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The Impact of a Transformative Intercultural Experience on Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Teachers' Instructional Practices

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Walden University

College of Education

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Alison Binger

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

The Impact of a Transformative Intercultural Experience on Returned Peace Corps
Volunteer Teachers' Instructional Practices

by

Alison Binger

MEd, Kutztown University 2002

BS, Kutztown University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Global and Comparative Education

Walden University

October 2018

Abstract

Teachers are being asked to implement cultural awareness into their instruction in the 21st century classroom, yet many lack the requisite knowledge and skills to accomplish this. The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the perceptions of teachers who are returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCV) regarding what in their long-term international experience influenced them to include cultural awareness in their instruction. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity and Mezirow's transformative learning theory were the conceptual frameworks. The research questions for this qualitative study asked how a long-term international volunteering experience impacts teachers' pedagogy and what instructional practices RPCV teachers consider to be influenced by their Peace Corps experience. From 11 interviews, codes were identified and categorized into patterns and themes. There were three key findings. The first was that teachers who are RPCVs recognized their Peace Corps experience provided them with a deep cultural experience that brought about the realization of their own culture. The second was their recognition of their ability to adapt to cultural differences more easily than before they had their Peace Corps experience. The final finding was that RPCV teachers choose to use deep and engaging teaching practices with varied approaches, forms, styles, and subject matter in their classrooms upon their return to the United States. Given the current problem of preservice teachers entering teaching jobs with a lack of cultural understanding, these findings could contribute to positive social change by providing a practical approach for policy makers and universities to increase attention to promoting international volunteering and implementing cultural awareness in their curriculum.

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Dedication

My work is dedicated to my three young daughters, Chloe, Kya, and Jasmine, their futures, and to all the future globetrotting children of the world. You inspire me to be my best and to create a better world. I love you with all my heart and soul.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Cultural awareness is an essential 21st century skill that teachers need to incorporate into their instructional practices (Cushner, 2007; Kereluik, Mishra, Fahnoc, & Terry, 2013; Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018). While studies have confirmed that teachers in the United States are aware that their pedagogy should contain cultural skills along with an array of other 21st century skills (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Cushner, 2007; Kereluik, Mishra, Fahnoc, & Terry, 2013), research also has identified that their limited knowledge about culture prevents them from implementing such skills (Franklin, 2010; Moor McBride, Lough, & Sherrard Sharraden, 2012). Long-term international volunteering experiences provide volunteers with a deep understanding of culture, one that impacts their appreciation of the extraordinary, complex, and diverse world they live in and how to listen, speak, and maintain a respectful and professional demeanor with people from different backgrounds (Bennett, 1993; Cushner, 2007; Hanvey, 1976; Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018). This research explores how returned Peace Corps volunteers' (RPCV) long-term volunteering abroad experiences impacted their instructional practices once they became teachers. As international volunteering increases in the United States, understanding the impact of a volunteers' experiences and the changes it produces in their pedagogy will be important in the preparation of pre-service teachers and their teaching of the 21st century skill of cultural awareness (Chalou & Gliozzo, 2011; Institute of International Education, 2015). Implications of this research may produce supportive substance for policy makers and volunteer abroad

programs, and increase universities attention to promoting international volunteering and implementing cultural awareness in the classroom (Green, Luu, & Burris, 2008; Moore McBride et al., 2012; Sherraden, Lough, & Bopp, 2013). .

This chapter is organized into several sections that present the topic of the study, why the study needed to be conducted, and its potential social implications. The background includes a brief summary of literature related to the scope of the study. The problem statement provides evidence that the problem is current, relevant, and significant to education. The purpose of the study section provides a research paradigm along with the intent of the study. The conceptual framework section describes the theories used in this study and identified how these theories relate to the study approach and research question. The nature of the study section provides a rationale for the design selection along with a brief summary of the methodology. The definitions section provides descriptions of key concepts in this study. The assumptions section clarifies and describes aspects of the study that cannot be demonstrated to be true. In the scope and delimitations section, a description of the research problem is addressed with its boundaries defined. This section also addresses potential transferability of this study. The limitations section describes possible limitations to this study and provides a description of the biases that could influence the outcome of this study. The significance section describes potential contributions of the study that advance knowledge in the discipline. In the final section, the summary, the main points of the chapter are noted and followed by a transition into the next chapter.

Background

Currently, there is research that investigates preservice teachers' pedagogical changes after a short-term international student teaching experience. Many of these research studies explored short-term international programs as a way to provide traveling opportunities to students (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Fitzsimmons, Flanagan, & Wang, 2013; Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012; Reynolds-Case, 2013). Although shorter-term experiences have been shown to have an impact on teachers' pedagogical understanding of culture, the impact resembles that of a more superficial tourist view and lacks the deeper understanding needed for guiding today's students (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2003; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). International volunteers' longer-term experiences provide richer knowledge, empathetic understanding, and a deep connection to the culture that changes their view of themselves and the world around them (Bennett, 1993; Fullerton, Reitenauer, & Kerrigan, 2015; Lough, Sherraden, McBride, & Xiang, 2014; Peace Corps: Returned Volunteers, 2015). Currently, there is a limited amount of research exploring teachers' long-term international volunteering experiences and the impact their experience has on their pedagogy (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Dunn, Dotson, Cross, Kesner, & Lundahl, 2014; Dwyer, 2004). It was my interest to conduct research that explored this deeper connection to culture through the perceptions of teachers who are returned Peace Corps volunteers and how this experience transformed them and their instructional practices.

This study is important for policy makers, higher education, administrators, and teachers. This study may assist in understanding how international volunteer experiences

impact future teachers' pedagogy. The positive influence of increased cultural understanding, cultural adaptation, and deep and engaging teaching practices found in this study provides educational policy makers and universities a resource to assist them in focusing on intercultural sensitivity and supporting future teachers to implement 21st century skills in their curriculum.

Problem Statement

Most teachers have had few if any significant cultural experiences and are relatively inexperienced with global affairs, yet are being called upon to educate students about culture (Cushner, 2007). The increase of teaching global knowledge in the classroom to ensure peace, collaboration, and adaptability (Boske, 2012) comes from the United States' dramatic shifts in diversity, negative intercultural disasters such as 9/11 (Coryell, 2013), increased global connections through technology, and the human need to communicate (Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018). The lack of teacher knowledge about global affairs fuels the dilemma of how to prepare pre-service teachers to gain a deep understanding and empathetic knowledge of intercultural awareness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore RPCV teachers' intercultural experiences and their perceptions of what in their long-term international experience as Peace Corps volunteers influenced their intentions to include cultural awareness in their instruction. Pragmatic theory was selected as the inquiry framework for this study. This study explored RPCVs' perspectives regarding their international experiences,

identifying transformational moments and how these transformations impacted their pedagogical instruction.

Research Questions

There were two research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers perceive their experiences in the Peace Corps to have impacted their cultural awareness?

RQ2: What instructional practices do RPCV teachers attribute to their enhanced cultural awareness?

Conceptual Framework

I used Milton Bennett's intercultural awareness theory as a foundation for understanding deep engagement in intercultural experiences. Bennett's scale of intercultural sensitivity describes the ways in which people can react to cultural differences. The six levels are denial of difference, defense against difference, minimization of difference, acceptance of difference, adaption to difference, and integration of difference are organized by one's increased sensitivity to difference (Bennett, 1993). Each level along the continuum provides the framework for understanding individuals' cultural growth throughout a long-term international experience. Mezirow's transformative learning theory explains the process of perspective transformation. The three dimensions that form this theory are psychological, convictional, and behavioral (Mezirow, 1991). This theory provides a process that expands perspectives and changes frames of reference triggered by a disorienting dilemma. An important part of transformative learning is changing frames of reference

by critically reflecting on previous beliefs and consciously making plans to change to accommodate ones' new understandings of the world (Mezirow, 2009). Long-term international experiences can heighten teachers' cultural awareness as well as provide necessary support to students with culturally responsive strategies, an assumption that is supported through the research of DeVillar and Jiang (2012) and Lupi and Turner (2013). Sherraden et. al.'s (2013) continuum of international service program models served as a conceptual guidepost regarding the types of international service programs available to students, which range from international study abroad programs to international volunteering programs.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study explored teachers' perceptions of impactful experiences after volunteering as U.S. Peace Corps volunteers. A pragmatic inquiry framework with a generic inquiry approach based on interviewing (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015) was the guide for this study. In order to discover the nature of experience, the outcomes of actions, and shared beliefs (Patton, 2015), it was decided that this approach would be most effective. Interviews with teachers who were RPCVs were employed in this study. Research was conducted through face-to-face interviews or video or phone conferencing that allowed for recording, based on the RPCV's location and choice.

Definitions

21st century learning: Core competencies such as global awareness, critical thinking, and cultural sensitivity that advocate the beliefs that need to be taught in higher

education to help students thrive in today's world (Kereluik et al., 2013; Mishra & Kereluik, 2011; Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018).

Cross-cultural immersion program: An international experience that lasts an academic year targeting local norms, integration programs, cultural living, and direct and extensive contact with the culture while the student attends a foreign university (Engle & Engle, 2003; Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Intercultural awareness: One's awareness of personal beliefs and values as well as becoming familiar with cultural beliefs and practices of others (Bennett, 1993; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

International experiences: Programs ranging from international short term study abroad to international volunteering that immerse students in different cultures to expose them to diverse social, economic, and political systems (Chang, Chen, Huang, & Yuan, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2003; Sherraden et al., 2013).

International service learning: Teaching and learning strategies that enrich learning through reflection and teaching civic and international responsibility, as well as strengthening communities (Bingle, Hatcher, & Jones, 2012; Coryell, Stewart, & Wubben, Valverde-Poenie, & Spencer, 2016; Fayetteville State University, 2016)

Long-term study abroad: International credit-earning program for preservice teachers that provide a student teaching experience in a foreign country lasting an academic semester (Engle & Engle, 2003; Fitzsimmons et al., 2013; Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Long-term international volunteering: An international experience that brings volunteers professional skill sets abroad in a variety of capacities from education to community service (Lough, 2010; Lough et al., 2014; Moore McBride et al., 2012; Peace Corps, 2018).

Returned Peace Corps volunteer (RPCV): A Peace Corps volunteer who has returned to the United States after a long-term experience, typically 2 years in duration, who directly worked with a community in a developing country on their most pressing issues (Peace Corps, 2018).

Short-term study abroad: A course-based international field trip abroad that lasts several days to several weeks with little to no cultural interaction or guided reflection (Engle & Engle, 2003; Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Sustainable pedagogy: A learning process that is transformational and prepares students, teachers, and school systems with new ways of thinking that generates responsible citizens and economic prosperity (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Lupi & Turner, 2013).

Transformative learning: The expansion of one's consciousness through life changing experiences (Mezirow, 2009).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions embedded in this research study. The first assumption was that RPCVs who are now teachers could be located using word of mouth and snowball sampling. The second assumption was that all who agreed to participate would complete the entire interview process. The third assumption was that each

participant would fully cooperate and be open and honest in sharing their perspectives and reflections on their long-term international volunteering experiences. Lastly, it was assumed that the participants' experience would not be so long ago that their recall was weak.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on the influence cultural experiences had on teachers' intercultural awareness. This focus provided a greater understanding of these influences and their impact on teachers' cultural instruction. A number of criteria bounded the study to identify how volunteering abroad may assist in the current problem of teachers entering education jobs with limited global and cultural awareness. This study has included only teachers who are RPCVs and not those who have had other international experiences. This has the advantage of hearing participants who have had lengthy experiences of approximately 2 years, and not shorter-term experiences, which may have had less influence on their teaching.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the narrow parameter of selected participants, the small number of participants interviewed, and my own personal bias. The selection of one type of international volunteer sample limits the generalization of the findings to other international program types and the volunteers. To ensure the accuracy of the impact international experiences have on volunteers' cultural awareness and pedagogy, further studies examining different international programs and their volunteers would be required. The results of this study also may not be transferable to a

similar population due to the small number of participants, though the findings may yield implication for further study. Instead of having a large number of participants, the focus was on the depth of the data and an exhaustive analysis of the perceptions of the participants. Research bias may also become a limitation for this study. To address this concern of bias I focused on my knowledge and experience of the qualitative research process regularly addressed critical assessments raised by my dissertation committee.

Significance

The useful contribution of the study may be the creation of an approach to the current problem of preservice teachers entering jobs with limited cultural knowledge (Cushner, 2007). Teachers' global knowledge is essential to preparing "students for the challenges of work, life, and citizenship in the 21st century and beyond as well as ensuring ongoing innovations in our economy and the health of our democracy" (Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018, p. 1). The research investigations can help expand our knowledge of the instructional benefits related to an international volunteer experience. If the research shows a Peace Corps volunteers' experience is perceived to have impacted their long-term instruction then education policy makers and universities may increase their attention to promoting international volunteering experiences and strategically integrating them into their teacher-training curriculum.

Summary

Students deserve 21st century learning opportunities to excel as future citizens (Kereluik et al., 2013; Kivunja, 2014). The 21st century outcomes "are essential to prepare students for the challenges of work, life, and citizenship in the 21st century and

beyond” (Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018, p. 1) along with ensuring continuous innovation for the United States economy and the sustainability of our democracy (Coryell, 2013). Taken together, the research reviewed collectively supports that international experiences contribute to preservice teachers’ intercultural awareness. Much of what is known about abroad experiences and cultural awareness is limited to preservice teachers’ study abroad experiences. Little research has been conducted about international volunteer experiences and the impact it has on teachers’ pedagogy. This research addressed these gaps in the literature to learn more about the implications of long-term experiences in a volunteering program and how these experiences impacted teachers’ pedagogy following their abroad experiences.

