challenged inequities through developing a greater awareness of the power of language and culture in the classroom, confronting stereotypes of Latino culture and English language learners, and developing new understandings of privilege. Professional learning considerations emerged as a tension between the need to reimagine teacher education to address the realities that teachers and students face in the classroom, and the participants’

beliefs on how an immersive professional learning experience can contribute to the learning of all teachers.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presents the research findings in the order of the two research questions. The participants' expanded background information were presented first in order to clearly illuminate the meaning participants have drawn from this immersive experience and provide background as to how their elected participation in this program contributed to their understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice. The findings revealed that the meaning teachers made of their experience were varied; while there were common experiences, individual teachers also drew unique results from immersion. The findings thus also revealed different levels of understanding in the following areas: immersion as a vehicle for meaning making, expanded globalized perspectives, and expanded perspectives of teaching and learning, and indicate how participation in the immersive experience led teachers to reaffirm their values, question current practices, and incorporate new understandings into their classrooms. Reflection emerged as an important factor that appeared to facilitate teachers' meaning making in both individual and group settings.

The findings further reveal that teachers changed their beliefs and practices in three broad areas as a result of their participation in this immersive experience: developing empathy, challenging inequities, and professional learning considerations. Teachers challenged inequities by addressing the power of language in their classrooms, confronted stereotypes of Latino culture and their work with English language learners in

their U.S. classrooms, and developed new understandings of privilege. Lastly, the interview data suggested that areas of tension existed in the need for professional learning opportunities that address the needs of diverse learners, the role of immersive experiences as a potential pathway for addressing these needs, and the beliefs participants held about teachers who would benefit most from participation in an immersive experience as a professional learning opportunity.

Chapter Five provides analysis and discussion of the findings and addresses several important implications of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five

The increasingly diverse and interconnected realities of our global community have created the need for greater international mindedness and cooperation amongst people of diverse backgrounds (Cushner, 2007; Perry & Southwell, 2011; Tate, 2012; Zhao, 2010). In concert with this need for interculturally competent citizens, there is an urgent need to prepare teachers to effectively teach all students with socially and culturally relevant curriculum, as well as prepare globally competent students (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cushner, 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Levy & Fox, 2015; Merryfield, 2000; Shaklee & Baily, 2012). However, most of the teachers today are not prepared to teach diverse groups of students nor recognize the impact that globalization has on the lives of students and families (Merryfield).

In the United States, classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse while the demographics of teachers continue to be less diverse, reflecting a majority of monolingual, middle-class white females (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1999; NCES, 2015b, 2015a; Planty et al., 2009). The challenges that sociocultural disconnects between teachers and students pose to the classroom have been reflected, in part, by the documented achievement gaps for English learners and marginalized groups (Gay, 2000; Goodwin, 2010; Sleeter, 2001, 2011). The current call to internationalize teacher education suggests that traditional models of teacher preparation fail to develop

teachers with the types of international perspectives and skills that prepare them to teach in diverse school contexts (Cushner, 2007; Shaklee & Baily, 2012). What has been addressed in the literature is the need for teachers who can prepare students for a changing, international world, yet there is still limited data exploring teachers' development of globalized perspectives and application to classroom practice.

As discussed in Chapter Two, research focused on study abroad and service-learning suggest the powerful role of international, cultural immersion experiences for the development of cultural understanding, international mindedness, and globalized perspectives (Bowman et al., 2010; Coryell et al., 2014; Crabtree, 2008; Cushner, 2007; Kiely, 2004; Killick, 2012). Furthermore, an extant body of research on the role of cultural and linguistic field experiences for pre-service teacher education suggest that carefully scaffolded programs can facilitate teachers' development of knowledge of culture; awareness of the role of culture in teaching, school structures, and educational systems; development of cultural and societal self-awareness; sociopolitical awareness and critical consciousness; understanding of the process of second language learning; and skills and attitudes that support cross-cultural interactions (see Smolcic & Katunich's, 2017 review of literature on this topic). It is unclear whether this assumption has merit for in-service teachers in the U.S. K-12 school system. What is missing from the literature is an understanding of how these types of immersion experiences relate to the professional learning of teachers.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate the perspectives of a selected group of U.S. teachers who participated in an international immersion

experience. Specifically, I am interested in their perspectives of being immersed in a new culture and educational setting through providing professional development for a group of bilingual teachers in a rural Mayan village in Guatemala. Furthermore, I seek to explore those teachers' perspectives regarding how, and in what ways, they made connections to their own classrooms and professional learning. The data were obtained primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using a constant comparative method that emphasized open, axial, and selective coding. This study was framed by the following questions:

1. What meaning do teachers, who participate in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience, make of their experience?
2. How did participating in the experience inform these teachers' understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice?

The study provides an understanding of international immersion experiences as a potential viable pathway for the professional learning of teachers. In concert with the current call for the internationalization of teacher education and the need to mindfully prepare teachers to effectively teach diverse learners, this study expands upon recent research that has addressed the topic of cultural immersion experiences for teacher education. I employed a qualitative case study design, which allowed me to seek deeper understandings of the U.S. teachers' perspectives regarding the meaning they made of their participation and how this impacted their understanding and practice of teaching.

The field of teacher education is still building our collective understanding about the types of professional learning activities, intercultural development, and personal

transformations that occur throughout the iterative and lifelong process of learning for teachers (Coryell et al., 2014; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Killick, 2012). This study was developed in response to the growing interest in carefully scaffolded cultural immersion experiences as a pathway for professional learning. It is unique in nature because the perspectives of in-service teachers who participate in such an experience, how they reflect on and make meaning from their experiences, and apply this meaning to their classrooms, is virtually unknown. Furthermore, my personal and professional interests in cultural immersion experiences and experiential understanding of the research setting informed both the research design and analysis of the data. The interview protocol was developed to incorporate both general and site-specific questions in an effort to enhance participant reflection and consideration of how the experience informed their understandings of teaching and learning. The analysis and interpretation of the data related the findings to the culturally immersive context, as well as their applications to classroom practice, in an effort to understand how the participants articulate their evolving perspectives and application of new knowledge to the K-12 setting.

This chapter presents discussion of the findings and provides connections to prominent research and theory in the field, as well as conclusions based on the research findings presented in Chapter Four. It concludes with implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

In Chapter Four, two research questions which guided the study provided lenses through which the data were examined to explore how a selected group of U.S. teachers

(a) engage with and describe their elected participation in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience, and (b) how participation informed their understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice. Three principle results were derived from this study and will be discussed in the following sections: *immersion as a vehicle for meaning making, challenging inequities, and reflection.*

Immersion as a vehicle for meaning making. The most important finding that emerged from the data was that the teachers viewed the immersive experience as a catalyst for meaning making. The data revealed that even though the teachers shared diverse perspectives about the immersive experience, an underlying principle persevered: that immersion in a new culture and educational setting served as an important vehicle for meaning making. This overarching theme is presented first because all six of the participants discussed specific aspects of the immersive experience that prompted them to make meaning of their surroundings and make important connections to their personal and professional lives.

Participants addressed the concept of immersion as a vehicle for meaning making mainly through statements related to the *immersive context* – having spent the majority of their time immersed in a new culture and educational setting, and important *surprises* that emerged from their observations and experiences in Guatemala and within the Juyub community and Etamabal School. They also made assertions with regard to connections they made between these surprises that stemmed from their experience abroad and the development of *expanded globalized perspectives* and *expanded perspectives of teaching and learning*.

Immersive context. All of the participants talked about how being immersed in a new culture and educational setting was an enormous aspect of their experience. The overall travel itinerary and immersive context of the trip was carefully planned by community experts – including the NGO coordinators who had over 10 years of experience in the Juyub community and Etamabal School, and the Etamabal teachers who opened up their classrooms and collaborated with the participants to implement literacy-focused topics into their daily practice. The participants spent the majority of their time in the Juyub community and experienced living conditions that were very different from their life circumstances at home. The immersive context of the research setting for this study supports what Bowman et al. (2010) regard as cultural immersion: a type of experience that “requires someone to dislocate and disorient themselves from the familiar and give themselves fully to the experience guided by community experts” (p. 22). In this immersive environment, as reported by Bowman et al., participants learn to adapt and cope with their peers, as well as with social issues faced by the community.

