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# Incorporating an international field practicum: critical incidents during a cultural immersion experience leading to increased understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students

Kristin Dixon  
*George Fox University*

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INCORPORATING AN INTERNATIONAL FIELD PRACTICUM:  
CRITICAL INCIDENTS DURING A CULTURAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE  
LEADING TO INCREASED UNDERSTANDING  
OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

by

Kristin Dixon

Chair: Dr. Ken Badley  
Members: Dr. Terry Huffman  
Dr. Marc Shelton

Presented to Educational Foundations and Leadership Department  
and the School of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Education

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George Fox University  
School of Education  
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“INCORPORATING AN INTERNATIONAL FIELD PLACEMENT: CRITICAL INCIDENTS DURING A CULTURAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE LEADING TO INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS”  
a Doctoral research project prepared by KRISTIN DIXON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department.

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

6/22/12 

Date

Ken Badley, PhD

Committee Chair

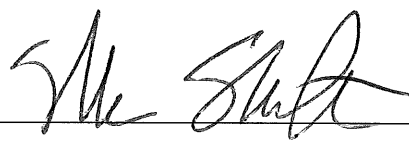
Professor of Education

6/22/12 

Date

Terry Huffman, PhD

Professor of Education

6/22/12 

Date

Marc Shelton, EdD

Professor of Education

## ABSTRACT

Schools today are increasingly diverse, with students from different cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds in almost every classroom. Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students and helping them achieve academically is an ongoing challenge for teacher training institutions. This study explored the nature of critical incidents experienced by teaching candidates who participated in a cultural immersion experience as part of their teacher preparation requirements. Teaching candidates traveled to Quito, Ecuador and Vienna, Austria, where they experienced disorienting events; through analyzing their critical incidents, candidates were asked to reflect in journal entries on the experiences that caused disequilibrium. This qualitative study examined the nature of critical incidents and the themes of disequilibrium experienced during a cultural immersion practicum. A central goal of this study was to relate critical incidents to transformative and experiential learning theory while reporting findings related to how disequilibrium experienced by candidates prompted personal growth in the areas of cultural sensitivity and competency. The following themes emerged: 1) navigating language study and language barriers; 2) paradigm shifts; 3) personal growth and learning; 4) display of egocentrism, self-righteous, or judgmental attitudes and behaviors, and 5) differences in school cultures. Participants found that language study, in particular, was one of the most valuable experiences they could have as they gained greater understanding and empathy for their future culturally and linguistically diverse students.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process of a doctoral journey does not happen in isolation. I am indebted to many who walked beside me through this process.

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Over the course of my doctoral journey, I endured and celebrated the following: one kitchen remodel, two trips to Nicaragua, one trip to China, one trip to Austria, my son Daniel's high school graduation, my daughter Katelyn's college graduation, and my husband, Brad's graduation with his M.Ed. Life has indeed been full. To God be the Glory.

*Dedicated to*

*David V. Amoth and Jennie E. Johnson*

*These two individuals—my dad and my grandma—modeled for me more positive traits than I can articulate here. Their spirit remains a constant and continual presence in my life. I remember them daily and thank God for their gracious and loving influence.*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Today's classrooms are increasingly diverse, filled with students from different cultures, ethnicities, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Teaching all students, regardless of their differences, and helping them to achieve academically are ongoing challenges and goals for inservice teachers and for teacher training institutions. With a progressively diverse and globally oriented society, we are preparing students for a changing world. Today's educators also need to be more aware of not only other cultures but also of key global issues influencing economic, technological, environmental and social change (Merryfield, 2000, 2002).

Dore (2004) states that classroom teachers cannot expect to teach students who are homogenous in any manner. Students come from a variety of diverse conditions, thus increasing the importance for educators to understand students who do not look alike, act similarly, or have similar values, beliefs, attitudes, or skills. Classrooms of today look very different than classrooms of the past, which reflect the growing variety of backgrounds and circumstances that students bring to school each day. Teachers must have a strong background of cultural competence, sensitivity and understanding, and a repertoire of strategies to reach the multitude of needs any one classroom will have.

Over the past decade, schools in the United States have experienced an increase in the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students. An article in Education Week (2011) stated, "From 1997-1998 school year to the 2008-2009 school year, the number of English Language Learners enrolled in public schools increased from 3.5 million to 5.3 million, or by 51 percent" (NCELA, 2008). These students fall considerably behind their peers in school



achievement and need additional support to be successful in school settings (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel & Herwanto, 2005). Within twenty years, demographers predict that one in every four students will fall into the category of a culturally or linguistically diverse student (Goldenberg, 2008). The considerable increase in the number of linguistically diverse students poses distinct challenges for educators. Preservice teachers need adequate preparation in order to address and meet the needs of these students.

The goals of diversity and cultural competence are addressed in the national teaching standards published by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The goal of diversity, which encompasses global and cultural competence, has been addressed in Standard Four of NCATE. One of the goals of this standard is:

[T]he development of educators who can help all students learn and who can teach from multicultural and global perspectives that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the unit provides opportunities for candidates to understand the role of diversity and equity in the teaching and learning process. Coursework, field experiences, and clinical practice are designed to help candidates understand the influence of culture on education and acquire the ability to develop meaningful learning experiences for all students. (NCATE, 2006, p. 31)

Meeting the needs of all students, in particular those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, is also articulated in the standards of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). Standard two, learning differences, states, “The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards” (InTASC, 2011, p. 11).

The standard is further broken down into three components, those of performance indicators, essential knowledge, and critical dispositions. These components can be more easily labeled as knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Under the umbrella of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, 18 competencies are referenced as necessary for proficient teaching of diverse learners.

According to Marzano (2007), teachers must select the correct instructional strategies to use with the right students who need them at the correct time. The art and science of teaching combines a deep understanding of the individual students in a class and their needs at any given time. Darling-Hammond (2005) contends that in order to make the best decisions possible for individual students, teachers must be aware of the numerous ways in which students learn—including any cultural influences—and also need to understand how to gather additional information in a culturally responsive manner in order to help each and every student achieve. The National Middle School Association's (2004) position paper on diversity states that, "The success of our nation and humankind itself depends on our collective ability to have mutual respect and appreciation of others. Schools must model a community that is based on justice and the celebration of similarities and differences among its members" (Dore, 2004, p. 1). Understanding the needs of diverse learners is a critical component in bridging the achievement gap and of helping diverse learners achieve their full potential.

Clearly, the national standards addressing teacher competency speak to the critical need teachers have to meet the needs of all students. The Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) department in alignment with the School of Education (SOE) at George Fox University adopted a conceptual framework that states, "We prepare educators who think critically, transform practice, and promote justice" (School of Education, George Fox University website). In order to meet the high calling of this mission, the MAT faculty have worked to adopt curriculum

which will guide and shape the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of preservice educators, especially as these behavioral elements relate to teaching students from diverse backgrounds. It is imperative that the MAT department strives to prepare educators who exhibit a high degree of cultural competence, proficiency, and intelligence and who can teach with a culturally responsive mindset.

To meet the goals of meaningful learning experiences addressing cultural competency and issues of diversity, two courses in the MAT curriculum were designed specifically to address the needs of diverse learners. Course goals for EDUG 503 include the following:

- Students will identify how values, ideals, behaviors, and beliefs impact the learning of all students as well as their own personal, professional, and intellectual development.
- Students will develop multiple strategies to transform the educational environment and demonstrate awareness and skills to eliminate issues of oppression that impact student learning.
- Students will demonstrate an awareness of multiple ways to maximize the learning of all students.

These course goals are taught in partnership with EDUG 575, Practicum 1. The course goals for EDUG 575 include the following:

- Compare and contrast various conceptions of culture.
- Use ethnographic processes as tools for learning about a sociocultural community different from your own.
- Challenge assumptions and biases, integrate multiple perspectives into the curriculum, implement an equity pedagogy, and create an empowering classroom climate and school culture for all students.

EDUG 575 is the first of three field experiences for teacher candidates in the MAT curriculum. This practicum emphasizes knowing “the other” and developing skills to work under diverse conditions and with diverse students. While many candidates refer back to EDUG 575 as foundational in their ability to question assumptions, acknowledge biases, and create structures for meeting the needs of all students, an international component was lacking for candidates who wanted a cultural immersion experience.

Field experiences, which include cultural immersion, provide an opportunity for all participants, not just students, to think critically, problem solve, reflect, review, ponder, and wonder. These cultural immersion experiences allow students an opportunity to rethink paradigms while often providing a crisis of thought or a disruption to their current thinking, to some degree. They offer multiple opportunities to view the world from a different perspective. Cultural immersion experiences allow learners to take knowledge and action, combined with a context that is atypical or unusual for the learner, while considering personal, professional, and instructional implications (Dantas, 2004). An international component in preservice education can provide this out-of-the ordinary experience while building students’ intercultural competence through dimensions that are both cognitive and experiential.

Experiencing culture via written materials or media from the comfort of home primarily promotes only cognitive knowledge, which may be insufficient to cause deep and lasting change (Mahon and Cushner, 2007). Research suggests that experiential learning is an essential component for developing not only cognitive insight and knowledge but affective responses as well (Dantas, 2007; Davis & Mello, 2003; Quezada, 2004), and that the benefits of cultural immersion are numerous (Alfaro, 2008; Dantas, 2007; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen, 2007). Darling-Hammond (2005) argues that, “Teachers need a new

kind of preparation—one that enables them to go beyond ‘covering the curriculum’ to actually enable learning for students who learn in very different ways” (p. 2). Employing a cultural immersion experience for preservice teaching candidates could begin to provide the new kind of teacher preparation Darling-Hammond suggests.

My personal interest in cultural immersion began in July 1995. Landing at the Nairobi, Kenya airport seventeen years ago remains a vivid memory. Sitting next to my three-year-old son, my husband and daughter somewhere across the plane, I realized that in less than 40 hours’ time, I had just moved a half a world away from Salem, Oregon to Nairobi, Kenya. I recall looking out the window of the jet at the surrounding fields, not yet recognizing them as the Nairobi Game Park, and realized I had just moved home. During four years living in Kenya, I experienced elation, disorientation, confusion, joy, challenges and rewards while adapting to another culture. Also during this timeframe, my family had the privilege of hosting over 50 guests for one-to-six-week stays. I had an immediate interest in their response to the differences between western and Kenyan culture. Many individuals experienced ranging degrees of culture shock, struggling to make sense of annoyances like water and power rationing and driving which bordered on lunacy while often being impressed and influenced by the warmth and hospitality of our Kenyan friends. The tension of both disequilibrium and benefits of experiencing another culture hovered constantly. I watched, as others seemed to adapt quickly to the rhythm and pace of Kenyan life. Without knowing it at the time, I was beginning to form my research interest.

Because of this experience living overseas, in addition to a dozen or more experiences of cultural immersion, I have developed a long-term professional and personal goal to see international practicum experiences available for MAT candidates. When I think of my own growth and personal development, the four years living in Kenya provided some of the most

profound and insightful experiences of both my personal and professional life. In addition, travels to Nicaragua, Guatemala, Ecuador, and China—with the intent of learning to understand cultures—caused me to want the same opportunity for the students whom I teach.

When first hired at George Fox University to teach in the MAT department, I wanted the values I learned through experiences living and teaching in Kenya to be part of my vision for preparing preservice teachers who were culturally aware, sensitive, and competent. Shortly after arriving in the MAT program, Dr. Carol Brazo and I began discussing and dreaming of strategies and experiences to enhance cultural competence and understanding in MAT candidates. We both hoped for some kind of international experience for MAT candidates, believing that experiences in cultures very different from our own provided rich learning environments, shaping the mind, heart, and soul.

As department chair, my role as a leader in the department has been to advocate for the experiences cultural immersion allows, based not only on my personal experience but also on research that indicated cultural immersion among teacher candidates could provide powerful learning (Dantas, 2007; Merryfield 2000, 2002; Quezada 2004). An international field experience also aligned with and supported the diversity goals of NCATE and InTASC. The idea of an international practicum gained noteworthy support when Dr. Linda Samek became Dean of the School of Education. Dr. Samek was an immediate supporter of international experiences and gave approval and encouragement in August of 2008 to move forward, making this goal a reality. The introduction of an international field experience was met with excitement and apprehension, excitement among candidates and some apprehension among faculty. In addition, logistical challenges including funding, scheduling, and appropriate professional development arose. As department chair, I guided, consoled, cajoled, mentored, and began to

move a department to greater acceptance, even an embrace of cultural immersion experiences for teacher candidates. By adding and encouraging an international component to the MAT curriculum, the department is being influenced to accept greater emphasis on long-term goals surrounding the teaching of culturally diverse students (Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2005; Northouse, 2010). Influencing a department toward acceptance and promotion of a different type of practicum is a critical process for encouraging and sustaining international experiences for MAT candidates as well as to prepare future teachers to be as culturally aware, knowledgeable, and sensitive as possible.