Chapter 2 provides a synthesis of current research on cultural awareness and teaching issues from the last 5 years. An explanation of the literature search strategy is provided to allow for replication of the study in other contexts. A description of the theoretical framework is provided and articles are analyzed in terms of how they relate to the framework. Studies are described in relation to the theoretical constructs with a focus on the weakness and strengths of the approaches used. A justification of the rationale for this study is provided. A review and synthesis of studies related to the research question and description of how the present study filled the gap in the literature finishes this chapter with a summary of the major themes involved.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Most “teachers have had relatively few if any significant intercultural experiences and are relatively inexperienced with global affairs” (Cushner, 2007, p. 35), yet they are being called upon to improve their cultural skills. An increase in emphasis on providing global knowledge in the classroom has developed as a response to dramatic shifts in diversity in the United States, the formation of global connections through technology, and the need to dialogue to ensure peace, collaboration, and adaptability following intercultural disasters such as 9/11 (Boske, 2012; Coryell, 2013; Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018). Limited knowledge about global affairs among teachers has led to questions regarding how to prepare teachers to gain a deeper intercultural understanding and empathetic knowledge to be ready to teach in a 21st century classroom. This research project explored the long-term international volunteering experiences of Peace Corps volunteers to better understand the impact this experience had on teachers’ cultural sensitivity, empathetic understanding, and connections to other cultures, thereby changing participants’ views of themselves and the world, which impacts their pedagogy.

The literature review includes empirical and theoretical recent scholarly articles, concerning long and short-term international experiences and their impact on teachers’ pedagogy. This chapter is organized according to three major foci. The section on the literature search strategy contains descriptions of the databases and search engines I used, as well as the literature search process. The conceptual framework section identifies and defines the concepts applied in this study. The last section synthesizes primary writings by key theorists and seminal researchers that are related to this study.

Literature Search Strategy

In order to develop an understanding of the impact that international volunteering experiences had on teachers' pedagogy, I accessed several sources. I gathered valuable information from peer-reviewed journals, books, established research organizations such as the American Educational Research Association, Canadian Center for Intercultural Learning, Harvard Kennedy School Center for International Development, National Center for Education Research, the Institute of International Education, the Partnership for the 21st Century, the Peace Corps, the United Nations, and similarly reputable websites. I employed search engines available from Walden University and public sources including Academic Search Complete, EBSCOHost, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education Research Starters, Google Scholar, SAGE Premier, and Teacher ProQuest Reference Center. The keywords used were: *abroad experiences and impacts on pedagogy, cross-cultural immersion, deep and transformational learning strategies, field trips abroad, intercultural awareness, international experiences, international volunteering, long-term international experiences, Peace Corps, Peace Corps volunteer, short-term study abroad, student teaching abroad, sustainable pedagogy, teaching abroad, volunteering abroad, and 21st century skills*. To assist in finding relevant articles, Google Scholar Alerts was set to flag the search terms: *international volunteering, transformative learning, 21st century skills, intercultural awareness, Peace Corps volunteers, and deep learning*. This service provided daily articles sent to my email inbox, which allowed for sorting and inclusion as relevant.

Literature regarding the impact of international experiences is limited. Scholars including Conner and Roberts (2015), DeVillar and Jiang (2012), Lough et al. (2014), Sherraden et al. (2013), and Watson, Siska, & Wolfel (2013) call for additional research on the types and lengths of international experiences and their impacts on preservice teachers' pedagogy. Peer-reviewed articles about international experiences were used to supplement and support my analysis of others' research on the impact that these experiences had on teachers' cultural awareness and their pedagogy.

Conceptual Framework

This study was built on the theories of cultural awareness and transformative learning to establish a conceptual framework for the purpose of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the impact a cultural experience has on a teacher's instructional pedagogy. The conceptual framework section is organized into two subsections. The first addresses cultural awareness through Bennett's (1993) intercultural sensitivity theory. The second identifies transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) as a fundamental concept in terms of cultural awareness. Each subsection identifies and defines the theories, synthesizes primary writings by the key theorists and seminal researchers related to teachers' cultural awareness, provides key definitions inherent in each of the theories and describes how cultural awareness has been applied in previous studies to benefit the framework.

Intercultural Sensitivity Theory

Bennett (1993) posited that as people experience and engage with cultural differences, a more complex and sophisticated organization of their perceptual

differences emerges and provides the potential for positive intercultural relations to increase. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) was created after observing students' and coworkers' difficulties with cultural differences. The underlying assumption of the model is that one's perceptual organization grows more complex with longer cultural immersions adding more sophistication to one's view of the culture. Through increasing cultural immersions one increases the potential to exercise competence in intercultural relations. The ongoing and increasingly complex process of organizing differences in cultural perceptions and how one's cultural understanding grows more complex can lend insight into teachers' cultural awareness (Bloomberg, 2014; Cross, 1998; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Intercultural Development Research, 2018; Unterhalter, McDonald, Swain, Mitchell, and Young, 2002; Vian, McCoy, Richards, Connelly & Feeley, 2007). Conner and Roberts (2015) showed a short-term study abroad experience provided stages of cultural experience and also provided an experience that gives meaning to culture through external world interactions, increasing participants' cultural understanding. McBride et al. (2012) and Brook, Missingham, Hocking, and Fifer (2007) indicated that participants in international volunteering experiences develop transformed mindset and behaviors of cultural understanding that prepared them for working in a global society. Bennett's (1993) six stages of intercultural sensitivity are as follows: denial of difference, defense against difference, minimization of difference, acceptance of difference, and integration of difference.

The denial of cultural differences is a constructional perception whereby one uses sensory information to construct a cognitive understanding. Individuals perceive one's culture as far more complex than other cultures (Bennett, 1993). Individuals who express cultural denial tend to be disinterested in and even hostile or dismissive toward intercultural communication. Denial of cultural differences is typically related to one's limited exposure to culture (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008).

The second stage, defense against cultural difference, is an indication of cultural experiences perceived in polarized or stereotyped ways (Bennett, 1993). Stereotypical views are often implicit or unconscious (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) and account for Americans' reluctance to interact with others different than themselves (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). Individuals in this stage view their culture as superior and other cultures as inferior with reactions of defense, criticism, and blame. This stage is similar to the first stage and is dependent upon one's limited cultural exposure.

The third stage, minimization, emphasizes human similarities related to psychological, physical, spiritual, and philosophical needs which leads people to believe that they no longer display ethnocentric attitudes (Bennett, 1993). The Canadian Center for Intercultural Learning (2014) said that this stage is still ethnocentric because it reflects a presumption that behaviors are universal and that is enough to ensure successful communication between cultures. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, and Hubbard (2006) found that a tendency to focus on similarities between cultures and not recognize the value in differences can create many challenges for those growing up in American culture, where people tend to see their country as a world leader. Challenges that may

arise include distrust of ideas and/or behaviors that differ from one's own and intense negative feelings about those that are different due to a limited understanding of the different culture (Bennett, 1993). Anderson et al. (2006) found statistical significance in their empirical study using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) manual measuring 16 college students' abroad experiences over a 4-week period that students developed their abilities to adapt and accept cultural differences within the minimization stage and some students progressed into the acceptance stage.

Acceptance, Bennett's (1993) fourth stage of intercultural development, indicates an experience in which one's culture is only one way, out of many, to view the world. This stage does not mean the viewer agrees with the other worldviews, only that other worldviews exist. To develop into the acceptance stage, direct, authentic contact with other cultures is necessary along with skilled guidance that informs and stimulates one's learning process (Engle & Engle, 2003).

Adaptation, the fifth stage, is indicated by individuals' ability to adapt their behavior in culturally appropriate ways (Bennett, 1993). Empathy and the sharing of another's' feelings are a key component to reaching this stage. One experiences the world through imaginative participation allowing them to feel a part of the other culture and behave in an authentic manner. Reaching the stage of adaption is particularly dependent upon spending longer durations abroad (Bennett, 1993). Medina-Lopez-Portillo's (2004) intercultural research supported Bennett's research showing significant impact on students' development of intercultural sensitivity with longer cultural duration.

The research showed a 16-week program developed students further along the DMIS continuum than a seven-week program.

The sixth stage, integration, emphasizes the ability to shift between different cultural worldviews (Bennett, 1993). According to Bennett, the person experiences an expanded view of self and a feeling of in-betweenness of cultures. This cultural liminality allows the individual to bridge the two cultures and hold sophisticated cross-cultural discussions. To reach this stage, one must spend significant amounts of time in a different culture (Bennett, 1993). Study abroad programs, which account for a significant amount of the cultural awareness research available, typically do not extend past a year or show students' reaching the stage of integration. For insight on the impact that longer international experiences have on an individuals' cultural sensitivity, one may look at 2-year international volunteering programs studies. The length of an intercultural experience impacts intercultural competence, but the focus of the experience is an equivalent component to developing intercultural competence as well (Engle & Engle, 2003). The Peace Corps is a 2-year international volunteering program, which also includes teaching enculturation for new volunteers. Bloomberg (2014) a returned Peace Corps volunteer described the teaching he learned from his Peace Corps training as "sit(ing) by the well." He explained that the guiding principle is to teach volunteers how to listen, learn, adapt, integrate, and to understand their new cultural environment. Volunteers are encouraged to form relationships, understand cultural norms, and ascertain community needs before they are to assist the community. This training combined with a

2-year experience provided the elements and opportunity to reach the sixth stage of Bennett's (1993) intercultural sensitivity scale.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning is “a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions” (Transformative Learning Center, 2004, p.1). It is a shift in consciousness so intense that it permanently alters one's way of life. The shift includes understanding one's self, one's self-location, one's relationships with others, and one's relationship with the physical world (Mezirow, 1991). This dissertation focuses on three of the 10 phases (Mezirow, 1978) that detail a learner's progression through a transformation learning experience. The three phases of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational discourse are central to the Peace Corps experience and mission of “providing an international experience, reflection upon the experience to promote a better understanding of each other's culture, and the promotion of a better understanding of other people on the part of Americans” (Peace Corps, 2018, p. 1). Focusing on these three phases has provided a greater understanding of how an international experience may impact teachers' meaning schemes and ultimately how it influenced teachers' instructional practices to include cultural awareness. Transformative learning theory supports intercultural learning theory by providing details of the conditions needed for an international experience to shift a learner's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The first of the three phases Mezirow discussed is a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma provides the learner a disorienting experience in which the learner creates new meanings and schemes to understand the experience (Mezirow, 1991). The

dilemma typically occurs when a learner has an experience that does not fit into their expectations. The learner may find difficulty to make sense of a new situation and cannot resolve the dilemma without changing their views of the world (Mezirow, 1978). The disorienting dilemma typically occurs outside of a learner's control and within the first 12 months of an international program (Harper, 1994; Holt, 1994; Taylor, 1993; Whalley, 1995).

The second of the three phases being considered for this dissertations framework is critical reflection. Critical reflection is a process of reasoning to make sense of an experience (Mezirow, 1991). Analysis of an incident may help the learner understand at deeper level events they feel are not satisfying (Mezirow, 1998). Critical reflection is and extension of an in-the-moment reflection which challenges the learner to examine their thinking beyond the moment. The learner reflects about the past event in the present, speculating about the future (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Critical reflection is a natural development after a disorienting dilemma (Kitchener & King, 1990) and it can be further developed through descriptive, analytical, and critical discourse as well as written and artistic expression (University of Tennessee, 2016). International programs that challenge people's concepts of self and their core personal cultural values, offers a promising way of developing a deeper understanding of one's beliefs and the validity of others' beliefs (Pickering & McAllister, 2000).

Rational discourse, the third phase selected for this study, is the mode through which one is further transformed (Mezirow, 1978). A successful adaption after a disorienting experience and critical reflection of the disorienting experience is the

willingness to respect the perspective of others and to include their concerns into the decision-making process (Renn, 1992). When an experience reaches a point where the validity is contested, and participants sincerely desire to reach an understanding, rational discourse can ensue (Hansen, Berente, & Lyytinen, 2009). Some international programs such as the Peace Corps includes rational discourse in their mission “to promote world peace and friendship among nations” (Peace Corps, 2018, p. 1).

Conceptual Framework Summary

Cultural awareness as understood through the theories described indicates that a sophisticated organization of perceptual differences and the potential for positive intercultural relations increases once a person engages in cultural differences (Bennett, 1993). Bennett (2003) stated “overseas experiences...and international study abroad programs... have identified that intercultural competence is central in increasing understanding and improving relations across cultures” (p. 422). According to DeVillar & Jiang (2012), Bennett’s intercultural awareness model can lend insight into the instructional practices of teachers who participate in cross-cultural programs. These intercultural exchanges can change learners’ beliefs by providing a perplexing experience, critical reflection of their experience, and development of their transformation through rational discourse (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1978).

Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature review section includes a description of studies related to developing teachers’ cultural awareness, international programs transformational experiences, and international programs’ influence in teachers’ pedagogy. A justification

of the literature chosen and the rationale for the selection of the concepts are discussed. Descriptions of the ways researchers have approached the problem, and the strengths and weaknesses in their research are addressed. The last section will review and synthesize studies related to the concepts and research questions that produce a description of what is known about them, what is controversial, and what remains to be explored.