This experience provided a unique opportunity to immerse participants in an educational setting that directly addressed inequities often faced by rural, indigenous communities. In the Guatemalan context, achievement gaps between indigenous and nonindigenous students are perpetuated by an educational system where access to bilingual education is limited; indigenous children are less likely to attend formal schooling; and indigenous children attend schools of lower quality with fewer instructional materials, lower-quality infrastructure, and qualified teachers (McEwan & Trowbridge, 2007; Psacharopoulos, 1993). The Etamabal School addresses the

educational needs of the Juyub community by employing an additive bilingual model of education, beginning mother tongue education in pre-school and shifting to dual language instruction in Balam and Spanish. The school relies on the resources of a U.S.-based NGO to provide funding for the daily operations and to implement professional development workshops, with the support of volunteers, for the Etamabal teachers.

The collaborative nature of the professional development workshops and complete immersion in the Etamabal school allowed participants to observe and listen to stories and perspectives of community members whom they never would have met if not for participation in this experience, as well as engage in dialogue and share aspects of their lives with the Etamabal teachers. This finding reflects the emphasis that research in the field of intercultural competence has placed on the role of building authentic relationships in the cultural learning process. As noted by Deardorff (2009):

Through observing, listening, and asking those who are from different backgrounds to teach, to share, to enter into dialogue together about relevant needs and issues. Respect and trust become essential building blocks in developing these authentic relationships from which to learn from each other. (p. xiii)

The participants often talked about how much they learned from the Etamabal teachers and from each other. The data revealed the importance they placed on their “mindsets” in contributing to their ability to develop authentic relationships and engage in professional learning. They described the “right kind of teacher”; someone who would most benefit from an immersion experience, as someone who showed respect, was

“flexible”, “opened minded”, “easy going”, and had a “willingness to understand different contexts.” This tension between the potential of this type of experience in contributing to a teacher’s professional learning and the implications of his or her mindset on this process is summarized by Alicia’s quote: “If we’re really going to educate everybody then we have to understand how different people in our society are living...I think more people should go but I would want the right people to go, that’s my dilemma.”

These findings support what Patterson (2014) regarded as one of the essential components in determining teachers’ professional learning in international immersion experiences; the role of the participants’ mindset in positively or negatively impacting the development of knowledge that may enhance their practice as global educators. In addition to a teacher’s mindset, Cushner (2007) asserted that teacher education should focus on experiences that address interpersonal and intercultural dimensions of communication, interaction, and learning, versus traditional models that focus only on cognitive learning dimensions. This also resonates with Shaklee and Baily's (2012) call to internationalize teacher education by providing international experiences that emphasize globalized perspectives on culture, traditions, and policies. Through the participants’ observations and intercultural encounters they learned about Mayan culture, language, traditions, educational practices, and life in a rural indigenous village characterized, in part, by extreme poverty and lack of resources. The participants often voiced how the travel itinerary exposed them to different facets of Guatemalan culture and provided opportunities to work side-by-side with the Etamabal teachers. They also

commented on the benefits of these experiences for their development of cultural understanding and exposure to new pedagogical approaches.

Through the process of developing intercultural relationships and immersing themselves in a new culture, the day-to-day dimensions of the trip appeared to help participants make important meaning from these experiences. The immersive context of the research setting and learning that emerged from their participation in this experience supports Kambutu and Nganga's (2008) argument, which describes how immersive settings are intertwined with the learning process:

When physically removed from known cultures and placed instead in unfamiliar ones for days and weeks, 24 hours a day, participants find themselves in an uncomfortable state of cultural dissonance. To escape, participants have to examine how currently held cultural assumptions, emotions, and beliefs constrain the development of new cultural schemes or knowledge. A level of cultural awareness and appreciation develops during reflection when a person is making “sense” of unfamiliar cultural experiences. (p. 947)

It is this type of international immersion that also resonates that Smolcic and Katunich's (2017) definition of cultural immersion programs and field experiences for teacher learning, which includes programmatic elements of cross-cultural community-based learning or daily life experience in another cultural context and some form of structured field teaching experience in a formal or informal setting (p. 51). These immersive field programs have been associated with pre- and in-service teachers' development of cultural knowledge and self-awareness, understanding of the role of culture in educational

systems, and understanding the process of second language learning; all characteristics associated with teachers' abilities to effectively support the learning of all students (National Education Association, 2008).

The findings suggest that all of the participants attempted to make sense of their immersive experiences by drawing on their own frames of reference and familiar contexts of being teachers and/or teacher educators in the U.S. This process revealed distortions in their perspectives that echo the basic tenets of TLT, which postulates that these distortions constrain the way adults perceive, interpret, and feel about the world (Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor, 2008). These distortions can present themselves as disorienting dilemmas – or in the case of this study, as surprises that emerge from the immersive experience and disrupt their habitual frame of reference. The participants often voiced how, for them, surprises presented themselves throughout their time in Guatemala and upon return home. The significance of how participants reflected on these surprises and developed new and expanded knowledge is described in detail below.

Surprises. The interview data indicate that important surprises emerged as a result of the participants' immersion in a new culture and educational setting, and were clustered around three main areas: the level of instruction and advanced capabilities of the Etamabal teachers and students; the way of life in the Juyub community, which the participants characterized by extreme poverty, marginalization, and hardworking community members; and the experience of being teacher educators, which entailed navigating intercultural relationships and balancing differing worldviews. These surprises suggest that participants crossed boundaries between the cultural familiar,

which highlight the significance of the immersive context of the experience. The participants also emphasized how they personalized these surprises by making connections to their personal and professional lives, in order to make meaning of what they were observing and experiencing. This finding supports what transformative learning theory posits – that adults change the way they interpret their worlds through experiencing disorienting dilemmas, which then drives the process of constructing new and revised interpretations (e.g. Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 1995, 1997; Taylor, 2008). The interview data suggest these surprises served as disorienting dilemmas, and as participants reflected on these, enhanced their self-awareness and contributed to new cultural learning, which is consistent with findings from previous studies examining the role of international experiences for pre-service teacher education (Addleman et al., 2014; Dantas, 2007; Hamel, Chikamori, Ono, & Williams, 2010; Santamaria, Santamaria, & Fletcher, 2009). More specifically, the data revealed that participants constructed new and revised interpretations relating to *expanded globalized perspectives* and *expanded perspectives of teaching and learning*.

Expanded globalized perspectives. The participants made assertions with regard to surprises that emerged from directly experiencing the conditions in which the Juyub community lived. The data revealed that participants reflected on their experiences and developed a deeper understanding of the world around them. Ample evidence was provided during the interviews when the participants shared their views on gaining new or expanded understandings of culture and complex social issues such as civil war and poverty, as a result of their participation in this intense immersive experience (Alfaro,

2008; Cushner, 2007; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Kambutu & Nganga, 2008; Malewski et al., 2012). Their comments alluded to learning about the multifaceted aspects of culture, and how “it’s way more complex than [they] ever thought it would be.” These results are reflected in what Smolcic and Katunich (2017) identified as core learning outcomes of cultural immersion experiences for teacher education: the development of cultural-general knowledge, awareness of specific cultural ways of being, and understanding of the similarities and differences between cultural groups (p. 51).

The interview data suggest that participants also expanded their awareness of different worldviews. For instance, Ana shared how this experience helped her “realize that everybody’s different and they might do things differently but there isn’t a right or wrong, sometimes your cultures [are] just different,” and Alicia added, “there are just differences in the way people see the world and it seems so obvious but then you go and work there, you live that experience and it’s so different.” This finding was accentuated by reports shared by some participants who were “cautious”, “reluctant”, and did not want to “impose” their beliefs on the Etamabal teachers. Participants expressed tensions between wanting to share their knowledge of instructional strategies with the Etamabal teachers while also “preserving their culture.” Their comments suggest that they viewed the push and pull dynamic of adapting within the intercultural encounter as an overall positive experience, which Bennett (2009) regarded as an interculturalist perspective; one that views adaptation as an additive, rather than deficit, process. These findings also add support to prior research that highlights the role of cultural immersion in developing perspective consciousness; the awareness of self and others’ worldview and a desire to

reorient one's perspective (Addleman et al., 2014; Case, 1993; Dantas, 2007; Hamel et al., 2010; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017; Tang & Choi, 2004).