In fall of 2008, three MAT professors organized and recruited for the first international opportunity; they then accompanied this group of MAT candidates in May 2009 to Ecuador for an international practicum with cultural immersion and Spanish language development as foundational elements of the experience. Professor Tatiana Cevallos had developed a partnership with the Andean Center for Latin American Studies (ACLAS), where candidates participated in home stays for a three-week duration, attended language class each weekday morning to develop Spanish fluency, and participated in local Ecuadorian schools in the afternoon. Two weekend excursions were planned in an attempt to show candidates as much of Ecuador as possible. As a result of this first international experience, my interest in researching the evolving perspectives of MAT candidates who participated in an international practicum for my dissertation topic was piqued, and I have followed closely the opportunities provided candidates the past three years in an international setting.

In the fall of 2009, Dr. Rebecca Addleman approached MAT leaders about taking candidates to Vienna, Austria, where she had connections to schools from prior teaching experiences. The first group of MAT candidates traveled to Vienna, Austria in May 2010. Also

in May 2010, I accompanied Dean Samek to Chongqing, China to establish relationships with Chinese educators in preparation for implementing an international practicum experience in rural China at a middle school for summer 2011.

In May 2011, I accompanied Dr. Rebecca Addleman, eight teacher candidates, and two recent graduates to Vienna, Austria for a three-week cultural immersion experience. As mentioned above, this international initiative was introduced in May 2009 with a three-week experience in Quito, Ecuador. In May 2010 two groups of MAT candidates participated in an international experience; one group returned to Quito and a second group forged a new trail in Vienna, Austria. Again in May 2011, one group traveled to Ecuador while the group I facilitated spent time in Austria. In July 2011, a group of students traveled to China, learning from and teaching a group of Chinese middle school students during a two-week English camp. Close to 80 MAT candidates and ten faculty have participated in an MAT international practicum since its inception in May 2009.

An additional component of the cultural immersion practicum has been the formation of a collaborative research team, who developed and conducted a research study of candidates who traveled to Ecuador in May 2009, May 2010, and May 2011 and candidates who traveled to Austria in May 2010 and May 2011. An outcome of these studies has been the publication of one scholarly article and another in process. An article was published in 2011 related to the stages of cultural adaptation MAT candidates experienced while immersed in Ecuador in May 2009. An article on debriefing circles, an intentional reflective process similar to Parker Palmer's clearness committee, is in process. I participated in the data analysis, interpretation, and writing of the debriefing circle article and am listed as a co-author. This dissertation will add to the existing research by providing a more comprehensive view of the nature of the critical



incidents and themes of disequilibrium for candidates immersed in another culture since this experience began four years ago. The findings of this study will be used to better prepare candidates prior to an immersion experience and as instructive for revising current immersion opportunities while developing additional international initiatives abroad such as fulltime student teaching in an overseas setting. The findings of this study may also be used as the MAT department undergoes a process of curriculum revision during the upcoming academic year, striving to expand curriculum in the area of teaching diverse learners.

The international practicum experiences in Ecuador, Austria, and China provided MAT candidates with unique opportunities to use critical thinking skills that transformed their newfound pedagogical skills in international situations that brought many challenges and opportunities for growth. Some candidates found that these experiences provided significant personal and professional growth. Their worldview was expanded as they gained confidence, insight, and new paradigms of learning. Others experienced disorientation, disequilibrium, and even crisis as they encountered difficult situations. The struggle to navigate their way to resolution required thinking through novel alternatives, options, and solutions. In these cases, crisis often brought enlarged perspectives.

It is through disequilibrium, disorientation, or crisis, followed by opportunities for discourse and reflection, that learners can make new meaning. How deeply were candidates impacted by a cultural immersion experience? What themes emerged causing candidates to reflect on their own biases and assumptions while gaining greater sensitivity for others? Could a cultural immersion experience such as EDUG 575 International provide significant scaffolding in the training of candidates who were culturally responsive and who would meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students? Feelings of disorientation are often expressed as

candidates step into the Pre-12 classroom for field experiences. Could experiencing disequilibrium in a cultural immersion field practicum provide opportunity for self-reflection and further honing of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, prior to stepping into a Pre-12 classroom? These are all problems that could be further illuminated through research on cultural immersion experiences.

### **Problem Statement**

The purpose of this study was to conduct a content analysis and to analyze critical incidents from journal entries of MAT candidates who participated in an international practicum. I sought to describe themes of events or emotions experienced by candidates, leading to increased understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students, due to the candidates' time in an overseas, cultural immersion experience.

### **Research Questions**

The focus of my dissertation was to examine the critical incidents reported by MAT candidates and the potential these incidents had in shaping culturally competent, empathetic, and aware teachers with an expanded view of teaching and learning, due in part to their time immersed in another culture.

I explored the following research questions:

1. What was the nature of critical incidents on teacher candidates in an international cultural immersion field experience?
2. What themes caused disequilibrium in a cultural immersion field experience?
3. What implications do these critical incidents have for restructuring future cultural immersion experiences to be as meaningful as possible?

## **Definition of Terms**

**Anomie:** The Language Minority Assessment Project (2005) defined anomie as “a stage of gradual recovery of equilibrium and the acknowledgment of the differences of both cultures. This is also referred to as culture stress.” It is important to note that this is not the typical definition for anomie used in the social sciences.

**Critical incident:** An incident occurring which the candidate continued to ponder or mull over; the incident did not need to be negative. Grabove (1997) stated that a critical incident cannot be planned and by its very nature, could cause learning.

**Culture:** Bennett (2009) defined culture as “the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of interacting people” (p. 5). There were multiple definitions of culture; for this dissertation, I used Bennett’s definition.

**Cultural competency:** Bennett (2009) defined competence as “the potential for enactment of culturally sensitive feeling into appropriate and effective behavior in another cultural context” (p. 5). Although there were multiple definitions of cultural competency, I used Bennett’s definition for this dissertation.

**Cultural Relevance:** Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) defined cultural relevance as “being evident through the integration of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse learners to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these learners. Culturally relevant instruction integrates a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different approaches to learning” (InTASC, 2011, p. 21).

**Culture Shock:** Feeling a sense of loss over what has been left behind in the home culture; experiencing a sense of disorientation and possible feelings of homesickness, frustration, loneliness, and even anger.

**Diverse Learners and Learning Differences:** InTASC defined diverse learners and learning differences as “those who, because of gender, language, cultural background, differing ability levels, disabilities, learning approaches, and/or socioeconomic status may have academic needs that require varied instructional strategies to ensure their learning. Learning differences are manifested in such areas as differing rates of learning, motivation, attention, preferred learning modalities, complexity of reasoning, persistence, foundational knowledge and skills, and preferred learning and response modes” (InTASC, 2011, p. 21).

**Diversity:** InTASC defined diversity as “inclusive of individual differences (e.g., personality, interests, learning modalities, and life experiences), and group differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, ability, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, nationality, language, religion, political affiliation, and socio-economic background” (InTASC, 2011, p. 21).

**Disequilibrium:** Dictionary.com defined disequilibrium as a lack of balance or stability that can be either positive or negative. However, I felt a more relevant definition—as related to cultural immersion—was that found on Ed Psyc Central’s website of Piagetian and Vygotskian terms, which defined disequilibrium as “the ‘out-of-balance’ state that occurs when a person realizes that his or her current ways of thinking are not working to solve a problem or understand a situation” (Ed Psych Central).

**EDUG 575:** This was the first of three field experiences in which MAT teacher candidates participated. This practicum was three to four weeks in length, seven days a week. The second

and third field experiences were held in Pre/K-12 classrooms and were considered typical student teaching placements.

**Teacher candidate:** MAT student pursuing a Master's degree in teaching and an initial teaching license; traditionally referred to as "student teacher."

**Transformative Learning Theory:** A theory specifically connected to adult learners, which contends that adults, through a disorienting or triggering event, will reconsider assumptions, beliefs, and paradigms in order to allow new learning to occur.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations of this study. First, MAT faculty who participated in the international field practicum did not guide the critical incidents around a particular concept, emotion, idea, paradigm, or theory. As they recorded their experiences and reflections day to day, the teacher candidates may not have revealed what was most formative or may not have yet realized what would be most formative. Second, there were a limited number of candidates who have participated in this international experience at this point; with anywhere from 50 to 100 reflections to analyze, conclusions cannot be applied to teacher candidates everywhere, nor may they be generalizable outside of the sample of journal entries I analyzed. Third, according to Berg (2009) a weakness of a content analysis "may be in locating unobtrusive messages relevant to the particular research questions" (p. 365). Fourth, I could not ask candidates follow-up questions and was limited to reading what was in the journal entries.

### **Delimitations**

Candidates were asked for three formal reflections during the practicum; for each reflection, the first question was to discuss a critical incident. The number of formal reflections was a restriction placed on the candidate due to the schedule of the practicum. A greater quantity

of reflections could have been solicited. As a researcher, although I read these reflections more than once, themes could still emerge from the data that I had not considered if I were to read these reflections at a later time, after completion of the dissertation. I did not share these reflections with others during the coding, analysis, and interpretation process; the themes that emerged were solely my interpretations.

### **Summary**

There are many theories related to the stages of culture shock, cultural disequilibrium, and, transformative learning which speak to the belief that disorienting events, or disequilibrium of some sort can promote significant growth and learning for those who are willing to allow disequilibrium into their lives and learn from it. While not necessarily comfortable or easy, the growth opportunities of living, studying, learning, and teaching overseas can positively influence a teacher candidate, even if the time overseas is only a few weeks.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), in their 2011 update of teacher standards, declared a new vision of teaching toward student achievement and specifically addressed the need for personalized learning for diverse learners. InTASC (2011) challenged all teachers to recognize what students bring to their classrooms as assets that can be used to advance learning. Teachers will encounter greater diversity in their classrooms as society becomes more global (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). An intentional response to cultural differences and to this growing diversity in Pre/K-12 classrooms is being addressed through an international teacher education component in many teacher education institutions. Preparing a preservice teacher to cross boundaries of culture, race, or socioeconomic status to enter the world of a student who looks or behaves much differently from him- or herself is a critical task. Considering the current demographics of public schools in the United States, there is an increased need for teachers to expand their skills in the area of cultural competence as they work with diverse learners (Dantas, 2007; Roberts, 2007; Schneider, 2003).

A primary goal of internationalizing preservice education is to build upon students' intercultural competence and cultural proficiency. As defined in chapter 1, Bennett (2009) described competence as displaying culturally sensitive feelings and appropriate and effective behavior in another cultural context. Cultural competence, as defined by Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2005), consists of interactions with other cultural groups in ways that recognized and valued their differences. This recognition and affirmation of cultural differences compelled one to evaluate their own skills, continue to develop their own knowledge about others, and adjust and refine their relational behavior toward more positive interactions. This

differed from cultural proficiency, which moves from acknowledgement and recognition of difference to honoring and affirming differences among cultures, viewing diversity as an asset while interacting with other cultures with knowledge and respect.

Merryfield (2002) suggested that educators who teach with a global perspective in mind could radically impact, shape, and influence their students' awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures and global issues. An educator with a global perspective is able to promote open-mindedness while confronting stereotypes, in addition to expanding perspectives; this perspective enhances educator's view of cultural awareness, difference and similarities, understanding, and appreciation.

The purpose of this literature review was to study what is currently known about teacher education programs with an international component as applied to preservice teacher training. This literature review will begin with literature related to the rationale for the internationalizing of teacher education, followed by a review of the outcomes of international experiences for preservice teachers and teacher education faculty. This will be followed by a review of the outcomes of international experiences for preservice teachers and teacher education faculty. The literature review concludes with a survey of the existing frameworks for increasing cultural understanding.

### **Rationale for Internationalizing Teacher Education**

The American teaching force continues to have a majority of white teachers working with students from minority backgrounds or who are culturally or linguistically different from their classroom teacher (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). The philosophies and assumptions of teachers can be resistant to change, as they have been formed during a lengthy period of time based upon years of individual school and life experiences (Dantas, 2007). These deeply held



philosophies and assumptions may inhibit a teacher's ability to understand the needs of their students. A teacher education program that includes an international component with intentional and directed instruction can help challenge individual assumptions and beliefs—which may be inaccurate or even unknown to the teacher—about culture and learning. Learning about others is a central component of field experiences that place teacher candidates in environments significantly different from their familiar and comfortable surroundings.

Increasing globalization creates the need to internationalize teacher education (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Mahon, 2007; Merryfield, 2002; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Roberts, 2007). Increased globalization has led many to conclude that efforts acknowledging globalization need to be part of programs preparing future teachers in order to help new teachers see the interconnectedness of cultures (Dantas, 2007; Merryfield, 2002; Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen, 2007). According to Dantas (2007), taking an understanding of culture and globalization and forming it into action is a challenging process and one that adds to the difficulty of understanding issues of diversity. Preservice educators often complete coursework in educational and multicultural theory; however, that theoretical knowledge alone may not be adequate or persuasive enough to change beliefs and presumptions about students from diverse backgrounds. Roberts (2007) contends that proficiency is gained by acknowledging first world privileges while at the same time, looking beyond a home culture to that of others. Proficiency in any area is achieved through learning and authentic practice. One cannot gain cultural proficiency without authentic practice. International opportunities can provide the means for cultural proficiency to be demonstrated authentically.