Developing Teachers' Cultural Awareness

Teachers are challenged with understanding culture at a deeper level as the United States student population diversity increases. This widening of diversity in public schools creates the demand for teachers to include culturally sensitive pedagogy and positive dispositions towards culture in the classroom (Catalogna, Greene, & Zirkel, 1981; Dee, 2005; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002; LaVonne, Mccray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). Teachers tend to judge their students from their own cultural perspectives unaware this judgment creates barriers to learning and supports the presence of societal racism (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005)

Culturally sensitive pedagogy is achieved through teacher education and training and is needed in today's changing and increasingly diverse classrooms (The Center for Multicultural Education, 2001). More students today are born outside of the United States, speak multiple languages, and practice different cultural traditions than just a century ago (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In 1970 the student population was "79% non-Hispanic white, 14% black, 1% Asian, and 6% Hispanic. In 2008, 59% were non-Hispanic white, 15% black, 5% Asian, and 18% Hispanic" (Census Bureau, 2011, p. 1). The Census Bureau's (2011) population projections indicate that the

population of school age children will continue to increase in diversity and by 2050 America will be a minority culture without one ethnic group having the majority of the population. Although specific trends vary across regions, teachers', school leaders', and policy makers should be aware of the changing student population and adjust educational curriculum and responses accordingly. To accommodate the diversity in classrooms “teachers must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy creating a classroom culture where all students are welcomed, supported and provided the best opportunity to learn” (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007, p. 64). The Center for Multicultural Education (2001) created a consensus panel of interdisciplinary scholars and worked over a four-year period to determine what was known from research and experience about American education and diversity. The panel founded eight principles of educational practice related to diversity that may improve cultural awareness in education. Teacher learning was the first principal that is essential to student achievement. Pre-service programs for university students as well as professional development for teachers should provide teachers with understanding the complexity of multinational citizens and the ways culture, language, and social class interact to influence student learning (Banks et. al., 2001). Teachers who understand American subcultures (including their own), the national civic culture which binds Americans together, and the interdependence of the world, tend to reflect and give voice to diversity establishing legitimacy to the difference of all students (Banks, 2004).

Teachers' positive dispositions towards culture are essential to student achievement (Richards et al., 2007). In a culturally responsive classroom, effective

teaching occurs in supportive, learner-centered, and nurturing context with the promotion of student achievement. A number of researchers have described the means to achieving social and academic needs for diverse students is through the teaching of culturally relevant pedagogy (Howard, 2003; Lanson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). Teaching to the strengths of culturally diverse students increases their possibilities of academic achievement (Gay, 2000). Along with understanding students' strengths, a positive disposition is essential for achievement among culturally diverse students (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Wiggins et al., (2007) empirical study showed a significant and positive correlation ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that students perceived that they could provide a more positive classroom experience in a culturally diverse setting with an increase of culturally diverse experiences.

Although America is a nation of immigrants, many citizens have conflicting views about immigration, and most believe there are too many foreigners living in the country (Pew Research Center, 2018; The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2018). Teachers tend to hold underlying negative views about other cultures when they were raised in and educated with homogeneous ideals (Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). Teachers tend to place culpability on students and parents for lack of student achievement not recognizing the barrier is cultural (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005). The need for cultural awareness was an overwhelming theme when reviewing teachers' perceptions of culture in their classrooms. Although teachers are limited in depth of their cultural understanding they have a need for the success of all their students;

teachers often express they are interested in learning more about cultural awareness and the best teaching strategies for their classroom (James & James, 2004).

International Programs' Transformative Experience

International programs provide students a heightened cultural experience that would be difficult to achieve in a classroom. International programs provide the learner with transformative experiential opportunities (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Rundstrom, 2005). The learner adjusts frames of reference during an international experience to create new understandings of the world through critical reflection (Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2012). An experience abroad goes beyond the traditional classroom and is aligned with the perspective that learning can be transformed when pursued in a more meaningful way (Smith & McKittrick, 2010). Three of Mezirow's (1978) phases - a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational discourse - may explain the transformation a learner goes through when abroad that brings a greater understanding of culture awareness.

International programs provide an experience for learners that provide a state of disequilibrium. Adler (1975) explained many students' experience disorientation when they are abroad as: "primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture to new stimuli which have little or no meaning and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences when entering a new culture" (p.13). This disequilibrium or dilemma can be perceived as shocking to the learner, proving disorienting to them and their beliefs. To create resolution, the learner transforms their perspective about their culture and other cultures (Church, 1982). The

experiences that demand attention and cause the individual to pause promote meaning making of the event for the learner. Meaning that is made from a disorienting experience integrates into everyday life providing greater clarity regarding the complexity of the world (Lyon, 2001). In a cross-cultural event, a disorienting dilemma is important for learners to develop new schemes and understandings (Mezirow, 1991) which typically happen up to 12 months after the initial immersions (Harper, 1994; Holt, 1994; Taylor, 1993; Whalley, 1995).

Critical reflection is essential to establish a new habit of thought when living in different cultures (Mezirow, 1998). Reflections may effect dramatic changes in orientation on the event, which frees the learner from previous frames of reference and paradigms. Critical reflection is not a singular focus but an understanding of one's biases, assumptions, and values with a shifting back and forth of looking at the self to the looking at others (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Sharma, Phillion, and Malewski (2011) found that a critical reflection during and after an experience abroad promotes competencies for teaching and learning. They found in their study that it was not just the experience of being abroad that provide learners with a new perspective but the disciplined practice of systemic inquiry of one's self and others that promotes more willingness to engage with cultural difference upon their return. Reflecting critically after a disorienting experience provides the identification of underlying belief assumptions, evaluation of the accuracy and validity of these assumptions, and the reconstitution of these assumptions for the learner (Brookfield, 1990). It is what transforms the thought into an expanded new view of the world.

Rational discourse, the catalyst for transformation through depth of discussion about various world-views with others, is a critical component to an abroad experience deeply impacting and transforming a learners' cultural perspective (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). A safe and comfortable setting typically in small groups is essential to ensure discourse. The focus of the group is to stimulate engaged, interactive honest dialog about potentially argumentative, culturally relevant, social issues. The individuals, identities, ideals, philosophies, outlooks, and understandings do not necessarily have to unify but instead collaborate to consider the best moral actions if any need to be taken (Sanders & Morgan, 2001). Research suggests that participation in an experience abroad can lead to profound changes in learners world-views yet can lack deep structural analysis and understanding of self-concept and multifaceted layers of social problems (Kiely, 2005). Kiely (2005) in his empirical study on transformative international service-learning found medical students who participated in small group discourse, attended seminars, discussed topics with government, neighbors, and leaders, and also volunteered in the community during a study abroad experience made a profound and intense difference in the lives of others due to their rational discourse discussions.

International Programs Develop Intercultural Awareness

Transformative learning theory seeks to explain why an international experience may provide an opportunity to change cultural understanding; intercultural learning theory seeks to guide understanding of the progression of cultural awareness. While the transformative learning process provides an understanding of how culture can impact a person and their reaction to it, a teacher may experience different levels of cultural

awareness depending upon the international program length, type, and focus.

Specifically, teachers participating in long-term volunteering abroad programs reach higher levels of cultural awareness than teachers participating in shorter-term study abroad programs.

Study abroad programs. Having greater intercultural understanding, increased acceptance of cultural diversity, and becoming more globally minded are essential to the 21st century student (Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018; Metiri Group & NCREL, 2003; The American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2007; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). Olson and Kroeger (2001) explain that “Intercultural sensitivity does not come naturally as we seek to ignore, copy and destroy” and therefore a benefit would accrue to teachers who participate in cultural experiences (p. 117). Clark, Flaherty, Wright, and McMillen (2009) research concur with Olson and Kreger’s finding that students of study abroad programs (SAP) increase their probability of enhancing intercultural communication skills and the ability to positively engage with others from diverse backgrounds, which may transfer to other surroundings. To further these findings, Stier (2009) explained that an examination of individual items within the openness to diversity scale showed, students liked being “challenged by different ideas,” “thinking about things from a dissimilar perspective,” “learning about unlike cultures,” and “interacting with people of varied backgrounds (e.g., race, nationality, sexual orientation)”. This transformed understanding of cultural awareness may manifest into self-reflexivity and self-confidence from an expanded view of the world (Stier, 2009, p. 2).

While SAP experiences provide a level of cultural awareness, the programs are typically too short in length to expand a teachers' thinking beyond the first two levels of Bennett's stages of cultural awareness (Engle & Engle, 2003). According to Kehl and Morris (2008), statistical analysis of students who participated in SAP experiences that are 8-weeks or less indicates insufficient evidence to conclude that significant differences exist in global-mindedness compared to students who planned to study abroad in the future. However, they did find statistically significant differences in global-mindedness with students who studied abroad for a semester compared to students who planned to study abroad in the future. The question of how long a student needs to study abroad to reach an ethnocentric view of culture now becomes important. Hachtmann (2012) found in his mixed-methods research that ethnocentric views were lowered in short-term SAP experiences. The data showed statistically significant ($t(39) = 3.09, p < .01$) decrease in the level of ethnocentrism using the GENE scale that measures the level of ethnocentrism before and after an abroad experience. Although this research showed short-term abroad experiences trend towards lowering ethnocentrism occurs, it does not show ethnocentrism is achieved. Some students held their stereotypical views upon returning to the U.S., noting, "Germans tend to be a bit more rude than people in the U.S. and they don't say 'excuse me' often" (Hachtmann, 2012, p. 25). Furthermore some of the student who traveled to "Japan noted that the Japanese 'were quiet and group oriented'" (Hachtmann, 2012, p. 26). Ingraham & Peterson (2004) in their comparative quantitative analysis of a 2-week SAP experience and a year long SAP experience found the program length specifically impact the growth in intercultural effectiveness. The

short-term program's greatest impact is at the denial/defense level, the first stage of Bennett's cultural sensitivity scale. However, the long-term programs had a statistically significant change at the minimization level of Bennett's cultural sensitivity scale. These longer-term programs demonstrated an increased development along the continuum. Similarly, Dwyer (2004) measured longitudinal correlations between specific program features- one of them being intercultural development. The study analyzed 50 years of data gathered from IES's full year (32 weeks) study abroad programs, semester programs (16 weeks), and summer term programs (six to seven weeks). The study showed that a full year SAP experience has more significant and lasting impacts on students' intercultural and personal development. The study also indicates that although short-term programs have less impact on students' cultural understanding, with careful educational preparation, skilled implementation, and substantial resources, they too can achieve a high impact on students' cultural awareness, which further reinforces the value of short-term programs.

Volunteering abroad programs. Studies concentrating on the cultural awareness impact of long-term international experiences tend to study volunteering programs since they typically last 1 to 2 years compared to short-term study abroad programs that tend to last from 8 weeks to 16 weeks (Lough, 2010). The longer the teachers' international experience, the deeper the cultural understanding and the further they advance along Bennett's cultural sensitivity continuum. Bridgeland, Wofford, Quigley, and Milano (2011) collaborated with Civic Enterprises, the National Peace Corps Association, and Peter D. Hart Research Associates to survey 11,138 RPCVs to

gain insight into their international experience and its influence on their perspectives. This survey showed the 2-year international program that focuses on both international experience and development found the experience changes mindset and lives. Eight in 10 (79%) of RPCVs said their service helped them understand people from another culture better. RPCVs reported a 20% point improvement in their attitude regarding the foreign community in which they resided and served with 73% having a positive manner toward the community when they arrived and 93% having a positive manner toward the community when they left. Nearly all the RPCVs (90%) rated their international experience as being transformational, changed the rest of their lives, and helped them become better citizens when they returned home along with recommending the experience to their families.

Similar to the Bridgeland et al. (2011), Lough (2010) found in his research about international volunteers' perceptions of intercultural competence that nearly all organizations that send volunteers abroad found the experience increased intercultural competence. This qualitative study collected 291 self-reported responses from volunteers who served in two different international volunteering models: short-term non-professional program (3.8 weeks) and a long-term professional service program (46.2 weeks). Lough (2010) found that sustained, longer durations of cultural contact increased volunteers' intercultural proficiency. These findings are consistent with Kim's (2005) model of intercultural adaptation, which stressed that cultural learning is a process that continues in regular cycles over time. Short-term international experiences may slightly increase cultural competence while lengthier experiences may have a greater

impact on a volunteers' cultural competence. Carano (2013) described in his autoethnographic research possibly reaching levels of ethnorelativism from his long-term 2 year Peace Corps experience. Carano uses Hanvey's (1976) levels of cross-cultural awareness scale to view his Peace Corps experience. Level four of Hanvey's stages explain that awareness brings the viewer to a subjective familiarity and views the culture from an insider's perspective rather than an outsider's perspective, which is similar or equal to Bennett's level 6 Integration. Carano (year?) wrote:

In retrospect, that day may have been the closest I would ever feel to my Tapoeripa family. There are two factors I point to when attempting to convince the reader level IV had been attained. One, the sorrow I felt by leaving my friends and the village I believe was the type of sadness only felt by those who are immersed in a culture and have now moved beyond living side-by-side with another culture (p. 13).

Equally important to the length of an international volunteer experience, is the reflection on the experience. Batey and Lupi (2012) in their qualitative study on the reflections of student interns' cultural development found that reflection improved interns' surface and deep cultural development. Their intercultural sensitivity increased, as well as autonomy and openness to cultural diversity. The reflection assisted in awareness of their critical attitude towards culture as well as their country. Mitchell et al., (2015) supported Batey and Lupi (2012) study through the investigation of the relationship between reflective practices in college service-learning programs and alumni's civic and professional identities. Their conclusion was critical reflection is

central to service learning. Students should be challenged to identify the immediate impacts of their actions as well as the broader implications of the challenges they witnessed to enhance their cultural mindfulness and the complexities of their identity, communication, and interactions with others.

Finally, Lough et. al. (2014) found that not only does cultural sensitivity increase with longer international experiences, but it appears even years after volunteers return from their service, volunteers report the event still impacts them. Fullerton et al., (2015) supported these finding in their qualitative study of the long-term impact of an international volunteering experience. Through randomly selecting 20 participants, an exploration of ways volunteers continued to experience effects from the experience and how the volunteers interwove or have catalyzed altered perspectives into action.