In summary, the findings of this study point to the critical role that experience plays in developing teachers' intercultural understanding and global knowledge, which includes characteristics of cultural self-awareness, culture-specific information, as well as positive attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery (Deardorff, 2006; Hill, 2012; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). As one participant shared, "It's just a reminder of how there's so many amazing things and so many rich things in this world. Unless you go away and get to experience them, you don't necessary see them." The participants' reluctance to impose their beliefs created the space for cultural learning and enhanced awareness of different worldviews. In today's globalized society, the need for teachers to develop awareness and understanding of their worldview has never been so critical. Developing cultural self-awareness and awareness of one's worldview are necessary precursors to understanding how these shape educational practices and assumptions about teaching, learning, knowledge, behavior, schools, students, and families. Only then can teachers and teacher educators implement strategies to address inequities in the classroom and create a more inclusive learning environment.

Expanded perspectives of teaching and learning. This trip presented an opportunity for participants to immerse themselves in new classrooms and participate in professional development workshops designed for the specific needs of the Etamabal teachers. During the interviews, the participants connected surprises that presented themselves within the walls of the Etamabal School to their own understanding of

teaching and learning. The benefit of this type of experience was illustrated by Alicia's comment: "It's really an interesting way to look at your own profession. To go into another context then come back and sort of see it through almost another lens." The findings revealed that the surprises that emerged from these experiences played an important role in shaping the participants' beliefs and teaching practices by *reaffirming* their commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy; *questioning* current practices and norms in their educational settings; and incorporating *new understandings* and instructional practices into their teaching.

Reaffirming. The participants viewed the opportunity to meet other "like minded" U.S. teachers as a very important motivator for deepening their awareness of, and reaffirming their commitment to, socially and culturally relevant pedagogy. They also voiced their commitment to student-centered teaching and reaffirmed their beliefs regarding the learning capabilities of young children, as one participant asserted, "I feel like even more strongly now that children are capable of so much more than we allow them to do, and definitely seeing that there [in the Etamabal School] has convinced me of that." The participants also often shared how they felt alone in their school settings and related these feelings of isolation to their lack of opportunities to meaningfully connect with other teachers in their schools and school districts. Noelle's comment summarizes the disconnect felt between professional learning opportunities and making meaningful connections with other teachers, when she shared: "At my school we do grade-based, routine-based things but it always seems to be very forced," and suggested that "maybe finding a more common thing that people want to work on with their teams, or with

people in their content area, and having the time for that.” The interview data disclosed many of the participants expressed concerns regarding the lack of fit between professional development initiatives and meetings the needs of diverse students. These findings highlight the need for school administrators and school districts to provide relevant, focused teacher education that engages teachers across content areas in ways that are meaningful to the localized contexts of each school.

Questioning. Four of the six participants questioned current norms and practices in their schools as a result of their international immersion experience. They made reference to making comparisons between the Etamabal classrooms and their professional contexts through being surprised by the “level of instruction” they observed; the advanced creativity, fine motor skills, and independence of the Etamabal students; and the abilities of the young children to develop bilingual proficiency. The findings suggest that as participants became familiar with classroom routines and teaching practices within the Etamabal School, they compared this new knowledge to their own context and discovered culturally induced assumptions that they held about teaching and learning and therefore, began to challenge ideas and beliefs about instruction and consider new approaches. One particular participant’s remark stands out in regard to how the immersive experience facilitated this process: “For me it was interesting because it brought to light all these questions about how we do things here [at her school].” She further explained how this led her to rethink how “we are too quick to label them [U.S. students] with fine motor problems” and “it made me question whether we don’t give them enough hands on experiences right now, maybe we’re seeing more fine motor issues

then need to exist in the population.” These findings substantiate Mezirow's (1981) concept of perspective transformation, in which the participants came to recognize culturally induced roles and relationships, recognized the reasons for them, and asserted ways to take action to overcome them. The study's findings also echo previous research on short-term, international immersion experiences for pre-service teacher preparation that suggest such experiences contribute to developing awareness of preconceived notions that impact their perspectives of teaching and learning (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009).

New understandings. All of the participants described new understandings that emerged from the immersive experience and discussed how they activated this new knowledge into their professional roles. For instance, the interview data disclosed many of the participants worked directly with students and families from Central America. They felt it was important to incorporate their new understandings of Guatemalan culture and geography into their classrooms, while also utilizing this knowledge to develop relationships with Latino students and families. As one participant explained, “it's given me an added dimension to interacting with the parents of a lot of my students.”

The participants also reported having a more informed understanding of indigenous culture and the diverse array of languages spoken in Central America, and expressed a desire to create inclusive classrooms that reflected a multifaceted understanding of the role of culture and language in teaching and learning. They also expressed how the surprises that emerged from observing the advanced level of instruction in the Etamabal School led them to think about their instructional practices

and young students in new ways. Some of the participants shared how they implemented new literacy-based practices into their classrooms, which they learned about in the Etamabal professional development workshops, and thought of new ways to teach math and second language acquisition. These findings are consistent with research on sustained, direct intercultural immersion experiences and outcomes related to teacher professional learning, including: exposure to new pedagogical approaches and educational philosophies, self-awareness and self-efficacy, personal confidence and professional competence, cultural sensitivity, and greater understandings of global and domestic diversity (Cushner, 2007; Lee, 2009) and specifically the connection between the opportunity to teach in different sociocultural contexts and professional learning outcomes (Alfaro, 2008; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001; Zhao et al., 2009).

In summary, the first major finding indicates that, for these participants, immersion in a new culture and educational setting served as a vehicle for meaning making; furthermore, important surprises emerged as a result of this opportunity. Participants reflected on these surprises and as a result, through deep consideration, developed new and expanded understandings of the world around them and made important connections to their teaching profession. Wilson's (1993) framework (see Figure 1) lends understanding to the types of meaning teachers made of their experience by addressing the impact of international experiences and intercultural relationships on teachers' development of global perspectives in four areas: substantive knowledge,

perceptual understanding, personal growth, and development of meaningful interpersonal relationships, which are discussed in detail below.

First, substantive knowledge includes intercultural understanding and a general awareness of global issues. The interview data suggest that participants expanded their globalized perspectives by developing a more informed understanding of prevailing and emergent world conditions, particularly those often experienced by indigenous communities, and the complex social, economic, and political links between people (Case, 1993). The data also indicate that participants developed intercultural understanding through experiencing different facets of Guatemalan culture and constructed a more multifaceted understanding of culture by reflecting on these experiences and making connections to their personal and professional lives (Dantas, 2007; Malewski et al., 2012; Phillion, Malewski, Sharma, & Wang, 2009; Tang & Choi, 2004).

Second, perceptual understanding involves combating preconceptions and stereotypes as a result of new understandings that emerge from international experiences and intercultural relationships. The interview data indicate that the U.S. teachers reflected on surprises that emerged from their Etamabal classroom observations and uncovered assumptions they made not only about the teachers and students in Juyub, but also students in their own classrooms. A further discussion on how the immersive experience led to participants confronting stereotypes is discussed in the next section.

Third, according to Wilson's framework, personal growth encompasses the development of self-confidence and cultural awareness of self and others. The

participants often made connections between their experiences in Juyub to their personal and professional lives. They reported enhanced confidence and risk-taking, particularly when applying their new and expanded knowledge to their classroom contexts by taking specific pedagogical approaches to working with young children in their classrooms. These findings expand upon research on cultural immersion for pre-service teacher preparation and the development of self-confidence and risk-taking (Miller & Gonzalez, 2010; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Tang & Choi, 2004; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Willard-Holt, 2001), and the connection between immersion in new classrooms and development of new pedagogical approaches and educational philosophies (Alfaro, 2008; Cushner, 2007; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007).