International experience is an essential component of efforts toward internationalizing the teacher education curriculum (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). The professional teacher preparation

standards found in both the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) have clearly articulated that teachers, particularly those teaching foreign language and social studies, need to have international experiences (Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen, 2007).

While there are key differences between multicultural theory and international education (Roberts, 2007), research in the area of multicultural theories can help guide an investigation of internationalizing teacher education. Banks et al. (2005) recommend providing opportunities for potential and soon-to-be teachers to be immersed in a culture with which they are unfamiliar. Such immersion would provide opportunities to gain knowledge through service learning experiences, studying and observing students, classrooms, schools or communities rich in diversity with teachers who are culturally aware and proficient. Dantas (2007) recommends that a key component of these immersion experiences allow for intentional, planned times of reflection and questioning of preconceived ideas and newly formed beliefs. This reflection allows students the safety of interrogating assumptions and erroneous beliefs about others, a critical concept for reflection that provokes change. Mezirow (1997) states that self-reflection can lead to considerable personal change. This personal change can influence a teacher's philosophies, beliefs, and instructional strategies. Multicultural research indicates the need for teachers to have an understanding of the individual, cultural, and linguistic differences of an increasingly diverse population.

While teacher education programs have worked in the area of multicultural theories to improve the knowledge base of preservice educators, too often the knowledge of multicultural theories has not truly transformed teacher candidates because, Dantas (2007) argues, theoretical knowledge is seldom applied in a relevant setting. Teacher education programs with an

international component have a unique opportunity to connect exploration of a culture and diversity of its people to what students already know, thus creating deeply enriching opportunities for discussion while promoting curriculum which is culturally responsive (Roberts, 2007; Dantas, 2007). International experiences are designed to put theory into practice.

Rios, Montecinos, and van Olphen (2007) report that participation in an international teacher education study provided opportunities for reflection, reexamination, and increased understanding of the definition of good teaching. While the majority of internationalizing experiences tend to have undergraduate students as its participants, international opportunities should be extended to faculty who teach preservice teachers, given the significant opportunity faculty have to exert influence in terms of guiding pedagogy, theory, curriculum development, instructional skills, attitudes, and dispositions.

The internationalizing of teacher education goes beyond sending students and faculty overseas. Hosting both faculty and students from other countries also provides opportunities to learn beyond the borders of one's own cultural understanding (Roberts, 2007). In addition, engaging in scholarly discussions and research with peers from international settings is a useful tool in expanding one's horizons. Each of these efforts to cross borders and continents enables the learner—whether a preservice teacher or teacher education faculty member—to achieve greater understanding of others, rather than judging, evaluating, or trying to change them (Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen, 2007).

### **Outcomes of Cultural Immersion Experiences**

The outcomes of cultural immersion experiences are numerous. A primary outcome is the development of new lenses for observing and discussing patterns and practices of life within classrooms, communities, and families. This helps students see how individual lenses shape an

individual and how those lenses cause awareness, understanding and meaning or lack thereof (Frank, 1999; Green et al., 2003). At times, expectations are unrealistic and deviate from what an individual expected, thus causing a disruption from the ordinary. Students' understandings are challenged as new knowledge regarding culture and education emerges (Dantas, 2007).

Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen (2007) found that cultural experiences provided opportunities for reflective practice, reconsidering assumptions, clarifying expectations, flexibility, creativity in acknowledging evolving identities and open-mindedness, and seeking genuine learning. These skills are invaluable to the teachers of diverse students.

According to Roberts (2007), preservice teachers have the opportunity to acknowledge privileged behaviors and beliefs—often found in western, middle-class, Caucasian students—while integrating content and methods from international settings. Students may believe they have relevant ideas of international settings, due in part to the proliferation of media, while discovering entirely different paradigms while overseas.

Effective teachers need strong skills in order to infuse cultural knowledge into their teaching. Growth in the areas of instructional pedagogy, multicultural sensitivity, and self-efficacy were the result of cultural engagement and not cultural tourism, according to Quezada (2004). Cultural engagement includes participating in a culture to a different degree than often experienced when an individual is a tourist. Engagement in culture can take the form of many activities, including but not limited to, language study, home stays, participation in the visiting country's schools or organizations, or service learning components. Many overseas tourism opportunities offer the chance to study, appreciate, and learn from a culture. The deeper benefits of intercultural competence result from the difficulties and disequilibrium that students experience in their practicum and community placements (Cushner, 2004; 2007).

Merryfield (2000) contends that within the scholarship arenas of multicultural education, professional development about globalization, and emphasis on diversity and cultural competence, a concerted effort is being made to increase personal, or face-to-face, experiences of teacher educators in a diverse culture and with diverse populations. Why are some professors excellent at the teaching of multicultural and global education? When teacher educators are primarily Caucasian, and middle class, how do they understand the experiences of their diverse students and perhaps more importantly, prepare teacher candidates to excel in teaching all students? In Merryfield's study of 80 teacher educators, middle class Caucasian teachers had profound experiences while living outside their home country. Educators who lived overseas or experienced lengthy cultural immersion experiences developed new perspectives of both past and current experiences, as well as reformed thoughts on their identity, while gaining additional knowledge on inequity and contradictions.

Leung et al. (2008) suggest that demanding or very intense cultural experiences—such as an international field experience—can provide holistic growth in an individual due to the difficulties of working in a foreign setting. In their study of global business leaders, some organizations are now requiring that younger executives with potential to be successful leaders obtain international experiences; these experiences foster growth and development in attitudes and behaviors, leading to successful global business endeavors and cultural intelligence (Hall, Zhu & Yan, 2001). This could be applied to teachers, as verified by the research in this literature review indicating that international experiences cause holistic growth, whether for a businessperson or prospective teacher.

There are some who believe that teacher educators should not pursue multicultural or intercultural education opportunities due to the belief that these approaches are not nearly

substantial enough to truly make a difference for a new teacher (Rios, 2007). This belief, however, has not gained momentum; the overriding conviction is that international and multicultural education do make a difference in preparing educators who are culturally aware, responsible, responsive, and competent.

### **Frameworks for International Experiences**

#### **Transformative learning theory.**

When taking teacher candidates overseas, one goal is that of increased cultural awareness, sensitivity, and respect. According to the theory of transformative learning, (Mezirow, 1997; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2003) adult learners, because they have habits and perspectives that have already formed, need a disorienting event to help reshape and mold new paradigms of learning and being. Educational experiences for an adult should provide learners with the opportunity to form their own interpretations rather than acting on the responses, beliefs, or assumptions of others.

Transformative learning theory extends independent thinking for the adult learner.

Mezirow (1997) defines transformative learning in the following way:

[T]ransformative learning is the process of effecting change in a *frame of reference*.

Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set our “line of action.” Once set, we automatically move from one specific activity (mental or behavioral) to another. We have a strong tendency to reject

ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration—aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird, or mistaken (p. 5).

Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory presents the goal of adult education not only as acquiring information but also helping learners critically analyze and reflect upon their beliefs, assumptions, and paradigms.

Transformative learning differs from traditional learning in that it reinterprets past experiences from a new perspective. Discourse and critical reflection are two elements used in transformative learning theory, which provide the learner with opportunities to make new meaning. Mezirow (1997) identifies discourse as an exchange of ideas with the goal of evaluating the rationale given in support of a competing interpretation. An important element of discourse is a serious examination of why a particular point of view is held. The process of dialogue allows for many interpretations or understandings of a belief to be questioned, discussed, and analyzed. The more this process of dialogue occurs, the greater the chance of finding a more reliable or valid explanation. When learners analyze the interconnected experiences of others, they learn together by arriving at common understandings. These common understandings provide a foundation for belief until new information or evidence is added and the cycle of discourse continues (Mezirow, 1997).

An essential objective in Moseley, Reeder, and Armstrong's (2008) International Student Teaching Project in Costa Rica was to facilitate personal change in each student and to compel each student to reexamine his or her identity and cultural views. Mezirow's transformative learning theory was applied in helping adult learners make new meaning of their previous life experiences in the context of their international teaching as the learner critically analyzes values, meaning, and belief systems. Individual frames of reference can be transformed through critical

reflection on the assumptions that form points of view, perspectives, habits of mind, and beliefs. Critical reflection takes place when learners problem-solve and discover together. This process also allows examination of assumptions made individually or by others. Changes in frames of reference and a habit of mind occur either because of critical reflection or due to growth and changing perspectives (Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow (1997) states that a defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure is adequate. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the fundamental goal of adult education. Due to its emphasis on helping individuals become more independent and self-directed in their thinking as they question their values and meanings, rather than blindly accepting them or basing those beliefs on the rationale of others, transformative learning develops autonomous thinking and is an essential component of adult learning.

According to Mezirow (2003), transformative learning occurs as a result of critical thinking and discourse, triggered by a disorienting dilemma. Students are given more responsibility for their learning in a transformative environment because they are actively engaged in critical reflection and dialogue as they question and evaluate their assumptions and thought patterns. This process is seldom experienced when students are living comfortably in a familiar environment because assumptions are not challenged. Encouraging disorienting events, set in a framework of transformative learning, is critical to the maturity of adults as they learn and process new information.



Moseley, Reeder, and Armstrong (2008) report in a study of international teaching experiences of a student who became fearful and whose fears became prominent, even over logical thought. By recognizing and acknowledging these fears through critical reflection, which included dialogue with peers and faculty advisors, the student was able to prevail over her fears rather than having them mark her experiences overseas as unpleasant.

Kitchenham (2008) describes Mezirow's first four phases of transformative learning as a disorienting dilemma followed by self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. This is followed by an honest appraisal of assumptions, and awareness and acknowledgement that feelings of dissatisfaction are "shared" and others have undergone similar changes in belief systems. These four stages of disorientation and critical reflection can help an individual begin to sort through and make sense of their experience.

### **Stages of cultural adaptation.**

Teachers need to gain knowledge related to the stages their students go through when adjusting to a new culture. Case (1993) reports that teachers participating in a process of cultural adjustment will gain open-mindedness and understanding of complexity of culture by participating in international experiences, thus experiencing their own cultural adjustment and adaptation. According to The Language Minority Assessment Project (2005), stages of cultural adaptation include euphoria, culture shock, anomie, and finally adaptation, which include assimilation or acculturation. Euphoria, often referred to as the "honeymoon" stage, is the first stage of cultural adjustment and may be experienced before the more difficult adjustments to culture arise. In this stage, individuals are captivated with their new experience, feeling a sense of adventure and generally enjoying the new experiences. There are new sights to see, new

foods to taste, new modes of transportation to navigate; individuals often respond with excitement and delight.

The second stage is fittingly described as culture shock. At this point, individuals begin to feel a sense of loss over what they have left behind or what they are missing. They typically feel a sense of disorientation at this point and may reveal feelings of homesickness, frustration and even anger. They may feel fearful or lonely. They may begin to question what they are seeing and feeling and try to make sense of it by comparing issues to that of the home culture (The Language Minority Assessment Project; 2005). Roberts (2007) suggests that this stage provides an opportunity for regular and repeated reflection and analysis. The uncertainty often felt during this stage can cause an individual to feel emotionally drained and physically exhausted. While these are normal traits of cultural adjustment, Roberts (2007) also connects these traits to the feelings and stages of novice teachers, who may experience similar emotional and physical responses during their first year of teaching.

As individuals begin to feel a bit more normalcy in their emotions and feelings, they are entering the anomie stage. This stage brings acknowledgement and even enjoyment of both cultures—the one left behind or at home and the one currently being experienced. Typically an individual in this stage will place more emphasis on the differences between cultures rather than similarities. Finally, students move into one of two directions, either acculturation or assimilation (Banks, 2002). With acculturation, individuals find value and meaning from both cultures and identify with both; while assimilating, values and beliefs of the home culture are replaced by the new culture. Roberts (2007) suggests that preservice teachers who participate in cultural immersion field experiences are more accepting of differences, more aware of contributions of another culture, and more supportive of ideas around diversity than if they had

not participated in a cultural immersion experience. This growth in acceptance is a result of experiencing the stages of cultural adjustment in an international setting and gaining understanding for their future students who are also adjusting to a new culture or environment. These final stages of cultural adaptation also present opportunities to counter incorrect information about others with knowledge and understanding in addition to greater appreciation of differences.

### **Cultural proficiency.**

Cross (1989) suggests that culture is an opportunity to learn and knowledge of culture can be used for resolving cultural issues rather than viewing those issues as only a problem. This problem-solving perspective should be used to its fullest, rather than allowing it to limit the view of how the knowledge of one's culture can be informative and helpful. Lindsey, Robins, and Terrill (2003), present a framework for cultural proficiency which includes assessing culture, valuing diversity managing the dynamics of difference, and adapting to diversity. Each of these stages allows individuals the opportunity to recognize their assumptions and biases while developing skills, attitudes, and behaviors that promote cultural proficiency.