International Programs Influence on Teachers' Pedagogy

As previously stated, teachers often have had limited, if any, significant intercultural experiences and are relatively inexperienced with global matters and yet are being called upon to educate students regarding global issues and help nurture their cultural skills (Cushner, 2007). At a time when dramatic shifts in diversity are taking place in America and prejudice, stereotypes, and superiority towards other cultures are escalating (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016), teachers may find themselves being asked if they understand how culture, history, religion, and politics influence a students' well being as well as how they build a students' world knowledge through culturally enriched curriculum (John Hopkins School of Education, 2016). Teachers are faced with several challenges: moving beyond basic competency skills by weaving 21st century

interdisciplinary themes such as global awareness into their curriculum, focusing on increasing complex life skills such as communication and collaboration, and developing students' social and emotional competencies such as cross-cultural skills, flexibility, adaptability, and responsible leadership (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Department of Education, 2012; Karoly & Panis, 2004; Levy & Murnane, 2007; National Education Association, 2017; Partnership for the 21st Century Skills, 2018). To comprehend how an international experience may develop cultural awareness, it is important to understand if and how these experiences impact teachers' pedagogy.

Studies have shown that teachers' pedagogy may be influenced by participating in an international abroad program, particularly when it provides a broader perspective of cultural difference that fits into their instruction in the classroom (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). Enabling teachers to engage in interaction in an international environment as well as challenging teachers to think about global/local dynamics during and after an international experience best provides them for preparing to understand and recognize issues pertaining to local/global multiplicity and education (Dunn et. al., 2014). Bradley and Emerson (2016) explained:

While course work and field placements can help preservice teachers to begin to understand what culture is, a study abroad program in which participants are immersed in a community and schools can help them move beyond surface-level ideas of culture to a deeper understanding of it (p. 172).

Although researchers have begun exploring the impact of study abroad programs and its impact on teachers' pedagogy (Dunn et al., 2014; Jiang & Devillar, 2011), little to

no research has been conducted concerning international volunteering programs and its impact on teachers' instructional practices (Carano, 2013; Lough, et al., 2014).

Peace Corps Influence of Cultural Awareness in Teachers Instruction

The Peace Corps program is recognized for producing teachers known for their self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and special qualities that enhance their teaching (Calvert, 1966). RPCVs have been perceived by educational staff and students of schools as self-assured, adaptable, mature, culturally sensitive, and “uniquely equipped to establish meaningful relationships with deprived youth” (Washington, 1964, p. 13). Knowles, Pietras, and Urich (1970) suggested RPCVs should be recruited to work in urban schools because of their unique insight into cultural understanding. With such high praise and recommendations regarding RPCVs' teaching, many school districts throughout the United States began recruiting returned volunteers as teachers in schools with cultural tension. The recruitment was successful placing RPCVs in school with a high percentage of at-risk minority youths and with little supplies and resources (Fernandez, Guerriere, & Huffaker, 1994).

RPCVs in the Wilson (1986) study unanimously agreed that the Peace Corps experience influenced their personalities. This study showed evidence that returned volunteers were aware of and accepted the cultural differences in people. Cross's (1998) research found that teachers' perspectives on culture who were RPCVs “Working overseas for 2 years in the Peace Corps seems to increase the cultural awareness of volunteers” (p. 9). Her mixed methods research found RPCVs (n = 154) who were teachers described their successful classroom cultural awareness from the long duration

and difficult circumstances of the international experience. Although the volunteers had widely varied types of experiences all expressed that difficult conditions brought changes in their cultural awareness and appreciation of difference. One teacher spoke of her exceptional relationship with students who were culturally diverse and beginning to learn English in a California school:

Most of the kids are from Mexico or Central America. I identify with them. I tell them stories about what it was like for me, in a situation where I didn't speak Spanish and I needed to learn Spanish very quickly...and I say, "a lot of you have had the same experience." They open up a lot when you say that.... It's a shared experience that I have with an awful lot of our kids. Seventy percent of the kids in my school are Latino. (p. 35).

This study concluded RPCVs demonstrated high levels of cultural awareness. They were conscious of the significance of culture and expressed empathy, sensitivity, importance of culture, and peace.

The Peace Corps program incorporates both intercultural awareness and transformative learning in their program. This program provides an extended length of stay that allows teachers to become deeply involved in the culture assisting them to move into an ethnorelative view of the world rather than an ethnocentric view of the world. The international experience also allows for teachers to interact with other cultures, experience dilemmas, provide opportunities for critical reflection, and promote rational discourse during and beyond the Peace Corps experience. For these reasons I have employed a sample of teachers who volunteered in the Peace Corps program to identify

the perceptions teachers hold about their Peace Corps experiences and its impact on their pedagogy as well as what cultural awareness instructional practices promoting cultural awareness were influenced by their Peace Corps experience.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature review began with a presentation of the study of intercultural awareness and transformative learning theories and its development in teachers. An thorough review of current empirical literature was arranged according to the following topics: teachers' perspectives on diversity, international programs transform learning, cultural awareness is developed during the international experience, pedagogical influences after an international experience, and the Peace Corps program produces culturally aware teachers.

Teachers are challenged with understanding culture as diversity in student population increases. Teachers tend to judge students from their own cultural perspective, which can be in contrast to their students' cultural perspectives causing barriers in learning. This coupled along with teachers' limited cultural understanding leads to the need for cultural awareness initiatives in education. Participation in international programs provides an experience for the learner that disorients their cultural beliefs providing an opportunity to transform cultural understanding. While several studies have focused on the importance and types of international programs, little research has focused on volunteering abroad programs and its impact on teachers' pedagogy. Pre-service teachers who participate in study abroad programs have shown the experience impacts their pedagogy to include cultural awareness. The need to further

scholarship in this area is necessary to understand how long-term volunteering abroad may impact a teacher's pedagogy.

Finally, I conducted a review on the impact the Peace Corps experience had on teachers and their cultural awareness. In conjunction with the intercultural awareness and transformative learning framework, these theories laid a foundation upon which the literature forms meaning and provides policy makers with direction for future higher education improvements.

Chapter 3 details the research design and rationale of this study, defines and explains the role of the researcher, and provides the methodology which includes the participant selection logic, instrumentation, participants information, and the data analysis plan. Trustworthiness issues and the summary conclude the chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore teachers' intercultural experiences, their perceptions of what was impactful during their Peace Corps experience, and how these impacts changed their instructional pedagogy to include cultural awareness. Most individuals teaching in the United States have had few meaningful cultural exchanges and are relatively inexperienced with global matters, yet are being called upon to educate students and enhance their cultural awareness (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Cushner, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002). The increased emphasis on teaching global knowledge in the classroom reflects shifts in U.S. diversity, global connections through technology, and negative cultural disasters such as 9/11. Increasing global awareness assists in the promotion of peace, collaboration, and adaptability among nations (Boske, 2012; Coryell, 2013; Partnership for the 21st Century, 2018). The low level of international and intercultural experience together with minimal knowledge about global affairs fuels the dilemma of how to prepare U.S. teachers to gain intercultural awareness and be ready for teaching in a 21st century classroom. Understanding how long-term international volunteering experiences impact teachers and their pedagogy may assist in preparing them to meet the cultural needs of the 21st century classroom.

This chapter is organized into five sections that delineate the methodology that was used in this study. The first section is the research design and rationale, which includes the research question, central phenomenon, and the research approach. In the second section, the role of the researcher is clarified through a description of data collection and analysis, which includes any biases and ethical considerations. The third

section, methodology, provides data collection procedures, participants, and the process of analysis. The fourth section, evidence of trustworthiness, discusses credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and the ethical procedures used in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions that guide this study were influenced by my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer. My international volunteering service impacted me so deeply that it prompted me to include cultural awareness in my pedagogy when I began teaching upon my return to the United States. My awareness of the deep impact as well as recognizing my need to include cultural awareness in my instruction spurred me to question if other RPCV teachers had the same deep impact as myself. After reviewing the scholarly literature on international experiences and their pedagogical impact, I concluded that there has been little or no study of this relationship. Indeed, other researchers have called for additional research into the impact international experiences have on increasing cultural awareness (Moore McBride et al., 2012) and changes to pedagogical practices (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). This study's research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do teachers perceive their experiences in the Peace Corps to have impacted their cultural awareness?

RQ2: What instructional practices do RPCV teachers attribute to their enhanced cultural awareness?

The perceptions and experiences of teachers who are RPCVs are central to understanding how long-term international experiences may have impacted their pedagogy. Because the experiences of the participants lead to a deeper understanding of why they may include cultural awareness in their pedagogy and how they may use this pedagogy to bring global understanding to their students, pragmatic theory was selected. Pragmatic theory provided sensible ways to solve problems. It offered a structured method of finding the practical consequences and useful applications of what can be learned about an issue or problem (Kahlke, 2014; Patton, 2015). Pragmatic theory provides useful answers with concrete real-world solutions. My role as the researcher has been to use my knowledge regarding research on international experiences and their transformative qualities to help frame the questions and extract useful knowledge to provide a practical approach to preparing culturally-aware teachers.

The use of theory in qualitative inquiry serves a different function than it does in quantitative or mixed methods research. Rather than working deductively from theory to prove hypotheses, qualitative approaches serve as a guide for conducting the study and analyzing the data (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative methodology provides knowledge-generating contributions such as illuminating meaning, studying how things work, understanding people's perspectives, identifying unanticipated consequences, and making case comparisons from interviews, observation, and documents (Patton, 2015). Theory in qualitative study is used to broaden an explanation for particular events and provide a lens to view these events through. In this study, I used these theories to build a rich

understanding of what happens within a long-term international experience that may transform a preservice teachers' pedagogy to include cultural understanding.

Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) theory was used to understand the different ways in which people can react to cultural differences during an international experience. In addition to Bennett's DMIS theory, Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory was used to understand how the stages of the DMIS transformed individuals' perceptions. The conceptual framework for this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' cultural awareness. One theory alone would not account for the dynamic nature of transformational learning possibilities during an international experience. Each of the theories mentioned helps to ground this project in understanding RPCVs' thoughts and actions that may help them include global awareness in their instruction.

Based on the purpose of this research and the research questions, the generic inquiry approach was selected. This method allows for deviation from full allegiance to a particular methodology and follows four elements used in qualitative research: epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and analysis (Crotty, 1998; Kahlke, 2014). Deviation from full allegiance to a particular methodology provides flexibility and creativity, which is helpful for studies with little or no supporting research (Kahlke, 2015). The purpose of my research was to uncover a possible approach to enhancing teachers' cultural understanding by identifying the value of participating in long-term international experiences. Through the generic qualitative approach description I have

provided, I am able to justify using this approach for this study rather than implementing another theory such as phenomenology or heuristic inquiry.

Several qualitative approaches could have been used for this inquiry. Both phenomenology and heuristic inquiry would be a logical choice for a qualitative inquiry regarding this question, but they would not have been appropriate for the first investigation into what experiences may have impacted teachers to include global awareness in their instruction. The use of phenomenology could have provided information about intense or deep Peace Corps experiences (Patton, 2015). This study would not have required inquiry into the purpose of the deep experience only that the experience provided intense depth into cultural awareness. Heuristic inquiry begins with a question, which is personal to the researcher and uses an autobiographical process (Moustakas, 1990) but this study did not require my personal Peace Corps experiences and instead sought to locate other RPCV experiences and describe how those experiences influenced their pedagogy upon return to the United States.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to interview teachers who are RPCVs and determine how they perceived their experiences impacted their global awareness pedagogy. The process began by obtaining permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) department prior to searching for RPCV teachers (approval #07-10-17-0425820). I contacted RPCV teachers about participating in the study. After they agreed to participate, I discussed the scope of the study and acquired their informed consent. Once I had each participant's signed consent form, we agreed to

meet for an interview through video or phone conferencing that allowed for recording based on the RPCV's location and choice. I collected data in the form of interviews from the perspective of each participant. The process of interviewing was loosely structured in order to provide a natural flow of responses and allow the participants to collect their thoughts along the way (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I established rapport with each participant through casual conversations prior to conducting each interview to help alleviate apprehension and encourage participants to become comfortable with talking about themselves (Maxwell, 2013).

To assist in accounting for and dealing with the bias in this research, I employed a variety of methods qualitative researchers have found to be successful. The first method was to acknowledge and interpret my biases. This was accomplished through examining my biases before beginning the interviews (Mehra, 2002). The second method was thinking of myself as a learner (Mehra, 2002). I approached the participant as a knowledgeable source regarding the topic that I am exploring; which assisted me in monitoring my subjective emotions. The third method I employed to monitor my subjectivity in my research with an etic voice. An etic voice places the participant's voice as dominant and thus is written from an outsider's perspective (Mehra, 2002). The fourth and last method I employed to monitor my biases was to use transcript validation (Rajendran, 2002). Participant validation includes others in reviewing my research to learn how they see the research design, the processes I employed, and the information generated. My research can be analyzed for the implicit assumptions, the preferences of evidence, blind spots, omissions, and to examine judgments (Rajendran, 2002). A

considerable amount of my research required coding and the interpretation of data. By employing these four methods, I believe inaccurate findings due to bias were minimized.

Methodology

This section details the rationale for the selection of participants for this study along with the selection of instrumentation, the procedures for participant recruitment, and issues of trustworthiness. Each section includes supporting information together with the procedures and processes necessary to recreate or extend this study. The section ends with a comprehensive data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

RPCVs who were, at the time, teachers in American public schools were purposely selected for this inquiry. According to Patton (2015), to uncover the truth about an event or idea, the researcher must interview participants. The responses of the participants direct scholars to seek practical and useful answers that can solve or provide us direction with a problem. Deliberately selecting participants, settings, and activities provide information that is particularly relevant to this study's questions. In contrast, other methods such as random sampling used in quantitative methods does not produce as much relevant information as deliberate sampling (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Each of the participants took part in this study voluntarily without promise of incentives and without detriments to their livelihoods. Falling within the upper range of participants recommended by Patton (2015) and Creswell (2013), 11 individuals were selected to participate in this inquiry. This recommendation is based on the basic method approach, practicality of the participants' availability, the richness of the data collection,

time issues, and resources issues. Participants were interviewed via an Internet application or telephone, which was open to the participants' preference. The primary participant selection criteria were teachers who served as Peace Corps volunteers. The grade levels the RPCVs were teaching at the time of the study ranged from elementary to higher education. Providing a variety of grade levels created diversity across contexts that also provided relevance and permitted depth of analysis (Patton, 2015).