Lastly, interpersonal connections focus on the role of intercultural relationships in facilitating an individual's development of global perspectives. The findings suggest that the opportunity to develop close working relationships with the Etamabal teachers contributed to participants' cultural awareness of self and others, and adapting an "interculturalist" perspective into their work. These findings expand upon intercultural competence theories that promote the building of authentic relationships as a key factor in the cultural learning process (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2009). This study provides one practical example of how programs can scaffold opportunities for intercultural encounters, but also calls to attention the need to explicitly address the power dynamics and differential benefits for all groups involved (Chi & Suthers, 2015; Collier, 2015; Gorski, 2008; Jones, 1999; Martin, 2015). This assertion has important implications for

teacher education and future research, in critically thinking about how immersion experiences most likely occur between groups of unequal power.

The results also highlight that the meaning teachers made was attached to both their experience in Guatemala and built upon their prior knowledge and experiences. This points to the crucial need for teacher education to devise ways to offer support to teachers in meaningful and transformative ways; what Cranton and King (2003) referred to as involving educators “as whole persons – their values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and their ways of seeing the world” (p. 33). These opportunities should also leverage existing professional knowledge and utilize pathways to professional learning, such as international immersion experiences, to transform their understandings and shape new meanings. By developing a better understanding of teachers’ learning through their elected participation in an international immersion experience, the field of teacher education for both pre- and in-service teachers can better prepare future learning opportunities that address the current call to internationalize teacher education.

Challenging inequities. The second major finding of this research is associated with how participants developed an awareness of, and directly challenged, inequities in the classroom, mainly through statements related to *empathy*, *power of language*, and *confronting stereotypes*. It was also evident that a certain overlap existed within these domains of challenging inequities in the classroom; for example, the interview data revealed that participants wanted to better understand where their students were coming from (empathy as a motivation for participation) as a way to inform their teaching of

linguistically diverse learners (power of language) and directly challenge stereotypes about immigrant families and English language learners (confronting stereotypes).

Empathy. The interview data revealed that participants worked in schools that served a large number of Latino students and English language learners. They described their motivation for participation in this international immersion experience as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the students in their classrooms, particularly those from Central America. These findings suggest that participants recognized the “big cultural gap” that existed between themselves and students in their classrooms (Cushner, 2012; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Goodwin, 2010; Planty et al., 2009). Participants voiced how this experience was “life changing” and perceived this as an opportunity to develop a better understanding of where their students and students’ families were coming from, and described how this expanded understanding would make them more sensitive to the needs of the students in their classrooms. These findings suggest that participants viewed participation in an international immersion experience as a potential viable pathway to contribute to their professional learning, and therefore, their ability to address sociocultural gaps between teachers and students, which researchers have associated with contributing to achievement gaps between minority students and English learners (Duckworth et al., 2005; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Shockley & Banks, 2011).

Researchers who have examined the role of international immersion experiences for pre- and in-service teacher professional learning have noted that unlike traditional forms of teacher preparation, this type of experience “engages participants in learning

that is impossible to replicate in traditional classroom-based learning” (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008, p. 947) because it offers a unique opportunity for intercultural development that impacts all levels of learning (Cushner, 2007; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017; Wilson, 1993). The following illustrative quote from Brenda captures how the teachers viewed this experience as something different from, and more effective than, traditional teacher education methods:

I explained it as a life changing experience and I think that all teachers should be able to do that if you’re teaching such a diverse population...you can read about it in books and watch videos but going there is different. It’s [a] completely different experience.

The interview data also revealed that participants talked about empathy as something they gained from their participation in the immersion experience. They perceived the experience as “eye opening” and, as one participant shared, enabled them to “understand a lot more of what happens in those countries; even [if] I saw a very small snippet of it.” They stated how the immersion experience was important for “understanding life in one of the poorest parts of a Central American country” and that this understanding led to more positive perspectives of, and deeper empathy for, the cultural and linguistic minority students in their classrooms (Addleman et al., 2014; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Santamaria et al., 2009; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Zhao et al., 2009). The findings of this study also echo previous research on the role of culturally immersive service-learning experiences in developing students’ empathy, social justice orientations, and enhanced cultural

understandings (Berry & Chisholm, 1999; Bowman et al., 2010; Crabtree, 2008; Kiely, 2004; Tonkin, 2004; Willard-Holt, 2001).

The concept of empathy, as a goal of intercultural education, is not without critics. For example, Jones (1999) argues that intercultural dialogue in teacher education is largely “based on the possibility of, and desire for, mutual empathy – learning to ‘walk in each others’ shoes,’ ” which allows for “the spectacle of diversity” to be enjoyed, instead of talking across difference in ways “where differences in power as well as ethnicity are acknowledged” (p. 299). Gorski (2008) further contends that intercultural experiences for teacher education “tend to leave unacknowledged the reality that the marginalized voices they invite into dialogue do not need organized opportunities to hear the voices of the powerful” (p. 521). These criticisms have important implications for immersion programs, both for the people who plan and participate in such experiences. It is imperative to consider how we can support teacher learning in ways that also attend to hierarchies and power structures that offer differential benefits for those from dominant groups (Collier, 2015).

Power of language. Four of the six participants made reference to how their participation in this immersive experience led to enhanced awareness of assumptions they made about English language learners and realized language plays a far more complex role in the classroom than they had previously understood. The following illustrative quote from Brenda captures how the participants transformed their perspectives of children who recently immigrated to the U.S. and challenged their inclination to assimilate new students into the classroom:

I think it [participation in the immersive experience] also gave me more patience. Once you know that a child...just came to America a couple months ago you grow some understanding for some difficulties they may be having. To hear that, oh he just came from Guatemala two months ago, that has a different meaning now. Before it was – he’s not going to learn English, how am I gonna teach in English, how am I going to integrate him into the classroom? Now, more [of my] questions are – how can I preserve his culture and slowly make this transition as easy as possible? Now it seems like a way more complicated thing.

These findings are consistent with recent research on immersion programs for cultural learning and teacher development, particularly those that immerse pre- and/or in-service teachers in a language context that differs from their native language (Addleman et al., 2014; Malewski et al., 2012; Olmedo & Harbon, 2010; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Phillion et al., 2009; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Zhao et al., 2009).

The findings also revealed that participants reflected on their observations of dual language instruction at the Etamabal School and uncovered assumptions they made about English learners in their own classrooms; as Alicia reported in the interview, “I made the typical mistake that ESOL teachers make all the time, that they hear the kids say a few phrases in English and they think, oh they speak English, but they really don’t,” she further asserted, “with all my years in second language acquisition how did I fall into that same trap?” Participants also reported similar revelations that stemmed from their reflections on the second language learning contexts in their own classrooms and developed a more nuanced understanding of how culture and language (including fluency

in native language and second language learning) are intertwined, and the complexity of these relationships (Addleman et al., 2014; Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Marx & Pray, 2011; Merryfield, 2000; Olmedo & Harbon, 2010; Zhao et al., 2009). These findings lend understanding to how teacher and classroom sociodemographics and teachers' prior experiences with diversity can influence their assumptions about diversity and cultural awareness, which can be manifested unconsciously in the classroom environment and instruction (Farkas, 2003; Levy & Fox, 2015; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Ready & Wright, 2011).

The results also suggest that the opportunity to engage in meaningful intercultural encounters with the Juyub community allowed the participants to more deeply explore the myriad of factors influencing student learning (Shaklee & Baily, 2012). In specific regard to developing the skills necessary to support linguistically diverse learners, these findings would support the importance of international immersion experiences for teachers' deepened understanding of the complex processes of second language acquisition and learning (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). These findings contribute to gaps in the literature that need to address the role of international immersion experiences as a potential pathway for in-service teachers to develop and act upon globalized perspectives, in order to inform their teaching practice and expand the learning opportunities of their students (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Wilson, 1982).