The first element of cultural proficiency, assessing culture, suggests that it is imperative to recognize how one's home culture affects how one views the culture of others. Within the first element, naming the differences, describing your own culture and the cultural norms of your organization, and understanding how the culture of your organization affects those with different cultures are important considerations that strengthen an individual or organization's cultural competence (Lindsey, Robins & Terrill, 2003).

The second element of cultural proficiency, valuing diversity, involves celebrating and encouraging participation of a variety of people in all activities. An important attribute of

cultural sensitivity is a growing awareness and willingness to view differences through a positive lens rather than a lens of judgment or as a response that may seem as out of place. It is important to acknowledge that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others (Lindsey, Robins & Terrill, 2003).

Lindsey, Robins, & Terrill's (2003) cultural framework for proficiency continues as learners first frame the conflicts which can be caused by difference and then manage those aspects of difference so they are not viewed as negative. In this third stage of cultural proficiency, learning effective strategies for conflict resolution is vital, especially among people who have differing backgrounds and values. Some may have misgivings or doubt, due to the impact of historic events and perspectives; these suspicions are understandable, therefore it is important not to distrust others based on stereotypes and limited or distorted information.

As individuals become more culturally proficient, they learn to adapt to diversity in such a way that decisions are made that acknowledge and accommodate differences. It is in this stage where intercultural communication grows, potential confusion caused by aspects of difference is clarified, and interventions are developed to deal with conflict in a healthy manner (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrill, 2003).

### **Experiential learning theory.**

Experience plays a significant role in learning and the development of attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) contends that experiences, thinking, and actions are interrelated and connected. Kolb drew on the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, who contend that learning first involves the integration of experience with concepts, and then connects observations with actions. Experiential learning suggests that learning is a holistic process.

Kolb describes a four-stage cycle of learning, including grasping the experience and transforming the experience. There are two modes of grasping experience: concrete experience versus abstract conceptualization that allows different methods for a learner to absorb the experience. Concrete experiences tend to focus on the tangible while abstract experiences tend to focus on symbolic representations of the experience. Likewise, there are two modes of transforming experience: reflective observation and active experimentation. Reflective observation relies on a learner's ability to process an event internally while active experimentation requires manipulation of the external world. According to Kolb, an experience is transformed into learning only after a learner has gone through four movements: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting.

The syllabus for EDUG 575, the international practicum, notes that the practicum is designed to facilitate experiential learning about cultural conceptions, diversity, and the dynamics of student differences with the ultimate goal of understanding one's own cultural framework and adapting to another culture in order to develop empathy towards culturally and linguistically diverse students in the United States. This experiential learning aligns with Kolb's experiential learning theory in that candidates are able to experience, reflect, think, and act upon their own assumptions, beliefs and values regarding other cultures.

### **Leading an Organization**

Responsibility for improving organizations falls to the leaders of those organizations. This is true of schools as well. Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2005) have developed a framework to guide school leaders in becoming more culturally proficient while leading and guiding faculty. Leaders must identify and find effective ways to move an organization forward

in ensuring that all students can be successful and that the varied cultural backgrounds of students are looked upon as strengths upon which to build.

Lindsey, Robins & Terrill (2003) lay out guidelines to institutionalize cultural knowledge and to train an organization's members about differences. In their view, cultural knowledge needs to be integrated into the norms of an organization, the history and causes of stereotypes and injustices need to be discussed, and professional development should take place allowing all members to successfully engage in varied intercultural situations.

Mahon argues that overseas student teaching programs can transform not only the individual student teacher but also the institutions that send student teachers overseas. Too often, an international component in teacher education is at the edge of acceptance by an education department rather than at the center, being embraced by the majority of faculty and students. Leaders in teacher education programs need to make changes in the structure of field experiences so that they reflect the changes taking place worldwide with the acknowledgement that future teachers will participate in a much more globalized society than past generations of educators (Cordeiro, 2007).

Stachowski and Sparks (2007) believe that the need for providing future teachers and teacher educators with global experiences is significant. Global perspectives should be infused throughout the curricula in teacher education programs along with an international field experience. An organization's leaders have a responsibility and opportunity to promote new paradigms for field experiences. Joining existing programs and consortia with common goals and outcomes can support a department's leadership as they work toward greater acceptance of international experiences and then to implementation of overseas opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The literature related to the rationale for the internationalizing of teacher education supports overseas cultural immersion experiences as field practica, which can shape future teachers' philosophies and beliefs about others, giving them new lenses through which to view their future students. Frameworks including transformative learning theory, stages of cultural adaptation and cultural proficiency, and experiential learning theory can guide the research in cultural immersion experiences and provide greater understanding into the emotions and thoughts experienced during an overseas field experience. In addition, leading an organization to acceptance of new structures for field experiences is a critical endeavor as teacher educators consider pedagogical opportunities for increasing teacher candidates' understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Teacher educators should be challenged to build and promote ideals of international teaching experiences while students are in our teacher preparation programs. Like any learning process, students should develop the kind of awareness provided through international experiences that allows them to gain a life-long practice nourished by new experiences and current global events (Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen, 2007). Teacher preparation programs should provide leadership in facilitating international education issues and practices into P-16 curriculum (Roberts, 2007). Internationalizing teacher education experiences should be considered part of the journey a prospective teacher takes in finding increased awareness of cultural stances, greater sensitivity and empathy, and expanded competence when teaching others very different from themselves. It is not the final destination; it is only a beginning.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to conduct a content analysis of a sample of journal entries from the 60 candidates who participated in an international practicum through the MAT department at George Fox University. During the three experiences in Ecuador—years 2009, 2010, and 2011—and two experiences in Austria—years 2010 and 2011—candidates were required to journal about the critical incidents they experienced in a cultural immersion practicum on three occasions; these data are archived. Formal permission from George Fox University’s IRB was granted for each of the practicum experiences where archived data are available. As part of the reflection process, candidates were asked to write about a critical incident. A critical incident could be positive or negative, a frustration or a joy, but needed to be something the candidate had continued to ponder.

This study explored themes from candidate reflections of critical incidents. A qualitative research design using content analysis of journal reflections was used. According to Berg (2009) a content analysis “is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (p. 338). The data will be coded using open coding.

### **Research Questions**

I explored the following research questions:

1. What was the nature of critical incidents on teacher candidates in an international cultural immersion field experience?
2. What themes caused disequilibrium in a cultural immersion field experience?



3. What implications do these critical incidents have for restructuring future cultural immersion experiences to be as meaningful as possible?

### **Setting and Participants**

Candidates ranged from being in their first semester of their preservice program to recent graduates of either the three-, four-, or five-semester program. Candidates participated from all five geographical locations where MAT has a presence; Oregon sites included Newberg, Portland, Salem, Redmond; MAT has one site in Boise, Idaho. Candidates ranged in age from their early twenties and right out of their undergraduate experience to their mid-forties. Some candidates were married; several were parents. Most candidates were of Caucasian ethnicity. All candidates traveling to either Ecuador or Austria were placed in three-week home stays. Candidates in Ecuador went to daily language courses in Spanish and saw one another and their faculty advisors every day. Because language study options were unavailable, candidates in Austria spent longer days in public, private, and international schools. Candidates in Austria also spent two afternoons a week working at a refugee center with youth from primarily eastern Europe and northern Africa. Candidates in Austria saw one another or their faculty advisors two to four times per week, but not daily. Candidates in both locations were expected to use the least expensive, also typically the most common, form of public transportation.

### **Sampling**

I used purposive and representative sampling methods through the use of stratified sampling as described by Berg (2009). I analyzed a sample of journal reflections from both female and male participants, from both locations—Ecuador and Austria—and from each of the three years' in which the international practicum has occurred.

### **Human Subjects Safeguarding**

All data have been archived; each EDUG 575 cultural immersion experience went through George Fox University's IRB process and approval was secured before writing journal reflections on critical incidents was allowed. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants who wrote the journal reflections was maintained by assigning each participant a pseudonym or number; this was used to identify the reflection instead of the participant's name when referring to the journal reflections.

### **Role of Researcher**

The role of the researcher was that of coding and analyzing the data. I was solely responsible for analyzing and interpreting the data. I interpreted the data as honestly as possible, avoiding assumptions of what I presumed would be in the data. Because this was a qualitative study, I allowed themes to emerge from the data, rather than looking for specific concepts. Berg suggests "researchers not make definitive conclusions during preliminary periods in the research process" (Berg, 2007, p. 392). I employed Berg's additional suggestion to remain open-minded and also used Bernard & Ryan's (2010) coding techniques, which recommended looking for repetitive, indigenous, and a priori themes while analyzing and interpreting the data. As a researcher, my role was to control my own bias, to the best of my ability. Neuman (2007) explained value free research as "research that is free from any prior assumptions, theoretical stand, or value positions, and research that is conducted free of influence from an individual researcher's personal prejudices/beliefs" (p. 64).

### **Contributions of the Research**

Given the national and state standards declaring the critical importance of specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for the successful education of diverse learners, I

expected this research to add to the body of knowledge as to how to best prepare teachers for the rewards and needs of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Because of the changing demographics of Pre/K-12 students, continued emphasis needs to be placed on appropriate theories and pedagogy to prepare effective and competent educators who strive to meet the needs of all students.

There was a limited body of research on the nature of international field experiences for both undergraduate and graduate teacher education candidates. I believe this study added to the existing research while also providing useful data for evaluating and strengthening the Master of Arts in Teaching department's current international field experiences.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to analyze critical incidents from journal reflections written by MAT candidates who participated in an international practicum with a focus on cultural immersion. I sought to analyze the nature of the critical incidents MAT candidates reflected upon and to describe themes candidates cited as a cause of disequilibrium, due to the candidates' time in an overseas, cultural immersion experience. The purpose of analyzing the reflections was to examine the critical incidents reported by MAT candidates and the potential these incidents had in shaping culturally competent, empathetic, and aware teachers with an increased understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

#### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Bernard & Ryan's (2010) observational techniques. Bernard & Ryan suggest "pawing through texts and marking them up with different colored pens" (p. 56). At one point, all 64 journals had color-coding of some sort as I read, analyzed, read again, and organized the reflections around emerging themes. Bernard & Ryan (2010) advise looking for repetition, indigenous typologies, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory-related material. Several of the themes I chose were selected because of repetition, indigenous typologies, or metaphors and analogies.

#### **Critical Incidents**

In this qualitative study, I conducted a content analysis of 64 journal reflections from 37 participants. Of the 64 reflections analyzed, 47 related directly to a candidate's critical incident and cause of disequilibrium. The remaining reflections were focused on a reflective process

using debriefing circles as a tool to more fully analyze and synthesize critical incidents as part of dialogue with peers. Of the 47 reflections specifically mentioning a critical incident, several candidates stated they were unsure their critical incident was good enough. Candidate EE said, “nothing bad happened,” while Candidate C stated, “I am not sure exactly what would qualify as a critical incident. I am not sure if I’ve experienced such a moment just yet.” Journal entries expressed a range of intense emotions as part of their learning experience, as articulated by Candidate DD:

When I got back to the school, I was so overwhelmed and stressed and to my max that I lost it. I started crying and I think it was because the differences between America and Ecuador were such a big difference and I didn’t know how to handle it. It could also have been because it was the first week here and I was having a ton of first experiences with not having my normal outlet to release it all. This situation will be one that I will most likely think about for awhile but the stressful part and overwhelming part I think is over with. It is just something I accept and learn from.

This reflection acknowledged the many first experiences candidates have upon entering a new culture, the ensuing emotions that one may encounter, and the idea that acceptance and learning can be a byproduct of these intense emotions despite the uncomfortable and stressful feelings and emotions also being experienced.

### **Introduction to Themes**

A vital goal of cultural immersion as expressed in the course goals of EDUG 575, International Practicum I, was to place teaching candidates in situations where they were the “other” and where they would experience challenges and learn to navigate those challenges. In the analysis of reflections from practicum experiences in both Austria and Ecuador, five overall

themes emerged from the data: 1) navigating language study and language barriers; 2) paradigm shifts; 3) personal growth and learning; 4) display of egocentrism, self-righteous, or judgmental attitudes and behaviors, and 5) differences in school cultures. I will present findings for each theme in this chapter with further discussion of each theme in chapter 5.

### **Navigating Language Study and Language Barriers**

Critical incidents around the theme of the struggle of a language barrier, the challenges and ultimate rewards of learning a new language or the feelings of being immersed in a non-English speaking culture were mentioned in 15 journals as a critical incident and in an additional eight journal entries unrelated to a critical incident. Candidates reflected upon the language difference as their source of disequilibrium more than any other critical incident.