The participants who were selected for this study were chosen to deepen and enhance the credibility of the analysis by adding information-rich experiences (Patton, 2015). Teachers who are RPCVs provided the rich information needed to assist in determining if a long term international experience prepared teachers with a deep cultural awareness that impacts their instruction. Each participant was relevant to this study and was interviewed about the impact of their experience. Participants were selected who volunteered for the standard 2-year service length. This long duration has the added advantage of contributing to the current research literature while ensuring sufficient length and depth of experience to inform this complex phenomenon.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured open-ended and flexible interview protocol was audiotaped and transcribed (Creswell, 2013). An Internet application was employed for the audiotape recording that allowed for each recorded interview to be saved. An interview guide was created for this study during my advanced qualitative research class at Walden University in the winter of 2016. This class and my dissertation committee informed the refinement of the interview guide, which ultimately enhanced accuracy. A variety of questions were

relocated to later in the interview to ensure accuracy and interview questions were asked more loosely to create a comfortable conversational style interview. The interview length for this study was between 45 and 75 minutes, which allowed sufficient time to deeply discuss the volunteers' experiences and perceptions, and each interviewee was interviewed only one time.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Teachers from across the United States who were RPCVs were sought out as participants for this study. The recruitment was both word-of-mouth method (University of Virginia, 2016) and snowball sampling (Boise State University, 2016). The word of mouth method used the Peace Corps community network to reach out to potential participants. The snowball sampling included asking research participants to assist in identifying other potential subjects. Once IRB approval was granted, I began seeking out RPCVs who were teachers through contacting volunteers I served with and through Peace Corps social media sites.

The data for this study was collected through interviews with participants. Prior approval from the participant for recording the interview was collected before the interview began. I made every effort to assist the participants with being comfortable with the interviewing process to promote openness and to encourage reflection on their international experience and current teaching pedagogy. I briefly identified with the participants through communicating about my own Peace Corps experiences to help establish a productive relationship (Maxwell, 2013). As I shared both Peace Corps and teaching experiences with the study participants, there was a greater likelihood that our

shared experiences promoted connections and would result in more candid responses during interviews (Maxwell, 2013). At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were thanked for their participation and time. I conducted the interviews and collected data over the course of 3 weeks.

Once the interviews were complete, I transcribed each recorded interview before coding it. To ensure a strong foundation for qualitative analysis, I employed tips that Patton (2015) recommended.

1. I began analysis during fieldwork: took notes of patterns and themes that began to develop during interviews.
2. I took inventory and organize the data: Labeled, dated, and ensured all interviews were accounted for.
3. I filled in gaps in the data: As soon as missing information was noticed or lack of connections was realized, contacted the interviewee quickly. If documents were missing, took steps to get them.
4. I protected the data: Backed up all data and ensure they were secure.
5. I expressed appreciation: Thanked participants; followed up with appreciation to created positive relationships.
6. I reaffirmed the purpose of your inquiry: Reaffirmed the purpose of the inquiry and the purpose of analysis. Created a clear understanding of the purpose of my inquiry and the designs that framed the analysis.
7. I dedicated time for analysis: Set a realistic schedule.

8. I clarified my analysis strategy: The theoretical tradition directed the organization of the data. This dissertation used pragmatic theory and generic inquiry data analysis method and I reconnected with this theoretical and strategic framework regularly to guide the design and analysis.
9. I reflected and was reflexive: The monitoring of the thought process and decision-making was monitored to reduce biases, fear, and blinders.
10. I kept an analysis journal: The documenting of thoughts, analysis decisions, forks in the road, false starts, dead ends, and breakthroughs helped with remembering. Qualitative analysis was observed and documented even with the researchers own processes and analyses.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for this dissertation involved searching the qualitative data for patterns and themes without preconceived analytical categories. The concepts that emerged in the analysis described commonalities in the data (Patton, 2015). The coding process transformed raw data into a standardized form. It was the reduction and sense making effort that took large amounts of material and identified core meanings within them. The similarities found within the data tells a story of what aspects of the Peace Corps experience informed changes to pedagogical practices. The emphasis is on generating useful findings.

This dissertation research was small, exploratory, and had fewer than 12 participants, which made employing a software program optional (Medanth, 2016). Although a qualitative software program is not necessary, I employed the MAXQDR software program for this study. This software program provided an electronic version of the data obtained and it allowed an easy and accurate approach to identify patterns and themes. I chose the MAXQDR over Atlas-ti, Ethnograph, and NVivo for a variety of reasons. The Atlas-ti program is best applied to large projects that have a geographical aspect. This dissertation is small with little geographical relevance. The NVivo website and program had an unintuitive navigation structure and insufficient training and support options. I chose the MAXQDR software program for its basic qualitative program with a simple, clear structure that is sufficient for this small research study.

Once the coding was complete, the typed transcript of the audio recording was shared with participants as a way to ensure validation. Confidentiality was ensured through pseudonyms and the removal of all identifiable characteristics. Themes that emerged were identified and discrepant data was used as a way to search deeper and broaden the discourse to gain a richer understanding about the Peace Corps experience and how it impacted teachers and transformed their pedagogy (Maxwell, 2013).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Quality in qualitative research or the criteria with which to ensure quality is essential for the research to be accepted (Loh, 2013). Without such criteria, readers could not trust that the findings and presentation are credible and accurate (Loh, 2013). Guba (1981) constructed four criteria in the pursuit of trustworthiness. This section is

organized by Guba's criteria for trustworthiness. Each subsection addresses the specific criteria and how it was achieved in this study. This section concludes with ethical procedures for the treatment of the participants and their rights.

Credibility

To ensure credibility in this study and to limit research bias, a systematic, in-depth approach was used (Patton, 2015). Rich data was extracted from the findings through the exploration and full examination of each interview. Transcript validation took place through sending the participants a typed copy of our interview. Seeking out discrepant evidence (Maxwell, 2013) also added validity to the research and interpretation of data. Rigorously examining both supportive and discrepant data allows for the decision to either retain or modify the conclusions. The credibility of this study was enhanced through the use of all these validity measures.

Transferability

To promote transferability, attention was focused on adequately understanding the variation in the phenomena of interest in all the people being interviewed (Maxwell, 2013). The analysis of the diversity of the participants and their experience provided a deeper understanding of the data. For example, as patterns emerged, attention was given to the potential impact that differences have on interpreting and understanding the applicability of the findings. Modest sensible conjectures on the likely practicality and applicability of the findings to other situations under similar but not identical conditions are the hallmark of the pragmatic approach to generalization of data.

Dependability

In addition to carefully conceptualizing this study, applying logical participant selection, and employing a consistent systematic research process, all the data has been maintained for assessment upon request to ensure credibility and transferability (Williams, 2011). Detailed records of how and when the data was collected are preserved to allow transparency and duplication of the study. Also, all data has been securely housed in a database to ensure the safety of the information.

Confirmability

In this study, confirmability was established through the checking and rechecking of the data (Trochim, 2006). A description of my own predispositions and reasons for favoring one method over another was acknowledged (Shenton, 2003). This acknowledgement created evidence an audit trail, which allows any observer to trace the course of my research step by step (Shenton, 2003). Similarly, clear articulation of the design and procedures allows other researchers to search for and describe instances that seem to confirm or contradict prior observations. All of these procedures strengthen the confirmability of this research.

Ethical Procedures

In addition to IRB approval, a consent form was distributed to all participants explaining the study, the procedures, and their rights as a participant. I obtained all consent forms documenting consent to their participation and agreement for recording the interview. Each participant retained a copy of his or her consent form that included the scope of the study along with contact information for myself as well as Walden

University's representative. All data was secured electronically on an external drive and accessed through a secure laptop computer with password protection and a backup copy on an external drive secured in a lockbox. I shredded the paper records that were created during the data entry and analysis phase after data analysis. No one else had access to the data.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. The credibility of this qualitative research is established and maintained through the rigorous and detailed processes employed. This chapter also included the rationale for the conceptual framework and the benefits to the educational community that is anticipated as a result of this inquiry. At the core of this inquiry are the participants' reflections and perceptions of the impact of their Peace Corps experience. It is these personal interpretations, which helps promote a broader understanding of long-term international experiences and its plausible impact on teachers' pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' intercultural experiences and explore a specific subset of teachers, RPCVs, and their perceptions of what in their long-term international experiences as volunteers influenced their incorporation of cultural awareness in their instruction. I begin this chapter with a review and discussion of the research questions and their alignment with the research methodology and interview questions. A background and description of the setting, demographics, characteristics of the participants, detailed account and justification of data collection and analysis, responses to research questions, evidence of trustworthiness, and results of this pragmatic research follow.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the design and methodology for this study. The interview questions were created to produce descriptive recollections and generate reflections (Thorne, 2016) of teachers' international experiences, events, and circumstances and the application of their experiences in their pedagogy. Each interview question was aligned with the research questions (see Appendix B) to provide a basis for the pragmatic theory and generic inquiry approach used in this research (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

RQ1: How do teachers perceive their experiences in the Peace Corps to have impacted their cultural awareness?

RQ2: What instructional practices do RPCV teachers attribute to their enhanced cultural awareness?

Setting

A variety of social media outreach technology venues were used for participant identification and all interviews conducted in this study. The most productive technology venue for recruiting was Facebook, followed by RPCVs' using their preferred communication technologies. Eighteen people reached out to me through email before I completed posting the invitation on all media venues. Three of those 18 people did not respond to my emails and four people could not find a time that worked for an interview, which left me with 11 participants. Of these respondents, all who responded were willing and eager to participate in this research. Ultimately, based on the high volume of interest, I returned to each social media site used for recruiting until no more participants were needed. Interviews were either conducted through FaceTime, Zoom, or a voice telephone call, allowing participants to choose the method of conversation that was most comfortable and easily accessible to them. I conducted all interviews from my home office with particular attention paid to a professional and pleasant background for those who could see me during the interview. To ensure each interview was implemented consistently and captured accurately, I kept a copy of my interview questions in view and used a QuickTime recorder to capture the audio of our phone/computer-based interviews. At the end of each interview, I checked to make sure the recording was captured and audible. I took notes during each interview and wrote additional reflective notes after the interview concluded.

Demographics

The sample group stipulated in the participant selection criteria included teachers in the American public school system ranging from kindergarten to higher education who returned from serving in the Peace Corps as volunteers. Allowing for this range of grade levels among participants added diversity to the response pool and was intended to expand the promise of relevance and depth for the analysis. I used convenience sampling to find participants who were close and easy to reach through social media. All participants were Peace Corps volunteers who served for the standard 2-year length of service. This duration provides sufficient depth of experience to enhance the credibility of the analysis.

The 11 participants interviewed for this study were diverse in terms of the Peace Corps countries where they volunteered, dates served, grade levels they taught during the Peace Corps, grade levels they teach in the United States, and gender. The ethnicity of the participants was not diverse, a concern I address at the end of this section. I have provided each participant with a pseudonym, which I use consistently throughout to maintain confidentiality while personalizing each narrative. Table 1 shows the characteristics and demographics of the participants for this study. The order of the participants is in the order they were interviewed.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	PC Country	Dates Served	PC Job	Current Job	Gender	Ethnic
Sophia	Dominica	2003-2005	Elem. Ed	Higher Ed.	Female	White
Jacob	Kenya	1985-1987	Secondary	Secondary	Male	White
Isabella	Azerbaijan	2009-2012	Elem. Ed	Higher Ed.	Female	White
Michael	Uganda	1971-1972	Secondary	Higher Ed.	Male	White
		2013-2015	Higher Ed.	Higher Ed.		
Emma	Morocco	1977-1979	Elem. Ed	Retired	Female	White
Joshua	Albania	1995-1997	Secondary	Middle	Male	White
Olivia	Philippines	1999-2001	Teacher Ed	Elementary	Female	White
Emily	Namibia	2009-2012	Secondary	Elementary	Female	White
Abigail	Panama	2007-2009	Elementary	Secondary	Female	White
Madison	Namibia	1997-1999	BES-Teachers	Elementary	Female	White
Ava	Grenada	2002-2004	Elem. Ed	Elementary	Female	White

The first participant whom I call Sophia was a self-identified white female from Tennessee. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Commonwealth of Dominica, an island in the eastern Caribbean, from 2003 to 2005. While she was a PCV, she worked in a Dominican public elementary school. She currently teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) in higher education in the United States.

The second participant Jacob is a self-identified male who has “a bit of Cherokee but is predominately Caucasian.” He volunteered in the Republic of Kenya in East Africa from 1985 to 1987. During his time as a volunteer, he taught high school math in forms 1-4 which are equivalent to grades 9-12 in the U.S. school system. He is a high school math teacher and department chair in the northeastern part of the United States.

The third participant is a woman of Caucasian descent who I will refer to as Isabella. She volunteered in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is situated between Southwest Asia and Southeastern Europe, with Russia to the north and Iran to the south. Isabella served from 2009 to 2012. Her stay was extended an additional 9 months to

finish out the school year. She taught English as a foreign language (TEFL) in the Azerbaijan public school system. She resides in the western part of the United States and is a professor in higher education.