Confronting stereotypes. The interview data revealed that participants viewed their participation in this short-term, international immersion experience as contributing to their ability to breakdown stereotypes and assumptions about Latino culture. As one

participant shared, “seeing the way people are in Juyub, just for a week, I think can change that;” she further asserted how other teachers’ participation in such an experience “would take a negative spin off of a lot of their thinking.” The participants expressed that it was because of their experiences in Guatemala and the opportunity to develop intercultural relationships with the Etamabal teachers and students that they developed “a different understanding of where someone’s coming from.”

During the interviews, the participants shared stories of encounters with other U.S. teachers in their school settings that expressed ethnocentric and limited views of culture, class, and language. Their discourse suggested that they separated themselves from these teachers, who also seemed “resistant” to change; essentially unaware of how their biased views contribute to inequitable learning opportunities for English learners and minority students. It is plausible to question how teacher educators can engage all teachers; those most resistant and those who separate themselves from the resistant; in what Gorski (2008) refers to as “a larger shift from a colonizing to a decolonizing intercultural education” (p. 522). He posits that developing teachers’ cultural awareness is not enough, and instead intercultural teacher education should focus, in part, on how culture and identity differences affect one’s access to power. Thus, teacher education should be viewed as a continuum of learning that never ends, but rather integrates the individual teacher (their past experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, practices, etc.) into the learning process; moving them away from deficit thinking about culturally and linguistically diverse students and towards uncovering and addressing inequities in classrooms and schools (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Sleeter, 2008).

The participants also referenced how confronting stereotypes would guide future action in the classroom. One practical example that emerged from the interviews was related to the decision to assign homework. The participants shared their changing perspectives of how the decision to assign homework can contribute to inequities in the classroom, particularly when making stereotypical assumptions that “Latinos don’t value education” and recognizing the privilege and cultural capital that favors majority culture and language. One participant’s comment serves as an illustration of the aforementioned beliefs expressed by the teachers in this study:

So many of my families come from these rural areas of these countries and it really made me think about how different our world is and how much they’re probably dealing with. It really made me think about the inequalities of different things and it made me think differently about things like sending home homework. I’m sending home homework to these parents here [who have recently immigrated to the U.S.] and to the same child whose parents have been in America for many years and they’re head of the PTA and they’re very well educated and they have money to hire a tutor. It just really made me think about the inequality when sending home homework like that.

The findings of this study support what several authors have addressed regarding the importance of immersion programs in facilitating teachers’ self-reflection and examination of unconsciously held cultural stereotypes (Addleman et al., 2014; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Finney & Orr, 1995; Kambutu & Nganga, 2008; Malewski et al., 2012; Tang & Choi, 2004) and suggest that this experience required teachers to go

beyond their comfort zone in significant ways, and subsequently, examine issues of equity, access, and diversity in their classrooms (Davis & Richards, 2007).

This study provides additional information about the role of short-term international immersion experiences for teacher professional learning and offers insight into how the participants, who all self-identified as white females, developed sociopolitical awareness and a critical consciousness (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). Research from the field of service-learning suggest that short-term immersive experiences can develop students' positive orientations towards equality, social justice, and social responsibility, through purposefully and thoughtfully conducted programs (Bowman et al., 2010; Eyler & Giles, Jr, 1999; Kiely, 2004; McCarthy, 1996; Parker & Dautoff, 2007). Conversely, other researchers have asserted that short-term international programs can contradict program goals and reinforce stereotypes and ethnocentric perspectives (Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Stearns, 2009; Twombly et al., 2012; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). The results of this study suggest that, through their participation in a weeklong international immersion experience, participants demonstrated an emerging awareness of sociopolitical structures that constrain educational opportunities for those of non-dominate groups (Addleman et al., 2014; Malewski et al., 2012; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Marx & Pray, 2011; Santamaria et al., 2009) and the ability to recognize privilege, particularly related to class, race and ethnicity, and English language fluency (Malewski & Phillion; Phillion et al., 2009).

In summary, the findings from this study suggest that participants expanded their globalized perspectives, challenged educational philosophies and pedagogies, developed

empathy, enhanced awareness and understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity, and expressed a more nuanced understanding of their role in creating equitable learning environments. However, Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012) described the role of short-term immersion programs as having the ability, at best, to develop teachers' "critical cultural awareness" but "not quite coming to the systematic understandings of the nature of inequality or commitments to engagement that would imply critical consciousness" (p. 21). This may be a more appropriate description of the type of learning that resulted from the participants' participation in this short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience. During the interviews, not all of the participants specifically addressed a deep understanding of "institutionalized structures and processes that ensure differential access to educational opportunity based on race, culture, and language background" (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017, p. 56), which is necessary in order to truly combat the ways in which racism and discrimination manifest themselves in school structures and educational systems. These findings suggest the need for carefully scaffolded programs that not only support teacher learning during the experience, but also provide continued opportunities for learning upon return home and support in applying new knowledge to equitable classroom practices.

Reflection. The third major finding of this research relates to the role of reflection in facilitating the learning process. Throughout the interviews, participants described engaging in group and self-reflection, which often happened spontaneously and without formalized structure. They shared how "it was helpful to make sense of things when we could reflect together" and how the experience "wouldn't be as valuable to

someone who didn't' have that type of reflection and group talk with everyone.” These comments suggest that participants viewed opportunities for reflection as invaluable to their professional learning. This finding is similar to Patterson's (2014) study, in which he argues that teachers' participation in planned international experiences do not necessarily equate to professional learning, but rather the learning and reflection that took place during non-planned activities, such as spontaneous conversations on bus rides and over meals, resulted in the greatest opportunities for learning.

The participants, however, also identified the need for more focused reflection to help apply their learning to their personal and professional contexts. For instance, Alicia described how a changing school climate created barriers in applying her new knowledge that emerged from this immersive experience, and struggled to enact changes in her classroom practice. Elizabeth shared how she grappled with processing feeling of guilt and privilege once she returned home because she lacked opportunities to anchor her experiences through meaningful reflection. Reflection is well-established in the literature as a key component for teacher education, and specifically for teachers who participate in immersion programs for professional learning (e.g. Addleman et al., 2014; Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Goodwin, 2010; Kambutu & Nganga, 2008; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). These findings suggest that the participants would benefit from having more structured opportunities for reflection, particularly in making connections and applying their new knowledge to their professional contexts.

Conclusions

As indicated in the findings, each participant engaged in this short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience in unique ways; yet what emerged across the participants was the an understanding of how immersion in a new culture and educational setting contributed to their professional learning. Although this program was not explicitly developed for U.S. teachers' professional development, it nevertheless provided an opportunity for the participants to experience different facets of Guatemalan culture; observe culturally-responsive educational practices in an indigenous, bilingual context; and develop intercultural relationships with teachers from both the U.S. and Juyub. Through reflecting on these experiences and making connections to their personal and professional lives, the participants expanded their globalized perspectives and developed a deeper awareness of the role of culture and language in the classroom. The participants also shared how they lacked opportunities to connect with other teachers in meaningful ways and often felt disconnected from the professional learning initiatives in their schools and school districts. Therefore, as a result of this qualitative case study, three principle conclusions can be drawn from the data, which are described below.

Conclusion #1. In-service teachers would benefit from professional learning opportunities that place marked emphasis on addressing the sociocultural gaps between teachers and students, and should consider the role of international immersion experiences as a potential pathway for teacher development.

The findings from the study indicate that participants were seeking an opportunity to better understand where their students were coming from, particularly Latino students

and students' families who recently immigrated to the U.S. and were English learners. They viewed this international immersion experience as a potential pathway to developing the knowledge and skillsets that would help them become more sensitive to the unique needs of diverse learners. The results suggest that immersion in a new culture and educational setting contributed to the participants' expanded globalized perspectives, including knowledge of world conditions and awareness of self and others' worldviews. The participants' asserted how this experience contributed to their understanding of the role of culture, cultural capital, socioeconomic status, and language in the classroom, and uncovered assumptions they held regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students. The interview data suggest that some of the participants connected their assumptions to instructional practices and examined how their choices perpetuated inequitable learning environments.