Candidates in Ecuador went to daily language class and were with host families where some, but not necessarily all, family members spoke English and English proficiency may have been limited. Candidates in Ecuador discovered that even if members of the host family were English speakers, it certainly did not mean they were fluent English speakers or that they would speak English as much or more than Spanish.

Candidates in Austria stayed with English-speaking host families but quickly learned while grocery shopping, taking public transportation, or ordering a meal at a restaurant that English was not as prominent as they anticipated and was certainly not the dominant language. This realization refuted the belief held by several candidates that most people in European countries speak a fair amount of English. Navigating the language barrier in Austria also provided times of challenge, even though candidates were not taking daily language classes.

Many candidates made connections to their teaching of linguistically diverse students while experiencing firsthand the fatigue, frustration, and even fulfillment that can be caused from

navigating a language barrier all day, every day, or trying to learn a new language. Two sub-themes emerged within the language barrier and study of language theme: the numerous emotions that occur while learning a new language and connections to teaching English Language Learners (ELL) who may be their future students. Candidates used words like struggle, lonely, frustrated, feeling sorry for myself, confidence-building, and gaining empathy to describe their attempts to converse using their limited Spanish or German or to understand and participate in conversations.

In Ecuador, lunch is the main meal of the day; it is typical for the immediate family, including parents, children, and often extended family members, to gather together for a mid-day meal. Candidate A, female, described her experience with her host family:

Once I got home, I sat down for a big lunch with the entire family—children, grandchildren, etc. Unfortunately, my Spanish is not great and no one here spoke a word of English, so again, I felt out of place and lonely. Although I was surrounded by people for the next four hours, I was still ‘alone.’ I smiled and acted as if I understood the conversations, but I didn’t. This day left me frustrated and feeling sorry for myself. I was upset that I couldn’t understand more. After emailing my mother about my day, I got a new perspective. She said to me (my mom is a former ESL teacher, “Now you know how your ESL students feel. Your family wasn’t ignoring you, they just probably didn’t know how to engage you in the conversation.” Well, she was right. I stopped feeling sorry for myself and looked at it from her perspective. Now I will (hopefully) be able to feel empathy for my English Language Learners and understand some of what they are going through.

Candidate A mentioned the feelings of loneliness she experienced during this encounter with her host family and was able to make a connection, with the help of her mother, to how ELL students feel when entering a new culture. Her use of the word “again” indicates she had these feelings of loneliness at other times prior to this event. She had the benefit of connecting with her mother who helped her see another perspective. Putting themselves in the place of an ELL student (even unintentionally) was a valuable experience for candidates desiring to be future teachers.

Candidate B, a female in Austria related her experience with the language barrier while riding the U-bahn, (public transportation in Vienna), with elementary aged students on a field trip she was chaperoning. The U-bahn is the primary form of public transportation used by the majority of Austrians. Austrian children ride the U-bahn to and from school in the same manner many American children ride the school bus to and from school. Two individuals entered the U-bahn and began to make comments to the young students, which the teaching candidate did not understand due to her lack of German. Candidate B stated:

This incident had left me with a huge awareness of our language difference. It was completely uncomfortable to deal with two people whom I couldn't understand. Trying to talk to people who speak a different language and are acting very confrontational is scary and difficult. I became more aware of our language difference at that point because it was the first time that I truly wanted to know what was being said as I was worried for my students' safety.

Candidate B had initially felt she was fairly successful in navigating the Austrian/German language barrier by using other contextual clues, which were not available to her when individuals she did not know began conversing with her students using a threatening tone. Other candidates expressed similar thoughts in their reflections; they could partially navigate their new



culture without language fluency, however, without additional language comprehension and speaking ability, they were unable to fully experience the culture at hand. Candidate B indicated that this event was the first time she felt not only the need but also the desire to learn another language.

Candidates referenced feeling like outsiders yet not all of them dwelt in a place which could lead to feelings of unease; some were able to use that “outsider mentality” to spur them into action. Candidate E, female, described this experience in Ecuador:

The first time that I felt like a true outsider was when I sat with the entire family at dinner and they all spoke Spanish with one another for quite some time—perhaps 45 minutes. They were all speaking so quickly and fluently that I couldn’t keep up.....In fact, I lost track after a few minutes and then gave up trying to listen after about 15 minutes. I wanted so badly to understand what was being said and to participate in the conversation but I just sat there. And as I sat there I found myself feeling really regretful that my Spanish was so poor. I began to wish that I had taken more Spanish classes or sought more opportunities to practice. That sentiment surprised me a little because I may have expected myself to feel more entitled (since I am an American, selfish, ethnocentric....) I may have expected myself to think that it was the responsibility of the English speakers at the table to include me in the conversation, but instead I just kept thinking of missed opportunities, of wasted time. I told a friend once that I had watched all 7 seasons of the Gilmore Girls at least twice and he said, “Holy cow! You could learn a language in that amount of time!” Here in Quito I am committed to seizing every opportunity to learn Spanish, even when it makes me feel like an idiot. In the end, it will be worth it!

Experiencing another culture, even for a few weeks in an immersion environment, can have a positive impact, as indicated above, by compelling an individual to seek language skills.

Candidate E's use of the word "seize" indicated she planned to take full advantage of the language opportunities available to her through this cultural immersion practicum. Candidate E also used the term entitlement. Had the research design for this dissertation been one of using interviews rather than a content analysis, I would have asked Candidate E why she described herself as an American with the words "selfish and ethnocentric" as she was the only candidate in a reflection to describe herself as an American with those terms.

Candidate F, female, made direct connections to her "first-hand" experiences in Ecuador, what these experiences meant in a personal sense as she becomes a teacher, and how this will impact her future teaching of linguistically diverse students. Candidate F stated:

As I spend quiet moments thinking about my experience here, I regularly think back to what this means to me as a teacher. After three years of working in an ESOL department, and 16 months of an ESOL endorsement, you would think I was 100% prepared to teach English Language Learners - I know I did. What my job and studies could not show me was the first hand experience of being a minority and a second language learner in a whole new culture. My time in Quito has shed [sic] new light on what it really feels like to be a language learner, and it makes me even more sympathetic [sic] and understanding of what my ELLs go through on a daily basis for weeks, months, and years at a time. The exhaustion of going through it [language study] myself resonates much deeper than any book I ever read for school. I have a renewed respect and admiration for these students [learning a new language]. They are much stronger than me, and in many ways, I don't know how they truly cope. I am continually reminded of that on this trip.

Candidate F referred to her exhaustion, which is common during the stages of language acquisition development, and also acknowledged feeling similar emotions as an ELL would experience. She has gained both awareness and empathy for her future students in her own struggle to learn a language, acknowledging the courage it takes for ELL students to go to school everyday and learn and study in a language with which they are unfamiliar.

Several candidates described the experience of learning a new language with feelings of discovery and newfound confidence. Candidate G, a female in Ecuador, described her limited Spanish use in this way, “I’m now back in kindergarten trying to listen and make conversation. Even though I’m in this childlike position of learning, it really doesn’t make me frustrated—just eager to learn more and be able to talk about more important things than “Me gusta sandwiches con marmalade”—if that’s even right!” Candidate H, a female in Ecuador expressed growing confidence:

I have had at least four different people, including my host family, tell me that my Spanish is really good. That I’m able to communicate really well and that my accent is really good. This is something that took me awhile to believe because I still don’t have a lot of confidence in my Spanish, however the multiple incidences have encouraged me to start having more confidence in my Spanish.

The reflections of candidates E through H showed there were positive emotions associated with learning a new language in addition to some of the difficult or negative feelings and frustrations.

Other candidates described their experiences learning the language with eagerness to practice and resolve to learn. Candidate I, a female in Ecuador, described being made fun of for using her limited Spanish but took a light-hearted and accepting stance to what could be frustrating for others.

I don't think they realize that while I cannot speak Spanish to save my life right now, I do know what [*sic*] they're saying and it feels like I'm being made fun of because they talk about me in Spanish without including me in the conversation. I just keep smiling like an idiot and trying words when I can. I know this is what ESL kids in the US schools feel like, and I've felt it before but didn't expect it inside the house I'm staying at. Oh well.

Candidate I showed an ability to move past what could be considered negative—being made fun of by her host family—by smiling and continuing on while also connecting her learning to ELL students and how these students may feel embarrassed while learning in a new culture.

Candidate O, female, sums up eloquently the frustrations of learning a new language while acknowledging that others have gone before her in the study and proficiency of attempting language fluency.

It's like a crush that won't leave my mind alone. In most of my waking moments I'm thinking about it. Even when I snuggle under my blanket and prepare for a night of necessary sleep, it's there taunting me. It's this relentless frustration and desire to be fluent in Spanish. The frustration comes every time I try to communicate with my family and I'm quickly captured in the prison of my lack of vocabulary. I become paralyzed to communicate in their language so I resort to English, which my father and brother speak. They have put so much effort forth and have worked so hard to learn a second language. With all the resources at my disposal, why haven't I done the same? And why is it that I feel like I'm not catching on very well. It bothers me greatly that I learn new things from my family all the time, but then I forget it two minutes later.

Candidate O's reflection expressed some of the emotions many experience while immersed in another culture learning a new language. She touched upon a typical frustration when learning a

new language, that of learning new things and forgetting them quickly. Candidate O also used the imagery “captured in a prison” as she articulated both her struggle and her desire to be fluent in a second language.

### **Paradigm Shift**

While reflecting on their critical incidents, several candidates articulated a paradigm shift in their own thinking or acknowledged that their thinking—sometimes referring to US or western thinking—was dramatically different from Ecuadorian or Austrian perspectives and that was acceptable to them. Reflections from these candidates illustrated viewing other paradigms as within the realm of possibility as opposed to judging what they observed with only negative interpretations. Candidate DD stated in their journal entry, “As time goes on, I see the differences but I don’t see it so much as a negative thing but more for me to learn from.”

While in Ecuador, several candidates were robbed. Candidate P reflected in depth about her perspective on the mugging that occurred when several teacher candidates were walking home from an event.

I keep thinking about the second talk that Mario had with our group. His perspective about being approached for money (robbed) is so much different than my own. When two members of our group were robbed I think we all felt violated; this is the extent to which our culture condemns and fears robbery. And yet, Mario seems to look at it as simply a way to meet a need. I have been thinking about these different viewpoints over and over as I go into the old town and am approached by beggars and sellers of small goods. Knowing that the law in Ecuador says that stealing is only a crime if you hurt someone in the process, I find myself somewhat divided. My feelings, which dictate my immediate response, are that stealing something from someone else is wrong and should be

punished. Despite my ability to look at the beliefs I was raised with and be critical; my emotional side does not seem to be able to get passed [*sic*] the cultural belief that is widely accepted in the States, that stealing is a crime.

While contemplating the various paradigms around stealing, candidate P continues:

On the other side, my analytical mind is able to understand Mario's point of view. I have seen so much need here in Ecuador. Everywhere we have gone I have seen people living in conditions which I could not imagine; I have seen beggars every where, and in Quito there are even children as young as 4 or 5 selling and begging on the streets. (It is as if the words of the bible about the poor will [*sic*] always being with us have come to life.) It is painful for me every time I see a tiny child or a hunched elderly person asking for money. It has been advised that we not give to beggars or jugglers or purchase from those that approach [us] on the street because it encourages people to do these kinds of things instead of perusing [*sic*] employment. I understand this idea, as it sounds like something my family would say. On the other hand I think, if people cannot even get what they need from begging and selling in the streets are they not more likely to steal. Through passing them by do I not allow them to fall further into the desperation that leads one to steal? For these questions I do not have answers. It seems to me that from Mario's perspective, if we are approached for money (robbed) it is best to give whatever we have freely because, if we do not, what choice do they have than to aggressively force us, thus committing a crime. It is as if it is we who make them break the law; in this manner of thinking it is we who through our choices could do them harm and not the other way around. Out of their need they have (or perceive) few choices, therefore, saying that it is not a crime to demand money puts the choices in our hands. It is as if it is left to those

with means to in a way look out for ourselves and others at the same time. I see that it is a law of compassion, though from my cultural perspective it makes me feel even more the victim. Finally, I am convicted when I remember that the bible says when a man demands your coat you should give him your robe too. Were we not called to be compassionate as this law calls for? And yet is [*sic*] so goes against my every instinct of fairness.

While Candidate P's reflection on her critical incident is quite lengthy, it conveys the focused process she allowed herself to experience as she questioned and even interrogated the different perspectives that could be viewed around the mugging incident.