Michael is a Caucasian male who was born in Germany to U.S. parents and was brought back at a very young age to the U.S., where he was primarily raised. He is Caucasian and referred to his mother's heritage as a "New England Puritan." He volunteered twice in the Peace Corps. His two times volunteering were both in the Republic of Uganda, which is located in eastern Africa with South Sudan to the north and Tanzania to the south. The first dates of his service were from 1971-1972, which was shortened due to a safety issue in the region. During his first Peace Corps experience, he joined with his wife and was a chemistry and physics high school teacher in a Ugandan public education system. The second dates of his volunteering service were from 2013 to 2015. During his second Peace Corps experience, he joined as a single male and was a lecturer at a Ugandan teacher's college. Michael is currently an adjunct professor in higher education in the United States.

The participant who I will refer to as Emma is a Caucasian female. She served her Peace Corps service in the Kingdom of Morocco, which is located in the Maghreb region of North Africa, from 1977 to 1979. Emma taught TEFL in the Moroccan public school system. Currently she is a workshop presenter and accomplished writer in the northeastern United States after retiring from teaching in the public school system for approximately 14 years.

Joshua is a Caucasian male who served in the Republic of Albania, which is located in Southeastern Europe with Montenegro to the north and Greece to the south. He volunteered from 1995 to 1997 and taught English in an Albanian high school. Joshua is currently a middle school English teacher in the public school system in the southeastern part of the United States.

Olivia is a Caucasian female volunteer who served in the Republic of the Philippines, which is a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean in Southeast Asia. She volunteered from 1999 to 2001 and taught Filipino teachers how to teach English. Olivia currently resides in the southwestern part of the United States and teaches fourth through sixth grade in a Montessori school.

Emily is a female of Caucasian descent. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Namibia which is a country located in southern Africa. She served as a volunteer from 2009 to 2012. Emily was a primary and secondary school teacher working with students in grades five through 12. She is currently an English as a Secondary Language (ESL) teacher in a public elementary school in northeastern part of America.

Abigail is a female of Caucasian descent who served in Panama, which links Central and South America and includes the Panama Canal that connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Abigail volunteered in the Panamanian elementary public school system. She currently teaches in a public high school in the U.S. Southwest.

Madison is a white female. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Namibia in southern Africa. She volunteered from 1997 to 1999. Madison

volunteered as a Basic Education Support teacher. She was responsible for teaching teachers in Namibia progressive educational techniques. She currently teaches kindergarten in the rocky mountain region of the United States.

The participant Ava was a Caucasian female who volunteered on the island of Grenada in the Eastern Caribbean. She volunteered from 2002-2004 and worked as a special education teacher in a Grenadian public elementary school. Ava currently is a special education teacher in a public elementary school in the southeastern part of the United States.

All the participants in this study are of Caucasian descent, which represents a lack of diversity. A possible reason for the lack of ethnic diversity in this sample is the relatively low population minorities serving in the Peace Corps. In 2005, for example, only 19% of volunteers were minority (Peace Corps Performance and Accountability Report, 2017). The Peace Corps recently addressed the low ethnicity among their volunteers and developed a goal of increasing applicants' diversity. The data shows that in 2015 the ethnic diversity of Peace Corps volunteers rose to 35% (Peace Corps Performance and Accountability Report, 2017). The two largest minority groups volunteering in 2015 were African Americans at 13% and Hispanics at 12% (Peace Corps Performance and Accountability Report, 2017). Although cultural ethnicity is low within the Peace Corps, I searched and posted requests on diverse Peace Corps social media pages such as Black RPCVs in the hopes of expanding the diversity of my participant pool to more accurately represent Peace Corps diversity, but only Caucasians of western and northern European ethnicity responded.

Data Collection

I collected data through conducting one in-depth interview with each of the 11 participants over a 3-week time period. I emailed all the participants a copy of the Consent Form before each interview. All participants read and signed the consent form and emailed me their signed copy. Each consent form was signed, saved, organized, and secured on a password-protected computer along with all the research documents and these were also copied onto a secured external drive.

When IRB approval was obtained the agreed upon number of participants was no fewer than six and no more than 12. This recommendation was based on the basic method approach, practicality of the participants' availability, the richness of the data collection, time issues, and resources issues. For all the interviews, I used the interview questions (Appendix A) and recorded notes on my impressions of the experience. I documented my feelings and thoughts throughout the interview. I saved this document together with the participants' interviews.

The recorded interview ranged from 45 to 75 minutes in length. Transcription took approximately 8 to 12 hours per interview with careful attention to capturing all details. Once I finished transcribing each interview, I reviewed each transcript against the recording to ensure that the text was accurate. I then saved each transcript with the participants' recording. I emailed a copy of each transcript to the participant for their keeping.

Once I finished each transcription, I organized and compared the transcripts manually, seeking out initial patterns for each research question. I loaded the files into

MAXQDR Analytics Pro 2018 software program for further analysis. I chose the MAXQDR Analytics Pro program which was simple to navigate and easy to import documents, arrange and rearrange coding, and analyze the data. The program functions are direct and to the point, which reduced my confusion and increased efficiency, which allowed me to learn the qualitative analysis system. The four-window workspace is aesthetically pleasing and made it easy to navigate through the transcripts. Coding was straightforward and easy to use.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process required me to search the qualitative data for patterns without preconceived analytical categories (Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2015). The transcribed interviews of each RPCV teacher were organized and grouped according to the two research questions, which allowed me to structure commonalities that I found. To ensure accuracy of interpretation and grouping of commonalities, I listened to the words of the participant from the digital recording while I read the transcript. I formulated emergent codes through the recognition of repeated wording and similarities and differences in participants' responses. I found degrees of strength in the codes through careful analysis of subtle nuances in participants' expressions, wording, and tone of voices as suggested by (Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008). These codes were sorted and named through the summarization and condensing of the data. Once the codes were found and sorted, I began a second analysis examining linguistic connectors, the theory related material of cultural sensitivity and transformative learning, and missing data to form subthemes. I paid particular attention to mentions of related wording to tie in my

theory related material. The subthemes were further refined, compared with each other, and consolidated leading towards themes. Several themes began to emerge after a third reading, comparing the participants' experiences, and reviewing my journal interview notes. I organized the themes using specific words and phrases aligning them with the research questions to show the connection between the data and the questions that the study set out to investigate (See Table 2 for the alignment of the codes and subthemes with the themes).

Table 2

Thematic Structure

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
1. Realization of One's Culture	Realization of culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of one's culture • Awareness of others economic status and ethnic majority • Realization of American cultural prejudice towards other cultures • Realization of one's culture through a different culture • Realization of cultural meaning
	Realization of self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realization of one's ideals, beliefs, and behaviors • Realization of one's family and culture bias • Humility
2. Adaption to Cultural Differences	Deep cultural understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater understanding of perceptual differences • Deeper level of interpersonal intrapersonal understanding • Expanded world view

	Adaption to difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance of other cultures was less difficult than before joining the Peace Corps • More tolerant through understanding multiple perspectives
3. Deep and Engaging Teaching Practices	Teaching practices that promote deep learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural competencies • Inclusive classroom environment • Deep meaning and making educational connections • Growth mindset
	Teaching practices that promote student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple intelligence learning • Community-based learning • Conceptual learning • Multiple perspectives learning

Results by Research Question

In this section, each research question is stated and then followed by an introduction of the themes that arose from analysis. Research Question 1 had two themes that emerged: realization of one's culture through deep cultural awareness and adaption of cultural differences through cultural experiences. Research Question 2 had one theme that emerged: deep and engaging cultural practices to provide inspiration, insight, and comprehension. Each theme is described including a detailed account of participants' experiences supporting the theme. A summary is provided to conclude each research question section. Discrepant cases are discussed at the end of the Research Question results section.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: How do teachers perceive their experiences in the Peace Corps to have impacted their cultural awareness? There were two themes that emerged from this research question. Each theme shows teachers' cultural awareness was impacted by their 2-year Peace Corps experience and is supported by accounts of new, rich, and in-depth understandings of culture. As participant Jacob explained:

...the thing that you hear and I think it's that you hear it so many times that it seems cliché but it was definitely life changing. I left the country as an American and came back as an American but I have a totally different view on things when I came back so it was a life-changing event.

Each teacher expressed the need to reflect to fully understand his or her new cultural surroundings during their Peace Corps experience. The teachers critically analyzed the underlying premises of their way of life in comparison to the new culture's way of life to make sense of their new surroundings during their Peace Corps experience. They were able to develop new frames of reference by consciously reflecting critically on their beliefs and implementing new ways of defining their worlds. Many of the teachers expressed a need to continue understanding culture upon their return to the United States.

The themes organized under research question one were:

- Realization of one's culture through deep cultural awareness
- Adaption of cultural differences through cultural experiences

Both themes were derived through the examination of the text and noting similarities in participants' responses. The first theme, the realization of one's culture

through deep cultural awareness materialized from the codes and subthemes telling a story of PCVs' examination of their own culture and belief systems when living in a new culture that was different from their own. The second theme, the adaption of cultural differences through cultural experiences emerged from analysis showing RPCVs expressed a deep understanding of culture, multiple perspectives, and the ability to understand and empathize with cultures different from their own. The following sections describe the themes that emerged and participant's verbatim phrases to strengthen the credibility of the interpretation.

Realization of one's culture. One common theme amongst the teachers interviewed was the awareness of their own culture. Seven of the 11 teachers expressed a realization of culture through the experience of another culture. Four out of the 11 teachers expressed a realization of self through a different cultural experience. The first set of codes that emerged and was repeated the most often included awareness of one's culture, awareness of others economic status and ethnic majority, realization of American cultural prejudice towards other cultures, realization of one's culture through a different culture, and the realization of what culture means. The second set of codes that were expressed less often was the realization of one's ideals, beliefs, and behaviors, realization of one's family bias towards other cultures, and humility.

Sophia. Sophia explained how her experience prompted her to understand she had strength she hadn't realized. This strength emerged from her difficult experiences of trying to understand the new culture she was living in during her Peace Corps experience. She had to examine herself and the new and different culture to find new ways of

understanding, which assisted in being able to stay her assignment for the entire 2 year duration. Sophia explained:

I guess for me the biggest thing that came out of it was that I realized I could deal with anything. It was so difficult and I was able to stay in for the entire 2 years and I realized I could get through anything. I think it made me feel more competent as a person.

She continued to explain her examination of self through the realization of her economic status and ethnic majority. She stated, "...I always felt that I was fairly privileged. I never worried about food or shelter and I wanted to give back. I got to give back in Dominica and I also got to experience being a minority".

Jacob. Jacob described how he became aware of his ideals, beliefs, and behaviors, as being part of American culture once he lived in another culture. Describing the shift, Jacob noted:

Well, like a lot of us I didn't know what culture meant. If you only live in your culture then your only point of view is your culture and it's kind of out of your mind that there could be anything else. I didn't really know that I had a culture until I was in Kenya and then I was able to begin to understand the differences in culture.

Isabella. Isabella found humility when faced with opposing cultural norms. This feeling of humility did not come immediately but took time, multiple experiences, and reframing her understanding of cultures. During that time she reflected upon herself, her reactions, and how she viewed the world. She expressed that her empathy and the

recognition of multiple perspectives assisted her in expressing her views while still feeling part of the other culture. She stated:

Not my teachers but other teachers especially the younger ones were more ready to hit students with a stick if they misbehaved. That was really eye opening and although I would do things very differently than how they would do things, which I shared, I definitely approached those topics from a place of humility.

Michael. Michael became aware of culture through his Peace Corps experience. He explained the first time he joined the Peace Corps he was unfamiliar with where Uganda was but he was open minded and eager to see the world and stated it was “one of the best decisions I ever made.” He explained he was brought up in a segregated community stating, “I had very few interactions with African Americans and I was opened minded and it was a whole new thing meeting people and getting over language difficulties...”

He felt his Peace Corps experiences deepened his understanding of how he can bring about change through the impact he made within the Ugandan culture. He explained that it was in his second Peace Corps experience that he was able to realize the impact his first Peace Corps had on his students. He stated:

...I think you go and don't know if you made a difference. You're there a short time and you are doing stuff and you don't know what the impact is. When teaching students half the students look bewildered most of the time. You don't know what's going to become of it... in subsequent times I have learned that the

head of the police in Uganda was one of my students and I met a total of three or four other Ugandans who did very, very well who were my students.

Emma. Emma found it took her nearly 9 months before she was truly comfortable with living in another part of the world even though she had lived overseas as a young child. She found gaining the trust of the Moroccan community she lived signaled she was becoming integrated. She stated, “at about the 9-month mark some of the ladies in the public bath accepted me into their community...”. The feelings of being an outsider and then feeling welcomed into the community prompted her to question what culture is and how you fit into a culture. Emma explained that coming back to America she experienced similar feelings of being an outsider even though she was returning to the American culture. She felt her deep knowledge of culture through her Peace Corps experience enabled her reintegration into the United States.

Joshua. Joshua found that the community he volunteered in was generous and giving even though they had little to give. He expressed that this experience changed his perspective regarding how people should treat each other. He was able to look at his own culture and understand the amount of privilege it holds. He explained:

I guess one of the things that really stood out to me when I served in Albania in Eastern Europe was how people who have nothing and how generous they could be. I come from such a privileged culture where people kind of guard their possessions from each other. It was really interesting to be part of a culture where people would give you the only thing they own ‘cause that’s who they were. I

think it really changed, it really shifted my perceptions of how people should treat each other.

Olivia. Olivia explained that she thinks culture is not a theory but an experience. She explained her self-reflection began when she experienced another culture. She had studied cultural theory for years. She had taken workshops on cultural awareness. She studied a second language. She taught ESL students. She expressed she had a solid foundation in cultural diversity. It wasn't until she was immersed in a different culture that she began to understand her own culture as well as another culture. She explained:

Culture is not something we usually even understand is happening so when my mom and half sister came at the end of my 2 years and spent a couple of weeks, like 10 days in country with me and they were constantly asking like "Why do they do this? Why do they do that"? I explained, "Why do you stand up for the national anthem"? And my mom was like "We just do out of respect" and I was like "That's kind of our culture. We do things all the time and we don't understand that it's not something that everybody does but it's something that our culture does."