Therefore, the findings from this study suggest that immersion, as a vehicle for meaning making, was a potential viable pathway for these teachers' professional learning. However, it is also important to note that this type of experience is only *one potential pathway*. It is unreasonable to suggest that every teacher should participate in an immersion experience, just as it is unreasonable to suggest that travel, in and of itself, equates to the type of learning that supports teachers in teaching every student that enters their classroom. What the findings do suggest is that these participants identified a professional learning need, whether it was to better understand how to serve diverse students, enhance their sense of self-efficacy as teacher educators, or connect to other

“like minded” U.S. teachers; and felt this particular program would help them fill this gap.

Conclusion #2. It is imperative that teacher educators, school administrators, and school districts acknowledge the localized needs of teachers, particularly voiced by those who teach culturally and linguistically diverse students, and offer adequate professional learning and ongoing support that specifically equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to challenge inequities in the classroom.

The interview data revealed that participants felt disconnected between the professional learning opportunities offered at their schools and school districts and the realities they faced in the classroom. Some of the participants explained how teacher education initiatives that offer packaged programs in lecture-style formats did not adequately address “the bottom line”; how to differentiate instruction and balance the seemingly competing priorities placed on K-12 U.S. public school teachers. These findings substantiate the call to internationalize teacher education and equip teachers with the ability to teach all students, especially those who may enter the classroom with unique and challenging needs. In concert with the need for adequate professional learning, in both content and style of delivery, the findings also indicate that teachers need ongoing opportunities to collaborate in meaningful ways. The participants expressed frustration with current practices in their schools that failed to connect teachers outside of “grade-based, routine-based things.” Additionally, the participants placed marked emphasis on the role of teachers’ mindsets in creating or challenging inequities in the classroom. These results suggest that teacher educators, school administrators, and

school districts should consider ways to engage teachers, particularly those who express resistance to integrating new practices, in learning that, as Gorski (2008) asserts, “deepen [the] consciousness about the sociopolitical contexts and implications of [their] practice”, which he describes as a type of philosophy that cannot be achieved only through intercultural programs or slight curricular shifts (p. 524).

Conclusion #3. Teacher professional learning is a lifelong process and reflection must play an integral role in “learning, relearning, and unlearning” the ways past experiences have shaped their worldviews and teaching practice (Wink, 2005). Only then, can teachers truly create the types of learning environments that insist on equitable opportunities for each student.

Each of the participants represented a set of lived experiences and personal background histories that had unique implications for the meaning they made of this experience and how they applied this new knowledge to their understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice. In light of these differences, the results of the study suggest that reflection played an integral role in how the participants connected their immersion experiences to their personal and professional contexts. The powerful revelations that occurred for each participant, albeit in a variety of ways, transformed their thinking about what they can accomplish in the classroom. The interview data revealed that participants valued the opportunity to reflect on what they were observing and experiencing during the trip, and subsequently challenged their preconceived notions regarding students and families who recently immigrated to the U.S., English language learners, and the abilities of young children. However, they also

lacked support in transferring this knowledge to classroom practice upon return home. These findings suggest the continued need for focused reflection in the lifelong learning of teachers, and also highlights the potential for scaffolded immersion programs and teacher educators in facilitating teachers' ability to identify and address equitable learning opportunities.

Next, the implications of the study for teacher educators, school administrators and school districts, and teachers will be addressed, as well as recommendations for future research.

Implications

This study focused on teachers' perspectives of their participation in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience. The importance of this study was to explore the experiences of a selected group of U.S. teachers and provide an understanding of the ways in which they connected the experience to professional learning. Several implications have emerged from these findings for stakeholders in the teacher professional development field, such as teacher educators, school districts and school administrators, and teachers.

Teacher educators. This study points to the necessity of in-service teacher professional development programs, particularly those that address both the personal growth of the teacher and the development of teaching practices that directly address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teachers in this study underscored the need for professional learning opportunities that speak to the "human interaction endeavor" aspect of teaching and the lack of current initiatives to impact "the bottom

line”, which one participant described as, “this child came to you at this level and how do we get them to move forward in the greatest way possible?” They voiced their frustration at the lack of support and their sense of inefficacy in meeting the needs of diverse learners, particularly English language learners and students who recently immigrated to the U.S.

This is important for teacher education programs because classrooms will continue to become increasingly diverse, and these comments suggest the need for teacher educators to develop more comprehensive learning experiences that help teachers to teach effectively within culturally and linguistically diverse spaces (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). This should include placing more emphasis on promoting teachers’ awareness of the impact that their beliefs and perspectives have on the pedagogical choices they make in the classroom. Many of the participants shared how this experience “opened [their] eyes” to the “inequities [they were] putting in the classroom.” The findings of this study and research on the role of immersion experiences for pre- and in-service teacher education suggest that teachers need access to programs that move beyond prescribed experiences in familiar settings and encourage teachers to go beyond their comfort zone in significant ways (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cushner, 2007; Duckworth et al., 2005; Levy & Fox, 2015; McFadden et al., 1997; Merryfield, 2000; Zhao, 2010).

This study also offers insight into the importance of carefully scaffolded immersion programs for teacher professional learning. As argued by Alfaro and Quezada (2010), “providing a pathway for practicing teachers to globalize their perspective and

approach to teaching offers a foundation for new professional development pedagogies of the future” (p. 57). This pathway, according to both recent research and participants’ responses during their interviews, should include: pre-trip education specific to the historical/political/socioeconomic/cultural contexts of the trip; immersion in new cultures and educational settings that incorporate teaching experience, homestays or daily activity within local communities, and promote equitable intercultural relationships; multiple opportunities for structured reflection before, during, and after the immersion; and connecting classroom contexts with the immersion experience (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008; Kopish, 2016; Sleeter, 2008; Tarrant, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to consider the limitations of such experiences in developing what Gorski (2008) referred to as a deepened consciousness about sociopolitical contexts that influence teachers’ practice, which he argued “cannot be achieved through intercultural programs or slight curricular shifts” (p. 524). The findings from this study suggest that for teachers who do participate in an international immersion experience, they need support in making meaningful connections to their profession and need continued scaffolded opportunities that contribute to their lifelong learning as teachers of diverse students.

School districts and school administrators. The findings from this study also have implications for school districts and administrators regarding the professional learning needs of teachers, particularly those serving culturally and linguistically diverse students and large populations of immigrant families. The results revealed that teachers often felt a disconnect between district-wide initiatives to enhance student learning and their actual professional development needs for responding to the needs of changing

communities, and in responding to the opportunities and challenges that globalization presents in classrooms. A call for collaboration between teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and school districts is in order to address the unique needs and challenges that teachers face on a daily basis. School districts and administrators might consider assessing current programs and their ability to address localized contexts.

It is also worth mentioning that although many of the participants described this immersive experience as “life changing”, they expressed hesitation in sharing their experiences with their colleagues, administrators, or school districts. This highlights the need to find ways to meaningfully disseminate this information in ways that support the learning of the participant and other teachers as well. If teachers are not supported in their professional learning endeavors – what are teachers going to do with that new knowledge when they get back? How will it impact what teachers do with other teachers and families at your school? How does it enhance teachers’ practice but also of the school itself? These questions also highlight the need for school administrators to support teachers’ new and expanded knowledge to the application of their classroom practice upon return. In addition, school districts and administrators might consider providing resources on available programs, incentives for participation, support reflection and connections to classroom practice, and recognition for their continued professional development.

Teachers. The U.S. teachers in this study self-selected to participate in the international immersion experience, most were fluent in a second language, all had extensive international travel, and most taught or were currently teaching in schools that

served predominately Latino students. It is plausible to wonder in what ways other teachers' perspectives might be similar to or different from the perspectives of the teachers regarding the meaning they made from their participation and how this informed their understandings of themselves as educators and their teaching practice.