Candidate Q, a male traveling in Ecuador articulated in his reflection the Ecuadorian perspective of time as compared to his American views. Candidate Q stated:

Our excursion on the trolley bus the night of the ballet was definitely the first time while in Ecuador that I experienced a huge culture shock outside the language barrier. I think it was the first large difference in behavior that I really came into a frustrating confrontation with. I could not seem to rationalize it based on what I had been taught about Ecuadorian culture aside from simply being straight up told, "That's how it is." The more I thought about it, the more it upset me. And then it kind of hit me: tranquilo. Whether or not they could provide the correct answer was not very important, because whether or not we got to where we were going in a timely fashion was not a big deal either. As an American I am accustomed to being where I need to be in the timeliest of fashion as possible. I do not want to wander about to try and find it; I want to know exactly where it is and the quickest way to get there. The journey is not half of the adventure. I see them as saying, "It is over there, but if it is not, I'm sure you will find it and maybe something else along

the way.” And the thing is, I never really saw myself as that kind of American. I always thought of myself as a pretty laid back kind of person. But I guess the Ecuadorians just have me beat, in spades, in that department.

Through a frustration—being given incorrect directions to the ballet—Candidate Q pondered the various perspectives of getting somewhere on time as well as the idea of the journey to an event being part of the adventure, a viewpoint he may not have considered prior to this event.

### **Personal Growth and Learning**

Participating in a cultural immersion experience provided teacher candidates with opportunities for personal growth, including self-reflection, discovery, interrogation of ideas and questions, acceptance of new challenges, and evolving perspectives, to name a few of the sub themes which emerged under the umbrella theme of personal growth and learning.

Candidate R, a female participating in a hiking experience in the jungle of Ecuador, related the physical challenges of the hike and what she learned about herself because of her experience on the hike.

Hiking through the steep and muddy terrain of the jungle was one that challenged me physically more than I have been in the last 10 years of my life. This can become quickly emotional for me because I have always considered myself an athletic person. I’ve played sports my entire life and even when job, life and weight changes started to decrease that athleticism, I still see/saw myself as that athlete. I’m faced at this time to realize that I am not that person anymore. When I think of how this physical and emotional challenge can inform my teaching, I feel again like a different person than I have seen myself to be. I quickly want to go into “acceptance” mode. I don’t want any student of mine, or any child, to go through the embarrassment, the discrimination, the



hardships (emotionally and physically) that I have gone through because of my weight. I see an individual who has so much to offer. I see an individual who can change what they are if they want to or who can fully accept this part of themselves without taking away from any other incredible part of their own identity. How is it that I cannot see myself under this same umbrella of acceptance?

As candidate R related her physical challenges, new learning occurred for her as she realized her need to accept herself; furthermore, she connected accepting herself as she is to accepting her future students regardless of appearance or ability but because of the potential each person has.

Candidate S reflected upon the contrast between poverty and wealth as her critical incident and the questions with which she was left pondering. Candidate S wrote:

My critical incident came while in Prague this week. While standing in a group a sketchy looking man came near and I was anxious about the purses being near him. Instead of reaching for our pockets the man reached into the garbage and pulled out a discarded cup to drink the remaining foam left on the edges. It was an interesting juxtaposition with the masses of tourism and all the shops selling useless chotskys [*sic*] at high prices. It left me wondering what my role is in that. How do you balance the extravagance of tourism with the poverty of the people? Although I think it's important to remember that this is not something specific to one culture, rather the clash whenever wealthy tourism meets poor.

I find myself wanting to help but not being able to and feeling disequilibrium in that.

Candidate S found herself in a place with unanswered questions for a universal problem, the presence and tension of both wealth and poverty, while considering her personal response.

Cultural immersion can provide the paradoxes that may be more visible outside of normal

routines. These paradoxes can cause individuals to think carefully and thoughtfully about past problems with new perspectives.

A benefit of cultural immersion can be increased self-efficacy as individuals negotiate challenges. Candidate T, a female in Austria, revealed an ability to advocate for herself as she wrestled with whether or not to request a host family change, knowing it would cause additional work for the faculty and that it may not be well received by her current host family. Candidate T stated:

As I stated in my first reflection I think the biggest and most critical incident I have been dealing with would be the decision to move host families. I do not like to offend people or cause extra work and due to this I spent multiple days and hours thinking about if I could deal with the situation for the remainder of the experience or if I was just to [sic] uncomfortable and needed to move. I think my turning point was when I was approached by a gentleman who wanted to sell me drugs. After that I knew that I had made the right decision to tell Sandra that I felt unsafe and uncomfortable at my host family's house. The reason that I think I mulled over this incident for so long was that I didn't want to offend my host family and cause more work for Sandra. I wasn't sure if I was simply being overly sensitive to my host family.

An aspect of self efficacy is understanding what one needs in various situations and advocating for those needs. Candidate T carefully analyzes whether she is being overly sensitive or whether it is appropriate for her to request the change she desires. She continues:

However, when I heard all of my peers discuss their host families, none were like mine. This made me think more about the situation I was in and if I could continue to feel like such an outsider in my own "home." All of my fellow travelers had families that

included them in activities and invited them to dinner and lunches. I was essentially on my own the entire first week and this too affected my thought process. I wanted to have an experience to remember and really feel that I was a member of an Austrian family for a few weeks. I think I spent a lot of time thinking about my next tow [sic] weeks being spent feeding myself while my peers had the opportunity to eat and spend time with their host families. As I listened to myself today, I heard that I made the correct decision in order to make myself happier and more comfortable. I think that this taught me to trust the voice within me more. I had a feeling and there was something telling me that the situation I was in wasn't good for me. It would have really started to take its toll on me both physically and emotionally, as I was very stressed out and not eating much. The voice I heard within was correct and did not lead me astray!

Candidate T, with an emerging understanding of the culture or customs of Vienna, discussed how she wrestled with whether to ask for a host family change. She clearly articulated how she was able to listen to her inner voice and advocate for herself, believing the change in host families would help her enjoy more fully her experience in Austria.

Being outside of one's comfort zone or in a position of "other" can cause individuals to think about past experiences that have shaped them in some way, whether positively or negatively. This appeared to be what occurred for Candidate U as he recalled his critical incident. Candidate U, a male in Austria related this incident when helping at the refugee center:

The "critical incident" I brought up in this meeting was my feeling of being uncomfortable and unsafe at the Youth Center. The second night I was there, the older teenage boys were fighting, and a woman was trying to break in (pushing past Yvonne) to beat another boy up. Although I have worked with teenagers for years, the settings have

always been more controlled. This incident brought me right back to when I was beat up by a gang in Arizona. I was thirteen and alone. I ended up with a concussion, broken nose and multiple contusions. Even though this happened many (many) years ago, all the feelings of fear, being out of place, alone, and having no personal control were brought to the forefront again. This issue brought to light my need to be prepared for situations like this in the future. I cannot change the past, but I can be aware of how certain things affect me and have strategies in place in my mind that will help calm my feelings. I have many friends and family members at home whom I could have immediately talked it through with. But not on this trip. It forced me to deal with many issues alone, and I found that I could.

Candidate U discovered through his cultural immersion experience that experiences from his past are a part of him but they do not need to define him. Candidate U appeared to gain confidence in how he could handle future situations where he might feel uncomfortable or alone.

Candidate V, a female participating in the international practicum in Austria, experienced an event that bothered her for several days. While standing in a walkway that she believed to be a sidewalk taking a photo of the Viennese Royal Palace, she was nearly hit by a car. She was certain she was in the right place only to discover later that the car had the right of way. Many candidates turned to peers for reflection and perspective. As candidate V reflected on her critical incident with some of her peers, one of her peers asked her, "Why is it that the way you would have handled this situation at home [is] so different and important to you that you mentioned it a few times?" Candidate V stated:

That question got me thinking about the element of self-reflection that can be had just by being in a new culture. Normal events that would be nothing at home can become true

moments of disequilibrium. And for my incident, I was thinking how at home I would not feel sluggish or like I was in slow motion getting out of the way of a car like I did in my incident. Nor would I be likely to be taking a picture in the middle of a street, especially not mistaking a street for a walkway. There is something about being in unfamiliar surroundings that can heighten our awareness, but can also dull it to the obvious. I'd like to be one of those easy going people who doesn't take things so seriously...I'm not and in situations like this I don't see the worth of my personality...I just see all the weaknesses...

Candidate V stated that a simple, everyday incident that is routine in a home culture can provide opportunity for deeper self-reflection when experienced in a new or different environment.

Some candidates, as Candidate V mentioned above, focused on their weaknesses rather than their strengths when experiencing disorientation and had difficulty putting incidents into perspective.

### **Display of Egocentrism, Self-righteous, or Judgmental Attitudes and Behaviors**

Several candidates displayed attitudes or behaviors in their reflections connected to egocentrism, judgmental, or self-righteous stances as they negotiated their feelings with what they were experiencing in their new culture. Some candidates also reflected on behavior that would most likely be considered unprofessional or disrespectful, yet somehow felt comfortable behaving in that manner in another culture. However, one of the limitations of analyzing these journals is that as the researcher, I do not know what candidates did with these feelings beyond their reflection. As a critical incident is defined as something they have mulled over, candidates perhaps chose to share an event that caused them to feel emotions that might be categorized as judgment or self-righteousness. I do not know if they stayed in a place of judgment or if at some point, they returned to a stance of a learner.

Candidate W described her experience chaperoning a field trip with Ecuadorian elementary students. Candidate W stated:

From a distance, the park looked like it held promise, a welcome relief from the poverty and lack of meaningful learning opportunities we had just experienced. Most of time, the children ran free. Several of them had fallen from trees while trying to harvest fruit. Two of them found a rat in the bathroom. My first thought upon seeing the park was, “Finally, the children can at least have some fun playing in this entertaining environment.” But now, I can see that most of it is in ruins. They are not even allowed access to most of the equipment. The blowup jumper, Ferris wheels, the decorated merry-go-rounds and the train are all off limits. They are only allowed on the swing sets, teeter-totters, a wooden climbing structure and a small spinning disk, of which the last two were broken. As I looked at the equipment, I was sad for the children. The disparity between the beautiful parks I had taken my son to and this one was disturbing. I realized I would never let my own son attend this school. I would have been outraged and removed him the first day.

From candidate W’s reflection, it appeared she had options for her children that may be unavailable to the parents of the children attending this field trip in Ecuador. Candidate W may not view this perspective as one of entitlement or judgment on her part but rather one of protection of her children and providing the best for them.

Candidate X had one of the most unusual critical incidents as she recounted in her journal entry her experience at the gardens of a palace outside of Vienna.

We were going to spend our free morning exploring the palace gardens. Before we would go, we decided to stop by the café since none of us had really eaten that day.

Before sitting down I ran to the WC [water closet]. There was a beautiful flower, a white carnation on the counter. Feeling cheery, I took it and thought it would look pretty in my hair. I didn't think it would cause any trouble. I joined Justin and Sarah back at the table and showed them my pretty flower. They both look kind of concerned. Our waiter came to our table and took our drink order. A few minutes later, he came back and asked me "did you get this flower here." I said "yes." He grabbed it and began to walk away . . . I said, not meaning to do it out-loud "He's really going to just pick it up and take it from me?" He heard me, turned around and set it back on the table. And said, "fine you can keep it." And walked away, never to return to take our food order. I was somewhat embarrassed, but more so because I felt that I embarrassed Sarah and Justin. If it was me on my own, I would have brushed it off and moved on quite quickly, but when you feel like you made a fool out of yourself in front of people you know. It usually feels much worse.

Candidate X displayed a sense of entitlement, judgment, and self-righteousness in her behavior. As a researcher, this particular incident caused me to wonder if some candidates behave poorly in settings where they are not known or if they do not worry as much about consequences because of the distant nature of the practicum from faculty and typically other peers. I will pursue this question further in chapter 5.

### **Differences in School Cultures**

The theme of differences in school cultures had the second most number of reflections on a particular topic, following the theme of language barrier and language study. Included in the dimensions of school culture were the school's physical environment, pedagogy—including instructional strategies and classroom management—and the dispositions and attitudes of the

local teachers. Interestingly all journal entries related to this theme were from candidates in Ecuador with the exception of one journal entry from Austria. As a researcher, I wonder if because candidates saw their peers and faculty daily in Quito, (rather than only two or three times a week in Vienna) they were more apt to discuss the events of their day at school while comparing experiences and trading ideas.

Candidate Y reflected on her experience teaching children in Ecuador and the classroom management expectations she held prior to this experience. While observing Ecuadorian teachers, she noticed that the teachers did not wait for their students to be quiet before teaching; instead, the teachers talked over the students. Candidate Y stated:

To be honest, I did not think very critically about this observation until I was the one in front of the class teaching. I tried to get their attention and let them know I was ready to start teaching and found myself expecting them to all immediately stop talking, sit quietly in their desks and make eye contact with me. This concept is what we are taught in the states: wait for the students to be quietly and attentively sitting in their desks before beginning the lesson. I always thought that was just a common way to respect the teacher and that since these Ecuadorian children were not quieting down or making eye contact with the teacher before the teacher began talking, that they were disrespecting the teacher. However, I began to think that perhaps respecting the teacher in the states looks different than respecting the teacher here. I realized that in my expecting the students to sit quietly and look at me before I began teaching was in a way imposing American standards on a non-American classroom. They do things differently here and do not have the same expectations. I am not saying their expectations are necessarily less, than the American ones, just different.