Emily. Emily talked of recognizing that culture has layers. She described the surface layer as the national expectations and rules citizens are to follow. As she continued her time in Namibia she saw another layer that revealed role reversals and people following subcultural expectations and rules rather than national expectations and rules. She recognized once she returned to the United States that we also have national expectations and subcultural expectations. This recognition led her to have a much

deeper understanding of her students' cultural struggles as first generation immigrants.

Emily explained:

You know I think it is definitely possible that there are things that now I know that my students are going to struggle with. Like they are going to struggle to come around to an American way of thinking if indeed they ever do. Whereas if I hadn't had the experience in the Peace Corps I would be like, why don't they understand? I told them that this is the way that we do things and why don't they just understand that and change.

Abigail. Coming back to the United States and seeing the American culture through a new set of eyes brought Abigail a realization of her culture. The transition back into the United States culture helped her become more culturally sensitive. Abigail explains, "I, like most Peace Corps volunteers, experienced culture shock coming back to the United States. Once I returned I was really able to see U.S. culture through a new sense. It was a difficult adjustment." She explained that this adjustment allowed her to reflect back to her Peace Corps time. She stated:

When you are in their country they are not trying to be rude it is just their culture and so now that I am more aware of things like that I now can be more sensitive and understand what they are trying to convey to me rather than I am just interpreting their actions or words.

Madison. Madison became aware of her family's biases towards cultural diversity when she announced she was going into the Peace Corps and was going to be volunteering in Africa. She explained:

My dad was in the military and we lived in different parts of the world in like El Salvador and Honduras and in Germany so I would say that I was really blessed that I was exposed to different kinds of families from all over and even in our country. Although we lived all over the world, my parents were raised in the south. ...with my grandparents there was racial fear. I can remember a lot of relatives saying because I served in Namibia Africa “Oh what if she marries, you know, an African person?”

Ava. Although the recording was inaudible my reflective notes show Ava analyzed herself and the new culture she lived in as a PCV. She questioned if she was observing the new culture accurately. She suggested her length of stay allowed her to understand culture in new and in-depth ways.

Adaption of cultural differences. The second theme in response to research question two among the teachers interviewed was the ability to adapt in their new culture and to adapt after their Peace Corps experiences. Eight out of the 11 teachers expressed experiencing a deeper cultural understanding based on their Peace Corps experience which seems to have allowed them to adapt to cultural differences easier once back in the United States than if they had not had their Peace Corps experience. Three of the 11 teachers explicitly expressed a greater tolerance and easier adaption when encountering cultural differences as a result of their experiences. The first set of codes that emerged and were repeated the most often were a greater understanding of perceptual differences, deeper level of interpersonal and intrapersonal understanding, and an expanded

worldview. The second set of codes that arose was tolerance of other cultures less difficult and more tolerant through understanding multiple perspectives.

Sophia. Sophia found her Peace Corps experience impacted how she interacts with other cultures here in America. She teaches ESL in higher education and regularly interacts with students from around the world who have come to America to study. She explained that her Peace Corps experience assisted in her not reacting negatively or strongly to her students' cultural differences. She has learned to adapt to situations she may find odd or not typical in the United States. She explained:

I teach English to people who don't speak English so I interact with people from different cultures all the time. My Peace Corps experience helps me interact better with different cultures now. I work with a lot of Saudi students so I kind of have learned to have a blank expression when they discuss or behave in ways not familiar to myself as an American.

Jacob. Jacob noticed that economic surroundings could influence perception. He noticed those from developing countries tend to view Americans as wealthy and that Americans typically do not recognize their wealth since they have not had experiences in developing nations. This awareness was realized through the transition of leaving a developing country and arriving back in the United States. This awareness assisted Jacob in developing a deeper understanding and appreciation for both the United States and Uganda. Jacob explained:

So when I came back, it's been 30 years now so some of those things are kind of hazy but I do recall specifically upon our return, my wife at the time, she said we

had to stop at the grocery store. We went in this grocery store which was now time open 24 hours and she went to get what she wants and she said she was trying to find me and when she found me I was walking down the aisles just looking back and forth at all the toilet paper because there were like 10 different brands of toilet paper. I had just totally gotten out of the habit of choosing brands. There were not any brands to choose from in Kenya and here there was so much more at hand and it gave me a different view on economies and what it means.

Isabella. Isabella explained that her time in Azerbaijan changed her views on what is normal. Through living and working within the culture she was able to understand why people from other cultures behave in particular ways. She expressed being able to live and work in culture gave her an accurate view of the culture and allowed her to interact in culturally appropriate ways. She learned how to adapt in her new culture and how to adapt once back in America. Since returning to the United States she has noticed her expanded worldview has allowed her to be less judgmental and more opened minded towards cultural differences. She explained:

I have had a lot of cultural experiences since I have come back. In particular, in my master's program I interned at the refugee women's health clinic where I worked with lots of refugees from all over the world and I am a lot less judgmental and open minded when people tell me things. I now know it's all about perspective. What seems normal to you, if you take it from a different perspective it's not that weird. For example, if you tell others "oh, I tweeze my

eyebrows” or “I wax my eyebrows” they may be like “what? Can you believe that”? So I’m just a lot more open minded and respectful of things that people do cause it’s normal for them.

Michael. Michael became more aware of the prejudice Americans have towards Africa upon his return to the U.S., which deepened his understanding of culture and expanded his worldview. His awareness of prejudice prompted him to talk with others to broaden their view of African culture. He explained:

One thing I have noticed upon my return to America is the ignorance people tend to have about Africa. I think lots of Americans still to this day picture Africa with lions on the savanna or people living in wooden grass huts in the jungle. So in my interactions I try and tell people about that.

Michael explained that it was important for him to describe the Africa he experienced, one of commerce, education, and family. He finds a need to clarify Americans misperceptions that Africa is a savage land with roaming lions and grass huts. He has talked with his students, colleagues, and friends and written articles describing his experiences since his return to the United States.

Emma. Emma experienced being an outsider as an American living and volunteering in Morocco. She adapted quickly through speaking the language and fine-tuning her intercultural sensitivity skills, which allowed her to be accepted by other Moroccan women. She was able to expand her worldview from this experience appreciating culture, cultural differences, and how to integrate. When she returned to

America she found she was again an outsider and had to navigate through the new cultural nuances of the area she was living. Emma explained:

American culture is like a big umbrella with a lot of subcultures. Each subculture has its own hues and standards. Upon my return to America, I took a job in a small coastal community. It's a community that I was aware felt that people 3 miles beyond the border of their town are really people from away. I was maybe a 15-minute drive from the school but my house is far enough outside the town limits that I was from "away". I was also not related to anybody else in school. It was something I could understand and I could address from my Peace Corps experience.

Joshua. Joshua also found he is more tolerant of cultural differences following his Peace Corps experience. He explains that his Peace Corps experience in Albania provided him with understanding multiple perspectives. He explained he was able to understand that everything he experiences is a perspective and each person has his or her own which is equally valid. Joshua explains, his Peace Corps experience provided opportunities for:

...learning about global issues from other countries. Seeing the cold war from a small eastern European country's perspective or learning about the Iraq war from the perspective of people in Turkey who had been inundated with refugees in the '90s or even now serving immigrant populations in [the city where I work] allows me to be a lot more in tune with the situations they are coming from.

He continued his explanation by expressing that his ability to be in tune with American immigrants and refugees assists in his teacher student relationships. Joshua explained his Peace Corps experience had made him expand what he saw as culture and he thinks a lot more about the experiences the people from other countries go through.

Olivia. Olivia found her Peace Corps experience taught her the meaning of multiple perspectives. She told a story of an interaction with a Philipino colleague whom she had grown to know over her 2-year length of stay in the Philippines. During a conversation with her colleague she became aware that they both experienced the world differently. She knew the words her friend was saying but she was unable to decipher the meaning behind the words. This conversation brought about a new awareness for Olivia that allowed her to gain a greater understanding of their perceptual differences and cultural experiences providing her with a deep understanding of multiple perspectives. Olivia explained:

My dear friend Mona Sues—Mona is a title of respect—and we were on the balcony at work. She was a coworker. She was like 60 so she was quite a bit older than I was. She spoke beautiful English and I remember speaking in English with her on the patio and she was trying to explain something to me and still to this day I wish I had a recording of this conversation because I could understand all the words she was saying but it was like I could not understand what she was saying. I knew the words she was saying, I heard them, and I understood them but what ever she was saying, what ever it was, my experience of being a human was

different enough from hers that I could not make sense of what she was saying to me.

Emily. Emily explained that her Peace Corps experience allowed her to understand the feelings of others better. She works with students who emigrated from Cape Verde in Africa. She is able to empathize with her students' cultural situations through sharing their feelings and views of cultural struggles. Emily stated:

I think that having been in the Peace Corps and having had the experience of living and working in another culture definitely made a difference in the way that I interact with my students and their parents now. I understand they may struggle to come around to American thinking and without my Peace Corps experience I would not be as tolerant or understanding.

Abigail. Abigail found her experiences in the Peace Corps brought a new cultural awareness. Her tolerance for difference evolved through accepting the differences among cultures and understanding culture can be experienced through a number of worldviews. Abigail explained:

I like most Peace Corps volunteers experienced culture shock coming back to the United States. I was really able to see U.S. culture through a new sense. It was a difficult adjustment but I believe I have managed now but I still notice that there are bumps. It has absolutely helped me be more culturally sensitive or being able to recognize when someone is not trying to be rude. It is just their culture. Now that I am more aware of things like that I can be more sensitive and understand

what they are trying to convey to me rather than I am just interpreting their actions or words.

Madison. Madison reported that she came to the realization that cultural difference, once understood, leads to a deep level of interpersonal and intrapersonal understanding. She understood that through the interaction with others in another culture she developed new ways of communicating and was able to empathize about situations she would have previously judged. Her personal interactions prompted her to reflect which provided a deeper understanding of herself, her likes, her dislikes, and her uniqueness. Madison explained:

I can remember walking to the grocery store which should have probably been a 30 or 40 minute walk and it would just take for ever because every single person whether you knew them or not that you met on the dirt road had to stop and ask you about the family and about the crops and how is your health and you had to kind of go through this whole spiel, a greeting. Right before I left I can remember a Namibian young woman was doing my hair, she was braiding my hair, and she said “What is something you won’t miss?” and I told her, I said, “I cannot wait to just go into a grocery store and get one or two things and I don’t have to talk to anybody and it will take almost no time.” And she said to me “But what if there are [sic] trouble? What if you don’t have money? What if someone is trying to rob you? What if your car has a flat? What will you do? You know, who will help you?” and I just remember in that moment just crying and thinking I don’t want to leave. I realized I am going to feel really alone.

Ava. Although this recording was inaudible, my reflective notes written during the interview indicate Ava said she was deeply impacted by her Peace Corps experience and has increased her understanding and tolerance of cultural differences. She said she includes cultural acceptance, appreciation, and understanding in her daily lessons now as a teacher.

Summary of commonalities related to research question 1. The participants in the study expressed their cultural awareness was impacted by their Peace Corps experience. The themes that emerged reflected how participants expanded their realization of their own culture and how their experiences helped them adapt to cultural differences once they returned to the United States. They found themselves to be more empathetic and aware of cultural perspectives and reported they have an expanded worldview. Through these understandings they felt they were able to develop a more complex cultural view, which allowed for a more sophisticated understanding and realization of cultural dynamics.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked: What instructional practices do RPCV teachers attribute to their enhanced cultural awareness? The main theme that emerged from research question two was deep and engaging teaching practices. Teachers who are RPCVs chose to use teaching practices that engage their students about the underlying significance and basic principles of ideas to impact individual learning. They ask their students to explore in great detail, encourage them to create their own arguments, and support pragmatic

practices. Although all the teachers apply deep and engaging teaching practices, each teacher's approaches varied in range, form, style, and subject.

Seven out of the 11 teachers chose teaching practices that promote deep learning. Four out of the 11 teachers chose teaching practices that promote student engagement. The first set of codes that emerged and was repeated the most often was: cultural competencies, inclusive classroom environment, deep meaning and making educational connections, and growth mindset. The second set of codes that arose was: multiple intelligence learning, community-based learning, conceptual learning, and multiple perspectives learning. Verbatim phrases and experiences of the participants will inform the theme as titled, strengthening the credibility of the interpretation.

Sophia. Sophia recognizes that her Peace Corps experience enabled her to create an inclusive environment in her classroom. She addresses the needs of the students so they feel equally valued and are encouraged to question and explore. She is aware of their differentiated backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities and uses this knowledge to engage her students. She described her new awareness:

I try to create an inclusive environment in my classroom. I try and make sure everybody is involved in the lesson. I am a big proponent of very little teacher talk and so I try and do a lot of active learning. There is a lot of group work happening in my classroom where the students are hopefully doing some leading of the lessons. I try and make it student centered when I am creating my lesson plans. I try and make it as student-centered as possible.

Jacob. Jacob found teaching in Kenya taught him the importance of multiple perspectives in education. He found students' perspectives impacted their comprehension of the mathematical material he taught and his assessment of their learning. Through this realization he is able to encourage his students to explore their ideas and supports finding multiple methods to the same answer. To assist in his evaluation of multiple methods in mathematics, he developed his own way of evaluating his students. He explained:

I developed some very specific ways of writing and scoring tests that I still use now. Whenever I give a test, I take the test myself and write a test key so the students are subjected to the way I think the problem should be solved with the understanding that they can do something different that is still mathematically correct and valid and I would accept it and they would get full credit for that.