Nonetheless, teachers who are seeking opportunities to improve their teaching practice may consider international immersion experiences as a potential viable pathway to meet their professional learning needs. In order to maximize the learning opportunity, teachers might select a program that incorporates the scaffolded components discussed in this chapter and consider meaningful ways to share their experiences with their students, colleagues, school administrators, and school districts. While it is not possible for every teacher to travel abroad, and furthermore, travel abroad in and of itself does not equate to professional learning, the findings from the study provide one practical example of how this type of program can incorporate immersion in a new culture and educational setting, while engaging the participants and host community in co-constructing knowledge that benefits the teaching practices of each group.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has provided insight into the perspectives of a selected group of teachers regarding the meaning they made from their participation in an international immersion experience and how participation informed their professional learning as educators in the K-12 U.S. school system. The findings revealed important surprises that emerged from being immersed in a new culture and educational setting, demonstrated how participants reflected on and personalized these surprises through developing

globalized perspectives of teaching and learning, and the ways in which they connected this experience and new knowledge to their classroom practice. Future research should expand upon this study to address a larger sample of teachers that represent diverse backgrounds, race/ethnicities, gender identities, years of teaching experience, international travel, etc. Future research could build upon these findings by incorporating international immersion programs that are specifically designed for teacher participants, and those that address pre-, during, and post-trip education, focused reflection, and learning outcomes. Knowing more about how teachers make meaning from scaffolded international immersion programs and apply this knowledge to classroom practice will also deepen our understanding of the needs of teachers and the ways in which ongoing professional development can best meet these needs.

Now, more than ever, there is a particular need for teachers to build upon and expand their existing frames of reference to a more global landscape and effect change in their classroom practice. Therefore, research should also explore the connections between participation in such an experience and how teachers come to apply this expanded knowledge into their classroom practice. In considering how future research should focus on this transfer of knowledge from cultural and linguistic field experiences to classroom practice, Smolcic and Katunich (2017) posed a set of questions for further consideration: (1) Will teachers' newfound respect for learners whose daily lives play out in unfamiliar linguistic and cultural contexts come alive in their instructional practice? (2) What have teachers learned about instructional strategies to engage students of other cultural and language backgrounds? (3) How will the attitudes and empathy that they

have developed in a culturally different space endure and transfer to their work with individual learners? (p. 48). These questions, along with research that has questioned the role of immersion experiences in having the capability to do nothing more than raise awareness (e.g. Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012; Sleeter, 2008), capture the need for future research to follow teachers into the classroom and see how their experiences have influenced understanding of themselves as educators and their teaching practice.

There is also still a limited understanding of how teachers develop globally informed skills and knowledge in their students, particularly when the sociocultural background of teachers differ (Perry & Southwell, 2011). What is missing from the literature is an understanding of how, and in what ways, international immersion experiences serve as a potential pathway to not only develop teachers' globalized perspectives, but to also expand the learning opportunities of their students. Lastly, future research on immersion programs should focus on how these experiences typically occur among people with differential access to power and offer differential benefits to people engaged in these programs (Collier, 2015; Gorski, 2008; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). The voices and perspectives of communities of people within which the experiences take place are often absent from this body of research. It might be revealing to offer another lens and add a new perspective to our understanding of internationalized teacher education, thus offering ways to truly enhance the development of an equitable and just world.

Final Thoughts

This research provided a qualitative case study of teachers' perspectives of participation in a short-term, non-formal, international immersion experience. Its purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning teachers made of their experience and how they recognize this experience as beneficial to their professional learning, and therefore, to inform the field of teacher education of how immersion programs may facilitate intercultural learning and application of new and expanded knowledge to classroom practice. The findings suggest that what makes these types of experiences so meaningful to personal growth and professional learning is the opportunity for teachers to immerse themselves in a new culture and educational setting, while most importantly, valuing the knowledge, culture, and practices of the host community.

The findings also suggest the significant need for ongoing professional development initiatives that address the needs of English language learners, children who have recently immigrated to the United States, and children of families of subordinate groups. By doing so, we can emphasize the fact that in order for teachers to create equitable learning environments in their classrooms, they need to develop an awareness of the sociocultural lenses which shape their educational beliefs, attitudes, and practice. Teachers must also continuously pursue throughout their professional career, and teacher educators, school administrators, and school districts should continuously offer, learning opportunities that push them outside of their comfort zone and aid them in developing a deeper consciousness of the sociopolitical contexts embedded in their classrooms and

educational institutions. This study further suggests the necessity of professional learning experiences, such as international immersion programs, to provide focused reflection and support in helping teachers connect their experience to their classrooms in specific ways.

In today's world of efficiency and an educational culture in the U.S. that arguably values equality (e.g. evaluating all students and teachers on standardized test scores) over equity (e.g. recognizing the structures of inequality embedded in the educational system and communities that perpetuate inequitable learning opportunities for students), there is a temptation for teacher educators and programs, school administrators, and school districts, to provide professional learning opportunities that offer topic-focused courses organized around teaching standards and performance-based assessment. This continues despite, what I believe to be, a disconcerting truth that achievement gaps are determined before a child is even born. What is fundamentally missing from the landscape of teachers' lifetime learning are ways to truly help them move along a continuum towards a deeper level of self-awareness and understanding of sociopolitical contexts that both contribute to equitable, or inequitable, learning environments. The study findings suggest that international immersion experiences are a potential viable pathway for providing the types of experiential learning opportunities that help teachers along this continuum. However, it is important to consider that immersion in a new community or country does not equate to personal growth or professional learning. These types of learning opportunities should be carefully scaffolded to provide education, facilitate reflection, and offer support before, during, and after the trip. Even more concerning within an intercultural context is that oftentimes these experiences ignore the voices and

perspectives of the cultural “other.” I implore that any stakeholder in teacher education, including those offering immersion programs, raise questions regarding control and power and attend to analysis of contextual factors at the macro (structural), meso (level of the group), and micro (situated) levels (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017, p. 56).

Lastly, what I most gleaned from this study is that professional development for teachers is an ongoing process that is never finished, and international immersion experiences do have the potential to elicit the type of deep reflection that transforms teachers’ understanding, awareness, and action. Whether a teacher has been in the classroom for five or 25 years, we bring with us the sum total of our experiences. All of the participants in this study engaged in the immersion experience in Guatemala in unique ways. However, one fundamental aspect emerged – they all returned with an intention of wanting to be a better teacher. My hope is that future research and the field of teacher education will listen to the voices of teachers who are calling for help and support them in transforming their best intentions into best practices.

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Materials



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: December 15, 2015

TO: Rebecca Fox
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [842415-1] Teachers' perspectives of participation in an international, cultural immersion experience: A case study

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: December 15, 2015

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the ORIA prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Katherine Brooks at (703) 993-4121 or kbrook14@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

Teachers' Perspectives of Participation in an international cultural immersion experience: A case study

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand teachers' perspectives of their elected participation in an international cultural immersion experience. The aim of this study is to also understand how participation in this experience may be related to their professional learning as educators in the K-12 U.S. school system. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will be audio recorded and last approximately 1.5-2 hours, possibly take part in a follow-up interview that would last approximately 30 minutes-1 hour, and share documents relating to the professional development workshops you participated in (such as recruitment flyers, trip itineraries, and lesson plans).

Electronic Collection of Data

The research may involve electronic collection of data (such as surveys and documents sent via email). While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission.

Audiotaping

All interviews will be audiotaped for the purposes of obtaining the exact words of participants for data analysis. Audiotapes will be kept in a secure, locked file cabinet in the office of Kelly Dalton, located in 441 Enterprise, George Mason University. Only the researcher will have access to the audiotapes and the tapes will be destroyed once the study is complete.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the field of teacher education.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. This study will begin with a short survey in December 2015/January 2016 to determine your eligibility to participate. Your name will not be included on the surveys or other data collected. A code and/or pseudonym of your choice will be placed on any collected data, such as interview transcripts, and through the use of an identification key, the researcher will be able to link your survey to your interview.