Candidate Y showed the ability to consider what she had been taught in her pedagogy courses at home, contrasting the more familiar practices of home with the practices she encountered in Ecuador classrooms. She viewed the Ecuadorian practices as different, not necessarily right or wrong.

Candidate Z, a female in Ecuador, discussed her observation that during an intramural soccer game after school, the boys' team had many spectators while the girls' team had no spectators. Candidate Z asked her cooperating teacher about this and was told that boys play soccer whenever they can and girls only play when the school organizes the event. Candidate Z noted that "even as very young children (these students are six and seven years old) boys are given balls and girls are given dolls to play with. It appeared that the parents valued watching their sons play, but not their daughters." She continued in her reflection by acknowledging that she does not know the schedules of parents or why they would choose to observe only the boys. Candidate Z also stated:

My one day of observation would never stand up to scrutiny, but it seems that this reflects a societal attitude in which boys and girls will not be given the same opportunities. This socialization seem to be quite complete for these kids already, but for those girls who may love to play or boys who just don't like to play, they won't fit into societal expectations and those voices may not be heard. I really wish that in this situation the boys and girls were treated more equally.

While recognizing that gender roles may be different in Ecuador, Candidate Z conveyed her desire to see more equality in what was offered to both boys and girls and less "socialization" toward traditional gender roles.

Candidate AA, a female in Ecuador, was one of several candidates who mentioned the conditions of playgrounds, specifically, as unsuitable for recess due to safety hazards as well as the lack of adult supervision during recess. Candidate AA reflected:

I want to start by addressing in the public school when students were at recess, or playing outside on their lunch break, there was no supervision to be found. The children are completely on their own to do whatever they feel is acceptable, and often times this is wrestling, punching, or chucking balls at another student. I think it is also important to point out that their playground in [sic] all cement, much of which is broken up, with many staggering rocks and slabs of cement to trip over. When a student falls down and gets hurt, it is up to their friend, other students to pick them up and bring them to the doctor's office. During this time, teachers are all sitting in a teacher's lounge, blinds shut, doors closed. The one day I did go out and play with a group of girls during recess, there were many strange looks thrown at me from other teachers on their way to their coffee break.

In the United States, it is common to have playgrounds with smooth cement, play equipment that has met safety regulations, and ample adult supervision. Candidate AA appeared to struggle with what she viewed as a lack of an appropriate facility and adult supervision.

### **Conclusion**

The findings presented here, representing an analysis of 64 journal entries from 37 participants, provide substantive context for each theme. Additional reflections were not grouped into themes due to the miscellaneous or singular nature of their critical incident. One candidate mentioned her peers and their response to her Christian stance as her critical incident. Another candidate reflected upon his unease taking three and four year olds on a field trip to a

swimming pool with European co-ed locker rooms and navigating displays of appropriate nudity—but much more nudity than he would typically be comfortable with. Several candidates discussed lack of instant access to technology, issues both positive and frustrating related to food, and enjoyment of the new sights and sounds of another culture. While entertaining and interesting, the theme of these reflections were singular in nature and did not constitute repetition, indigenous typologies, or metaphors, as defined by Bernard & Ryan (2010).

Further discussion concerning the findings comprising the five overall themes will be provided in chapter 5 as well as suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to analyze critical incidents from journal reflections written by MAT candidates who participated in an international practicum with a focus on cultural immersion. Cultural immersion field experiences among teacher candidates can provide powerful learning opportunities (Dantas, 2007; Merryfield 2000, 2002; Quezada 2004). With this in mind, I examined the critical incidents reported by MAT candidates and categorized them into themes connected to the literature on internationalizing teacher education, transformative and experiential learning theories, and cultural competence and proficiency. I discussed how these critical incidents were an influencing factor in shaping culturally competent, empathetic, and aware teachers who have an increased understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

After reviewing the data, the following themes emerged: 1) navigating language study and language barriers; 2) paradigm shifts; 3) personal growth and learning; 4) display of egocentrism, self-righteous, or judgmental attitudes and behaviors, and 5) differences in school cultures. The findings for each theme were presented in chapter 4; an ensuing discussion of each theme continues in chapter 5.

#### **Navigating Language Study and Language Barriers**

I chose to discuss this theme first due to the number of times language study and language barriers were mentioned by MAT candidates as their critical incident. In aligning with Bernard & Ryan's (2010) observational techniques, "the more likely the same concept occurs in a text, the more likely it is a theme" (p. 54). As mentioned in chapter 4, critical incidents

surrounding language issues were discussed in 23 journal entries, more than any other category of critical incident.

One element of the EDUG 575 cultural immersion field practicum, whether in Ecuador or Austria, was the experience candidates had of immersion into a culture where English was not the dominant language, thus placing them in a position of the “other.” Roberts (2007) stated that cultural proficiency is unattainable without authentic practice. MAT candidates had authentic practice learning a new language in Ecuador by attending language school every afternoon and by navigating language barriers in both Ecuador and Austria; this was one dimension that provided the means for cultural proficiency to be demonstrated. As Candidate A recalled her mother’s encouragement, she stated, “Now you know how your ESL students feel.” Candidate A stated she had empathy for her future ELL students, because of her authentic practice learning a new language.

Candidate B expressed both a need and desire to learn another language as a result of her experience on the U-bahn. The stages of cultural adaptation indicate that Candidate B was most likely experiencing culture shock, which includes disorientation, frustration and even anger as she tried to make sense out of what strangers on the U-bahn were saying to her students and what she should do given that she did not understand the language but deemed the strangers to be threatening.

Experiential learning was an essential component for developing not only cognitive skills but affective responses as well (Dantas, 2007; Davis & Mello, 2003; Quezada, 2004). According to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), experience needs to play a role in the learning and development of attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Candidate E connected her lived experience of dinner conversation with her host family, all speaking Spanish without including her, as a

motivating factor for continuing language study because of her strong desire to be part of the conversation. This represented a desire to embrace another culture more fully by being willing to learn another language in order to participate in all aspects of culture that are available when an individual speaks the language fluently. Candidate E stated that at some point in the 45 minute dinner conversation, she gave up listening. While some candidates may have wondered why the host family did not try to interact with their guest, she looked within, linking her frustration at not being a part of the dinner conversation as prodding for future language study. This experience helped her develop new attitudes, which will hopefully lead to new habits of greater language proficiency.

Candidate Y, a female in Ecuador, discussed not only the desire to experience another culture but also application of new cultural knowledge gained through authentic practice, using it to “better the educational experience of someone who may be hindered by cultural misunderstandings. Realizing and experiencing this concept first hand has made me think about what I might do as a teacher.” Candidate Y continued:

I will most likely be teaching in an American school and there will most likely be students in my class from a different culture. It is my hope to take this knowledge I’ve learned here and apply it in my classroom, so that students who may not understand what’s being said because of a language barrier, or students who don’t understand the rules because they do not have rules like that in their culture would not be hindered in their learning in any way simply because I do not reach out and try to meet them where they are at.

Candidate Y’s experience with language study and language barriers allowed her to develop new attitudes, behaviors, and skills, aligning with Kolb’s definition of experiential learning theory.

The teaching standards in InTASC (2011) challenge teachers to meet student needs by considering what students bring to the classroom; there is strong application of this standard and implied willingness to meet her student's needs, articulated in Candidate Y's reflection.

An intentional goal of EDUG 575 cultural immersion is to give candidates experience of being the "other" while believing they will make direct connections back to their classrooms. Candidate F stated, "What my job and studies could not show me was the first hand experience of being a minority and a second language learner in a whole new culture." This reflection also aligned with Kolb's experiential learning theory of firsthand experience being a necessary component of learning as Candidate F applied her experience learning a language to how linguistically diverse students might feel in her classroom when she is teaching.

According to Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (2003), adult learners first experience a disorienting event followed by self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. MAT candidates who discussed language study and language barriers in their reflection used a variety of words to describe their affective feelings, emotions, and responses. However, none of the candidates used words associated with guilt or shame, which differs from Mezirow's stage two of transformative learning theory. Candidate A stated she, "felt out of place and lonely." She expressed how she was surrounded by people speaking another language and not including her so she felt alone. She further described feeling frustrated and sorry for herself. Candidate E discussed feeling like an outsider while her host family spoke fluent Spanish around her, yet stated that she was, "committed to seizing every opportunity to learn Spanish." Other words to describe responses to disorientation surrounding language included: overwhelmed, stressed, both a growing desire and a sense of necessity toward learning a new language, exhaustion,

awareness and empathy for future linguistically diverse students, and even eagerness to learn a new language.

Future research studies should include an examination of reasons why MAT candidates did not convey feelings of guilt or shame, in alignment with stage two of transformative learning theory. This does not mean that they did not experience those emotions, only that they did not write about guilt or shame in the journal entries I analyzed.

Candidate O's reflection captured the paradox of emotions many experience while immersed in another culture learning a new language as she described through the use of a metaphor her desire to learn with her frustration at her abilities. She stated, "It's there taunting me. It's this relentless frustration and desire to be fluent in Spanish." She continued by stating that she, "is quickly captured in the prison of my lack of vocabulary." She further acknowledged that her host family had worked hard to learn English, so why shouldn't she also be willing to learn a second language? Candidate O stated, "They have put so much effort forth and have worked so hard to learn a second language. With all the resources at my disposal, why haven't I done the same?" This is part of the tension of desire and frustration, intertwined, which made navigating language study and language barriers such a pivotal learning experience for MAT candidates in a cultural immersion experience.

### **Paradigm Shift**

The second theme that emerged from the data was a shifting paradigm in the MAT candidates; this theme connects with Dantas' (2004) belief that cultural immersion experiences allow students an opportunity to rethink paradigms while often providing a disruption to their current thinking. Mezirow (2003) also stated that a disorienting event helps reshape and mold new paradigms of learning for adult learners. The cultural immersion experiences in Ecuador



and Austria offered candidates many opportunities to view the world from a different perspective. This is evidenced by the journal entries of Candidate P and Candidate Q.

Candidate P wrote a lengthy journal entry reflecting how she negotiated the Ecuador perspective of robbing someone, which might not be viewed as a crime if the person is in need, as opposed to the American perspective that robbing someone is most likely always viewed as a crime. Her reflection in chapter 4 mentioned Mario, who is the leader of the organization with whom the candidates in Ecuador had their afternoon language classes; Mario facilitated times of debriefing related to cultural issues which arose and explained an Ecuadorian viewpoint of crime and helping those who have needs.

As Candidate P articulated her feelings and responses, I could almost visualize her wrestling with the complexity of this issue as she acknowledged feeling violated because, in her words, “our culture condemns and fears robbery.” Still she was willing to think about the different viewpoints people hold toward robbery, asking herself questions such as the following:

On the other hand I think, if people cannot even get what they need from begging and selling in the streets are they not more likely to steal. Through passing them by do I not allow them to fall further into the desperation that leads one to steal? For these questions I do not have answers.

Candidate P brought a third perspective, that of a Biblical lens, into her ongoing conversation about the mugging incident when she articulated her own Biblical conviction, “I remember that the bible says when a man demands your coat you should give him your robe too.” Lindsey, Robins, and Terrill (2003) described an important attribute of cultural sensitivity as a willingness to view differences through a positive lens rather than a lens of judgment. Through her reflection, Candidate P revealed a changing paradigm as she processed multiple views on

stealing and the stark needs before her, while considering American, Ecuadorian, and Biblical perspectives of possessions, compassion, generosity, and crime. Candidate P's journal entry implied that she was learning to acknowledge that each culture found some values and behaviors more important than others. It is critical that teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students show the ability to rethink viewpoints that might be quite different from their own. Candidate P showed the ability to listen to others, questioned her beliefs, and considered very different perspectives in a positive rather than judgmental light.

Candidate Q's shifting paradigm related to getting to a location on time and yet the deeper reflection, and changing paradigm, were connected to how Ecuadorians viewed the journey to a location as part of the adventure rather than a more typical American view of traveling to a location quickly, efficiently, and punctually. As Candidate Q stated, "Whether or not they could provide the correct answer was not very important, because whether or not we got to where we were going in a timely fashion was not a big deal either." Candidate Q continued to discuss how as an American, he recognized western perspectives of timeliness and efficiency as an important value, yet felt he was, "a pretty laid back kind of person." Through this critical incident, he acknowledged that "...I guess the Ecuadorians just have me beat, in spades, in that department." Candidate Q used the word beat, implying that Ecuadorians are better at being laid back than he is. A changing perspective of time and journey is experienced by Candidate Q because of his cultural immersion experience.

### **Personal Growth and Learning**

The disequilibrium that candidates experienced in their practicum connected with Cushner's (2004; 2007) research that the benefits of intercultural competence occurred because of difficulty. Leung et al. (2008) suggested that challenging cultural experiences provided

holistic growth because of the difficulties of working in an overseas setting. Mezirow (1997) stated that self-reflection could lead to considerable personal change. Through a required reflective process, MAT candidates who experienced disorientation and challenges as a result of their critical incidents also reported personal growth. The experiences that led to growth were varied and personal, as evidenced by Candidates R through U, and seemed to convey that what one person experienced as routine, another could experience as deep and genuine learning.

The physical challenge and discomfort of her hike provided Candidate R the introspection necessary to view herself as she really is and to begin a new path of self-acceptance. Candidate S wrestled with the extravagance of tourism, wealth, and poverty, and Candidate V used her incident as acknowledgement that she viewed herself too often through the lens of her weaknesses. For each of these candidates, the growth they experienced may not have been achievable outside of a cultural immersion experience. Candidate V expressed, “there is something about being in unfamiliar surroundings that can heighten our awareness, but can also dull it to the obvious.” Being in an out-of-the ordinary situation gives opportunities for out-of-the ordinary learning and growth.

The concept of cultural engagement allows an individual a more comprehensive understanding of culture than what most tourists would experience (Quezada, 2004). Candidate T’s engagement with a difficult host family situation, her research from peers as to whether her situation was normal, her reflection as to whether she was being too sensitive, and her ability to listen to her inner voice compelled her to discuss the situation with the faculty leader and to ultimately request a host family change. She showed a desire to engage in the culture and to experience as much of Austria as she could, via a host family experience. This is a prime

example of cultural engagement as Candidate T engaged in the culture at a different level and to a different degree than she might have otherwise.

In the cultural immersion practicum in Austria, candidates spent several days a week at a refugee center participating in a service learning project with individuals who sought refuge in Vienna from eastern Europe or northern Africa. MAT candidates led craft activities, helped cook dinner, played games and engaged in English tutoring. Banks et al. (2005) suggested that potential teachers be not only immersed in a culture with which they are unfamiliar but also that a service learning component would offer opportunities to gain knowledge and enhance personal growth. Candidate U gained greater insight and self-understanding through his critical incident that occurred at the refugee/youth center when a few of the youth participants began fighting. As Candidate U reflected on how uncomfortable and unsafe he felt, he realized his emotions and responses from this experience at the refugee center in Vienna were a result of a physical beating he endured as a teenager. Candidate U showed growth in the area of self-sufficiency when he stated, "It forced me to deal with many issues alone, and I found that I could." This response also aligned with Leung's belief that holistic growth can be a result of difficult interactions in a foreign setting; this seemed to be the case for Candidate U.

### **Display of Egocentrism, Self-righteous, or Judgmental Attitudes and Behaviors**

According to Bennett's (2009) definition, which I included in chapter 1, an individual who is culturally competent is described as one who displays culturally sensitive feelings and appropriate and effective behavior in another cultural context. This definition of cultural competence was not displayed by several candidates who exhibited judgmental and self-righteous attitudes and sometimes egregious behaviors. Why did several candidates conduct themselves in inappropriate ways? Consider candidate X who took the flower from the water

closet in Vienna, put it in her hair, seemed to see nothing wrong with this flower-theft, and then became angry at the waiter who questioned her? Why did other candidates look at the teaching conditions and attitudes of the national teachers with disdain? These candidates did not display competence, as described by Bennett (2009) but a limitation of a content analysis is that as a researcher, I do not know if these were isolated events and attitudes.

According to Mezirow (1997) “we have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration—aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird, or mistaken” (p. 5). Were these candidates in the initial stage of disorientation where rejection of new ideas—seeing them as weird, wrong, or silly—is common? The stages of transformative learning theory point to a progression of acceptance, beginning with the need to question, judge, or initially consider that other ideas are mistaken. It is through this process of interrogation that new ideas of acceptance begin to emerge. Perhaps these reflections, due to their vulnerability and honesty, allowed me to see the emerging nature of interrogating assumptions and beliefs and the complexity of inner wrestling. It is possible that these incidents helped prod positive growth in the areas of cultural competence after the initial reflection, yet that would not have been evident in the journal entries I analyzed unless I followed the candidate through the entire three-week experience and beyond. This will be a suggestion for future research, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Candidate W expressed disappointment for the children on the field trip and had high hopes that they would have a playground with safe equipment to use. She mentioned children climbing trees and finding a rat in the bathroom. Some might categorize those behaviors—tree climbing and looking for rodents—as playful; perhaps playground equipment is not necessary for children to have fun. Is having a safe playground with a lot of variety a western value?

Candidate W's views could be labeled as protective however when she stated that "she would never let my own son attend this school. I would have been outraged and removed him the first day," her attitude moved from a protective stance to one that is demanding and entitled, presuming everyone in other countries would have availability to other options for their children as she does in her home country.

When reviewing the data, I found that there were a few occasions where candidates did not display respectful behaviors in relation to the local environment. I continue to ponder why some candidates did not behave as guests in another country and seemed to have an attitude of entitlement. In Austria, candidates did not see their faculty advisors every day. Did this prompt the candidate to take the flower from the water closet, knowing her inappropriate behavior may not be reported? And even if it were reported, would or should anything of a disciplinary nature occur? These questions remain unanswered but provide thought for potentially how to better prepare participants of future cultural immersion experiences.

### **Differences in School Cultures**

An important goal in the EDUG 575 cultural immersion practicum was for candidates to see and experience local school cultures. Experiences in local schools while in an international practicum can be the vehicle to develop the following skills: intentional reflection, reconsidering assumptions, clarifying expectations, gaining flexibility, acknowledging evolving identities and open-mindedness, and seeking genuine learning (Rios, Montecinos, & van Olphen, 2007). These skills are invaluable to the teachers of diverse students.

Candidate Y displayed several of these skills as she considered the classroom management philosophy of her Ecuadorian classroom and compared it to her view and what she had been taught in the United States. She first reflected on what she saw when she stated,

“However, I began to think that perhaps respecting the teacher in the states looks different than respecting the teacher here.” She then reconsiders what she has been taught and ponders a new method when she says, “I realized that in my expecting the students to sit quietly and look at me before I began teaching was in a way imposing American standards on a non-American classroom.” She continued in a stance of open-mindedness by conveying, “They do things differently here and do not have the same expectations. I am not saying their expectations are necessarily less, than the American ones, just different.” Candidate Y’s journal entry was a prime example of using a cultural experience to reconsider prior knowledge. She is gaining skills that will be invaluable to her future teaching of diverse students.

Candidate AA seemed to struggle with the conditions of the school playground and school recess, and yet her sentiments are more of a concerned or protective nature rather than ones of judgment. Her journal entry stated:

From the first time I saw this problem, I began to compare – compare this recess to the schools that I have seen in the States, compare safety hazards and lack of proper equipment, compare the differences in activities between boys and girls in the school. I found myself doing all this comparing, and told myself I had to stop. It wasn’t about what “we” have and “they” don’t, it was about the safety of these children, who are running and playing, and possibly getting hurt, without supervision.

She doesn’t appear to move toward open-mindedness in the manner that Candidate Y did, but she does acknowledge how comparing what she saw in local schools to the schools of her home culture may not have been helpful; she again returned to the issue of supervision and safety as her concern for the playground and recess conditions she observed.

## **Implications for MAT**

Ideally, I would like to see every MAT candidate participate in an international field practicum as it appears to be a life-changing event for these future teachers. Most importantly, it appears that candidates will be better and more effective teachers as they work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, due to their own cultural immersion experience. However, a required international practicum would need significant support from current MAT faculty in addition to an increased cost for MAT candidates, which may not be feasible or reasonable. I suggest MAT candidates who have participated in past international practica present their experiences to current and prospective MAT candidates, in hopes of increasing the interest in this type of preservice professional development and also to give international participants a venue for sharing what they learned.

Given the number of journal entries related to the theme of language study and language barriers, and given the demographic of students in Oregon who have been identified as English Language Learners, I recommend the MAT program consider placing candidates in a practicum with a dual-language component, particularly for those candidates who are unable to participate in an international cultural immersion practicum. Candidates could be placed in bilingual classrooms, which are numerous in the Willamette Valley; in addition, the Oregon School for the Deaf has their campus within five minutes from the GFU Salem site and could be considered for a bilingual placement. Engaging in P/K-12 schools with a bilingual and dual-language dimension would help preservice educators experience more of what it is like for linguistically diverse students. The MAT department has several faculty who are bilingual. I would also encourage them to use their bilingual language fluency to teach some lessons, alternating



between Spanish and English or French and English, thus forcing MAT candidates to try to navigate another language in an academic setting.

Future practicum experiences, both local and abroad, could continue to use the concept of a critical incident to encourage deeper self-reflection. As defined in chapter 1, a critical incident is an incident that one continues to ponder or mull over. It is not an incident that is necessarily negative. A suggestion for future practica experiences is to better define critical incidents. Several candidates indicated they were unsure if their critical incident was good enough or even if they knew what a critical incident should be. I would like to promote use of the phrase *critical incidents* as departmental shared language in clinical field experiences and through other coursework that prompts a person to a greater degree of reflection.

One aspect of cultural immersion experiences is seeing how other people live and think and respond while participating in the awe that can be encountered in new places and surroundings. Most critical incidents in the journal entries I analyzed seemed to have a negative or frustrating emotion attached to them. I suggest that critical incidents could also have a positive element to them in helping candidates see the enjoyable elements of experiencing new sights, sounds, scenery, and perspectives; this could be conveyed to participants in their pre-immersion training workshops (Mezirow, 2003).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Due to the research design I selected and the use of purposive and representative methods through the use of stratified sampling, I did not intentionally select specific candidates, for example, only those candidates in Austrian national schools, nor did I follow one candidate through the duration of their cultural immersion experience when analyzing journal entries. The analyzed entries which pointed to displays of poor behavior caused me to consider if these

candidates were particularly honest and vulnerable for the one journal entry they wrote, which I happened to analyze, or if they stayed in a place of poor behavior (as I define poor behavior) throughout the practicum. For this study, I have no way of knowing how the candidates' perspectives evolved from the beginning of the practicum to the end.

I suggest that additional research follow the evolving perspectives of candidates through not only their cultural immersion practicum but also through their MAT journey as they develop into effective and competent educators who understand the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Currently, one focus group gathering occurs for formal debriefing within two to three weeks after participants return home. I believe further opportunities could be provided to these candidates at key times during the MAT program to connect what they learned abroad to what they are experiencing in a local classroom. Additionally, a longitudinal study should be conducted of candidates who participated in a cultural immersion practicum and their application of skills in their classrooms one, two, or even three years beyond obtaining licensure.

## **Conclusion**

I believe that the journal entries analyzed portrayed strong evidence that critical incidents, occurring as a result of cultural immersion in an international setting, influence and shape preservice teachers toward the goal of being more culturally competent. Cultural competence, as defined by Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2005), is displayed through interactions with other cultural groups in ways that recognized and valued their differences, compelled one to evaluate their own skills, developed their own knowledge about others, and adjusted and refined relational behavior toward more positive interactions. Candidate BB, a female in Ecuador, eloquently illustrated this definition of cultural competence by her response:

I have come to a conclusion. It is simple and seems obvious. Nevertheless, it is profound when one takes the time to really think about it. The conclusion I have come to, as simple as it is, it [*sic*] this: Life is different. When I take the time to read that over again and dwell on it, it makes me see how life is in the change, in the differences, in the culture. We can call life whatever we want, but in the end, I call life different. Though in the minds of many “different” may hold a negative connotation, I choose to take different in its original meaning. Thus, when I say life is different, I mean that each life, each culture, each student is not alike in character. In other words, cultures and students are distinct—unique.

Candidate BB acknowledged, recognized, honoured, and even affirmed differences among cultures while viewing diversity as an asset. Candidate BB personalized how she will use this idea of being different and distinct in her classroom when she is teaching. She stated, “Consequently, when I go to view a culture, a classroom, or a student, I go with the intent to see the “distinctness” of that culture, classroom, or student—remembering the whole time that there is no implication in the definition that distinction is good or bad, but simply different.”

Candidate BB’s response indicated the respect for another culture that is currently, and will continue to be, necessary if all students, particularly those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, are going to be taught in a manner that helps them achieve their full potential. I believe Candidate BB’s reflection points to why cultural immersion practica experiences can be so valuable and should be an important consideration for programs that prepare future educators.

An international component in a preservice teacher education program can help new educators take cultural and global knowledge, gained from firsthand experiences, and apply those experiences to their philosophies and skills in teaching diverse students, better enabling

them to see the distinctness of each learner seated in their future classrooms. Theoretical knowledge alone is often inadequate in changing beliefs and presumptions about students from diverse backgrounds; experiencing another culture as the “other” provides invaluable opportunities for genuine learning and for deeply influencing a teacher for years beyond the initial cultural immersion experience.

It is my hope and strong desire that cultural immersion experiences will become an accepted practice in the MAT Department and in teacher education departments elsewhere. Cultural immersion has potential to positively influence beliefs about all learners while expanding and enhancing the teaching skills necessary to reach every student in our classrooms.

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