For those participants who are willing to be contacted via Skype: Participants may review Skype's website for information about their privacy statement
<https://www.microsoft.com/privacystatement/en-us/skype/default.aspx>.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Kelly Dalton with the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703—993-2910 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this project is Dr. Rebecca Fox and she can be reached at 703-993-4123. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

Name

Date of Signature

Script: My name is Kelly Dalton and I received your contact information from [name of NGO volunteer coordinator]. I am currently a Ph.D. student and writing my dissertation on teachers' perspectives of their participation in short-term international experiences. I would like to interview you on your experiences in [name of town], Guatemala with [name of NGO]. In order to determine if you are eligible to participate in this study, I will need to ask you a few questions first.

Appendix B

Pre-Participation Survey

- 1) Did you participate as a volunteer with [name of NGO] and travel to [name of town], Guatemala?
 - a. When did you participate? (month, year)
 - b. Did you volunteer with the Literacy or Math team or both?
- 2) Were you employed as a K-12 teacher during the time you volunteered?
 - a. What grade/subjects did you teach?
 - b. Are you still working as a K-12 teacher?
 - c. Has the grades/subjects you teach changed since you volunteered? If so, what grades/subjects do you currently teach?
- 3) How many times have you volunteered with [name of NGO] in Guatemala? (if more than once move to 3a)
 - a. What types of trips did you participate in?

Appendix C

Participant Interview Protocol

Background Information:

Name:

Gender/Age:

Race/Ethnicity:

How many years have you been teaching?

What grades have you taught? What subjects have you taught?

What are you currently teaching? Where?

How did you find out about this volunteer experience?

Interview:

- 1) What led to your decision to participate?
 - a. Prompt: How was the program described to you?
 - b. What was your primary motivation for participating?
- 2) Have you ever participated in something like this before?
 - a. Prompts: providing professional development workshops for other teachers;
volunteering in international settings
- 3) Are there any factors that facilitated your decision to participation?

- a. Prompts: When making your decision to participate; support from family, administrators at your school, etc.
- 4) What barriers did you face, if any, in making your decision to participate?
- 5) What did you hope to achieve through your participation?
 - a. Prompt: Expectations
- 6) How did you plan and prepare for the trip?
 - a. Prompt: What was your perspectives of Guatemala before the trip?
 - b. What had been your experiences with poverty prior to the trip?
- 7) What did you do during the trip?
- 8) Please describe one day that stands out in your mind.
 - a. Prompt: Describe a typical day during your time in [insert name of community]
- 9) What was the best/worst/most unexpected experience you had?
 - a. How did you feel about that experience?
- 10) What was it like working with the teachers in the school?
 - a. Prompt: Working with teachers from different national, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds?
 - b. What did you learn from the teachers?
- 11) In your opinion, why does the [insert real name of community] have both a public and private school?
 - a. Prompt: Why is the NGO support education in the community?
- 12) What is your view of Guatemala now?

- a. Prompts: What is your view of education in Guatemala now? What is your view of poverty now?
- 13) If you were to describe the [insert real name of community] culture, what three elements would you choose to describe the host culture and why?
- 14) What did you feel unprepared for?
 - a. Prompt: When did you find yourself not knowing what to do?
- 15) How would you describe this experience to other teachers who have not volunteered abroad before?
 - a. Prompt: Service-learning, volunteering, professional development for you, personal interest, etc.
- 16) What do you believe are the benefits, if any, for in-service teachers volunteering abroad?
 - a. Prompts: teachers as teacher educators, working in international schools, collaborating with teachers from different schools/backgrounds
- 17) What did you experience upon returning home?
 - a. In what ways did this experience change you?
- 18) What lessons did you learn from this experience?
- 19) What types of students do you teach?
- 20) How do the school and your teaching support their learning needs?
- 21) How has your participation influenced your own professional development?
 - a. Can you describe an example of this?

- b. Prompt: How have your instructional practices changed, or not, as a result of your participation in this trip?
 - c. How can you see yourself (or how have you) translating your Guatemala experience into your classroom?
- 22) How does your participation in this experience influence your teaching/pedagogy/curriculum development/interaction with students and families?
 - a. Prompt: Have you perceived any changes in your teaching practice/curriculum development now as compared to before the Guatemala experience?
 - b. What would you change about this experience to make it more meaningful for you as a teacher?
- 23) Is there anything else that you would like to share?
 - a. Prompt: Is there anything that I did not ask you, that you wish I had?

Appendix D

Definitions of Key Terms

Culture: This term is used to denote the way different people make meaning of the things they do (adapted from Kambutu & Nganga, 2008, p. 942).

Cultural immersion: This type of experience requires someone to dislocate and disorient themselves from the familiar and give themselves fully to the experience guided by community experts (adapted from Bowman et al., 2010, p. 22). Teachers not only immerse themselves in unfamiliar cultures, but also reflect upon those experiences in order to broaden their pedagogical approaches and beliefs to become more successful culturally responsive change agents” (adapted from Zhao et al., 2009, p. 297).

Empathy: the ability to identify with or understand the perspective, experiences, or motivations of another individual, including emotional and intellectual dimensions (adapted from Bennett, 1998).

Globalized perspectives of teaching and learning: This term refers to the development of the following five elements as related to the practice of teaching and also to a teacher’s perspectives of learning – both their own learning and the learning of students:

- Perspective consciousness: awareness of self and other’s worldview and factors that influence the development of an individual’s worldview.
- Knowledge of world conditions: knowledge of prevailing and emergent world conditions.
- Cross-cultural awareness: respect for and knowledge of diverse ideas, values, and practices.
- Knowledge of global dynamics: an understanding of the complex social, economic and political links between people and the impact that changes have on each other.

- Knowledge of alternatives: awareness of human choices and the ability to challenge the ways the world is currently run (adapted from Hanvey, 1976 as cited in Case, 1993, pp. 319-320)

Intercultural: An experience that includes interactions between people from different cultures – this includes differences in people’s values, assumptions, communication styles, ways of perceiving and interpreting the world around them, in addition to obvious distinctions of language, dress, and other customs (adapted from (Hornig, 1994, p. 15).

Intercultural competence: “The appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 9).

Intercultural sensitivity: “The ability to discriminate and experience cultural differences” (Hammer et al., 2003).

International immersion experience: To further expand upon the definition of cultural immersion, which can take place both domestically and internationally, an international immersion experience is both culturally immersive and involves travel to another country.

International mindedness: According to Hill (2012), international mindedness is the product of successful international education, in which a person “embraces knowledge about global issues and their interdependence, cultural differences, and critical thinking skills to analyse and propose solutions” (p. 246). Furthermore, IM is a value proposition: “It is about putting the knowledge and skills to work in order to make the world a better place through empathy, compassion, and openness – to the variety of ways of thinking which enrich and complicate our planet” (p. 246).

Internationalized teacher education: “refers to the preparation of teachers who can demonstrate intercultural understanding and competence, global citizenship, international mindedness, and activism for social justice and human rights” (adapted from Levy & Fox, 2015, p. 275).

Non-formal education: “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader

activity – that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives” (Smith, 2001).

Professional development: Refers to the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically (adapted from Glatthorn, 1995, p. 41).

Professional learning: For the purposes of this study, professional learning and non-formal professional development (see above) are used synonymously. While there has been discussion in the research literature about the similarities and differences in these two terms, for the purposes of this study they are used synonymously.

Title One: A public school with high percentages of children from low-income families and receives federal financial assistance to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (adapted from U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Transformative learning: “Learning that causes a profound change or shift in the learner’s thoughts, actions, or frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions, meaning perspectives, mindsets—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change (adapted from Mezirow, 2003, p. 58).

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Biography

Kelly McGrath Dalton graduated from Park View High School, Sterling, Virginia, in 2000. She received her Bachelor of Science and Master of Science from Virginia Tech in 2004 and 2007, respectively. She also completed her Dietetic Internship from Virginia Tech in 2010 and is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. She is currently employed as the Assistant Director for the Center for Social Action and Integrative Learning and Term Assistant Professor in the School of Integrative Studies at George Mason University.