Isabella. Isabella found in Azerbaijan that in general teachers were teaching rote memorization and copying notes from a blackboard. She explains that it wasn't until she was in this type of learning environment that she realized the significance of her American education and Peace Corps teacher training which allowed her to teach educators more effective teaching methods such as interactive learning and critical thinking. The combination of her knowledge and experiences abroad has prompted her to teach cultural competencies in her American higher education classrooms. She explained:

I teach in the school of social work and it's important for us to be culturally competent. I think that I deliver on that cause I can give examples from being in

Azerbaijan to my students and then they can share examples that are culturally relevant to them. I just think it's more on my mind because I have served in the Peace Corps. It's very real for me.

She encourages her students to “share examples that are culturally relevant to them” to assist in deeply engaging them in the lessons she is teaching.

Michael. Michael noticed both in Uganda and here in America students tend not to have what he calls “quantitative thinking.” He finds that students lack the knowledge of how to relate basic mathematics skills to real world contexts. He incorporates critical analysis in his teaching methods by encouraging his students to relate science to the world around them. He explained:

I spent a lot of time trying to make ways of approaching science easier. In Uganda I discovered the first time and the second time I served that they had to try and relate science to the world around them. I'd have them try to precipitate something from a solution. I tried to liken that to rain falling. The students did not have any general chemistry. They did not understand how rain forms so we did experiments and things like that. In my current teaching role we try and relate as much as we can. For example, when something dissolves in solution like when you put sugar in coffee and stir it that kind of thing. At [my] university many of the students need chemistry to get their degree so I try my best to make it interesting.

Emma. Emma found that her Peace Corps experience taught her the importance of community-based learning. She stated:

I think there is a desperate need for students to be able to understand and work from within their own communities and to understand how their community via education experiences can interact with the broader community. One of the things I've done is uh—I am an English teacher—and so we discuss and write what does it mean to be a community member and what is part of your community and what kinds of things are part of your community.

Joshua. Joshua found his Peace Corps experience provided him the opportunity to develop a growth mindset. His attitude towards trying new ideas and allowing himself to make mistakes became one of the biggest influences on his current teaching practices. He fosters the importance of making mistakes, improving yourself, and not being afraid to try new ideas with his students to develop their cognitive processes. He explained:

I'll tell you one thing I can think of right off the bat is being willing to try new things in the classroom without really worrying if they will go wrong. I sometimes will expect that things will go wrong but that it is just part of the experience. I am not sure that that came from my teaching experience in the Peace Corps but maybe from life experiences in the Peace Corps and being in a foreign country. Being in a different culture I became use to thinking things are probably going to go wrong and I am probably going to get through to them somehow and that is just sort of part of the experience. I now incorporate this practice in my classroom through not trying to run a ship that is too tight. I allow things to go wrong. I think that this keeps things interesting for me and my students.

Olivia. Olivia felt that being in a different culture for an extended period of time influenced her to teach educational meaning to her students. It is important to her to connect her students to the literature she teaches. She seeks out books and topics that motivate her students and help them feel connected. She explained:

I came away from Peace Corps definitely having an appreciation of how much our experiences influence our overall learning. I appreciated it much more in a deeper way so reading about someone we have no understanding of or reading about a character that we have no similarities to makes it very, very hard to understand or engage with. I think the Peace Corps influenced my desire to find literature and resources that connect to my students.

Olivia extends her classroom learning to real life events through service learning opportunities. When Olivia was teaching her elementary students about the Rwandan genocide she was able to connect the students deeply enough to the situation that the students asked how they could help. She assisted her students in participating in a non-profit organization that coordinates the packaging and distribution of food to people in developing nations.

Emily. Emily experienced the need to proactively advocate getting the instruction she needed during her language training at the beginning of her Peace Corps experience. She explained:

In my experience as a learner I guess something that I feel that I got more comfortable with during pre-service training, especially going through language training, was to be a little bit more proactive with advocating to get instruction in

the way that I learned. For example, I had already had experiences learning languages before the Peace Corps. I took French when I was in junior high and all the way through high school and a little bit in college but when I studied Arabic I really discovered that I really need the visual aid information to go with the auditory information and I remember my entire language group giving some obviously constructive pushback to our language teachers when they were saying “no, you just need to learn how to speak it.”

This experience brought her awareness that she was not being taught the way she learned best. This awareness prompted her to teach to different intelligences. She gears her teaching methods towards different learning styles, memory abilities, performance types, and multiple perspectives. She explained, “I think I became more aware of how different students became aware and different strategies for different kinds of learners.”

Abigail. Abigail found in the Panamanian educational system a lack of creativity and the need for quality. She explained:

Teachers were at the front with students sitting down. The students were writing and copying from the board and copying into their notebooks. That’s really where it seemed to stop. I wasn’t there every single day but I believe there were tests of the material.

This experience directed her to wanting to be an educator that focuses on understanding broader principles or ideas that can later be applied. Her desire to include conceptual learning in her current teaching practices replaces the more traditional

learning models commonly found in schools that concentrate recalling facts, similar to what she observed while serving in the Peace Corps.

Madison. Madison teaches in a rural part of America. Her school is small, impoverished, and lacks culture. “Many of them will never leave the state as a child and so you have to bring the world to them”. She explained her Peace Corps experience brought her awareness to the importance of multicultural learning, which she includes in her kindergarten classes:

There isn't a whole lot of understanding of what is going on around them as of yet. I am constantly getting out the globe. I love Google Earth. If we are learning about Ireland, studying about St. Patrick's Day, we will go and we will look 'cause I think they need to see.

Madison explains that she uses materials she brought back from Africa in her classroom. She stated:

I have a lot of things that I brought back from Namibia. I have recordings of Namibian teachers' voices so they know how Namibian people sound and so they can have that exposure. Again where I live or where I teach many of my students will never go to a museum.

Another example of Madison including multiculturalism in her classroom is a book she found very helpful for kindergarteners:

There is this amazing book by the author Mem Fox called *Who Ever You Are Where Ever You Are*. The illustrations are just so colorful and beautiful and it definitely is perfect for kindergarteners. We read it the first week of school and it

shows schools from around the world, churches around the world, and languages around the world. It addresses whoever you are wherever you are and it talks about even though we might look different we are all the same on the inside. It is a really, really neat book and from there we kind of go into how do we want to be treated and we create a classroom constitution. This helps the student get outside of their selves.

Ava. Ava found that her Peace Corps experience influenced her need to include multiculturalism in her teaching. She was offered the opportunity to write curriculum for her classes and she explained that she was excited to include culture in her lessons. She explained:

I celebrate diversity. I have found that I can discuss culture, starting conversation easily in the classroom. A lot of times I will have young adults and teens come in with prejudice and I can challenge that by explaining everyone has their own genes and ways of being and what is yours?

She explained she thoroughly enjoyed exposing her students to cultural situations such as powwows and virtual tours of cultural environments. She expressed including culture in her teaching allows her to feel complete like she came full circle from her Peace Corps experience.

Summary of commonalities. The participants in this study have expressed the ways that their teaching practices were impacted from their Peace Corps experiences. The main theme that emerged showed teachers choose teaching practices that focus on extensive, complex, and deep educational theories and methods. They employ the basic

principles of ideas engaging their students with the underlying significance of the subject to deeply impact individual learning. Their support for pragmatic learning experiences encourages students to explore in great detail, form their own arguments, and realize their importance and ability to make a difference in their own world. Each teacher chose teaching practices that were deep and engaging for their students yet they varied their approaches, forms, styles, and subject matter. The teachers in this study stressed the important role the Peace Corps had on influencing their teaching practices.

A note regarding differences. A difference worth noting is Emma's background, which is unique among the participants. Emma is a retired teacher and not currently teaching in the public education system. This study selected participants who were currently teaching in the public school system. Although Emma is retired, she currently teaches writing seminars to adults, which falls within the parameters of this study. Her information was important to this study to enrich our understanding on the impact the Peace Corps had on her cultural awareness and her teaching practices. She noted that even though it had been quite some time ago that she served in the Peace Corps (she served from 1977-1979) her experience still impacted her cultural understanding and teaching practices today.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Quality in qualitative research or the criteria with which to ensure quality is essential for the research to be accepted (Loh, 2013). Qualitative research is rooted in philosophy and is subject to the rigor that accompanies serious research that benefits from looking beyond generalization and avoiding quantification of core ideas (Giorgi,

2009). In place of statistical analysis, qualitative methodology uses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure trustworthy results (Guba, 1981). Without such criteria, readers could not trust that the findings and presentation are credible and accurate (Loh, 2013). This section describes the implementation of qualitative trustworthiness in this research.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

Credibility is established through the use of multiple techniques to assist in exploring the link between findings and reality in an effort to confirm truth (Patton, 1999). The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand phenomena from the participant's perspective (Trochim, 2006). To ensure the findings are credible, I employed the strategies discussed in Chapter 3: using a systematic, in-depth research approach and a full examination of each interview, soliciting feedback, seeking out discrepant evidence, and rigorously examining both supportive and discrepant data.

To ensure I used a systematic research approach I followed guidelines from established qualitative analytical theories of Patton (2015) and Maxwell (2013). This involved finding themes and patterns to the research collected as well as searching for alternative themes and divergent patterns, which is the essence of rigorous analysis. Looking for alternative themes and divergent patterns can be done through thinking about other local possibilities and then seeing if those possibilities can be supported by the data.

A full examination was conducted as I transcribed each interview. I listened to the interviews a second time while reading what I had transcribed earlier to ensure accuracy. During the second listening, I added to the notes of my thoughts and feelings that I took

during the interviewing process. I coded each interview from the commonalities I found in the data (Patton, 2015), recognition of repeated words, similarities, and differences in responses, and careful analysis of nuances in expressions, wording, and tones in their voices. I sorted and named the codes paying careful attention to understanding the underlying criteria. Once the codes formed and I sorted them, a second analysis was conducted examining linguistic connectors, theory related material, and missing data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

As I listened to the interviews I took notes on any areas of confusion. I listened a second time and those areas that were still confusing I listened a third time to clear confusion where possible and document my understanding. There was one interview that was difficult to hear and after multiple reviews I decided I needed to contact the participant for clarification (Patton, 2015). I emailed the participant and she responded with her answer.

During the coding process, I sought out discrepant data (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 1999; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). One participant's information may be discrepant since the teacher is retired compared to the 10 other participants who currently teach full time in public schools, however her answers were similar to the other participants. The second possible discrepant case was due to a technical error in which the first half of the recording was lost. This data from this interview was noted and further explored to ensure a thorough understanding of the participant's perspectives. I used the mindset of attempting to disprove the supporting data by looking at the data that supports an alternative explanation (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 1999).

Transferability (External Validity)

Modest practical speculations on the likely applicability of the findings to future times and other situations under similar but not identical conditions are the hallmark of a pragmatic approach. To promote transferability, attention was directed to adequately understanding the variation in the Peace Corps experiences and their impact on teaching practices in all the people being interviewed (Maxwell, 2013). The analysis of the diversity of the participants and their experiences provides a deeper understanding of the data. Attention was given to the impact differences may have on the interpretation and understanding of the findings.

The variations in the participants were documented through the demographic information obtained. I compiled the demographic data and organized it into Table 1, which was introduced earlier in this chapter. I made a conscious effort to interview Peace Corps volunteers who were diverse in the volunteering location from around the world, the dates they served, the grade levels they taught, their gender, and their ethnicity. The homogenous ethnicity of the volunteers may be due to a relatively low number of minority volunteers in the Peace Corps, during previous decades.

Dependability (Reliability)

This study applied logical participant selection and employed a consistent systematic research process to ensure dependability of the data (Williams, 2011). Each participant was selected with specific criteria to ensure relevant and rich information to emerge (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The criteria for this study included RPCVs who are now teachers in the American school system from kindergarten to higher education.

Following Patton (2015) and Creswell's (2013) recommendations, no fewer than six and no more than 12 individuals were to be selected for this inquiry. This recommendation as explained in Chapter 3 was based on the basic qualitative approach, practicality of the participants' availability, the richness of the data collection, time issues, and resources issues. I interviewed a total of 11 participants who averaged the standard 2-year length of Peace Corps service. This 2-year duration provides an adequate length of time to ensure the participants experienced a significant depth of experience. This strategy supported creation of diversity across contexts, which in turn provided increased relevance and depth of analysis (Patton, 2015). Each volunteer provided the rich information needed to assist in determining if a long term international experience prepared teachers with a deep cultural awareness that impacts their instruction.

To further ensure dependability, I will keep the transcripts for 5 years should participants request them. Detailed records of how and when the data was collected have been preserved for transparency and duplication of this study. The data is securely located in password-protected database and in a locked external drive.

Confirmability (Objectivity)

In this study, I provide confirmability through checking and rechecking the data as mentioned in Chapter 3 (Trochim, 2006). I favor Trochim's (2006) confirmability method since it ensures consistency and accuracy through a systematic documentation of checking and rechecking during the data collection and data analysis process.

During data collection I wrote notes on the experience as I was interviewing each participant. I documented my feelings and thoughts throughout the interview and once

the interviews were complete, I listened to the recordings and took notes of anything I might have missed or wanted to add. Once I finished transcribing and taking notes, I reviewed each transcript against the recording to ensure that the text was accurate.

During data analysis, I took notes throughout the first and second reading and highlighted phrases that captured the essence of the experiences of the participants. To ensure accuracy of interpretation and grouping of commonalities, I listened to the words of the participants from the digital recording while I read the transcript.

I used articulation of confirmability that allows other researchers to search for and describe instances that seem to confirm or contradict my observations (Shenton, 2003). This transparent method also created an audit trail, which will allow any observer to trace the course of my research step by step (Shenton, 2003). All of these procedures have strengthened the confirmability of this research.

Summary

This chapter began with a review of the research questions and their alignment with research methodology and interview questions. A background description of the setting was provided followed by the demographics of the participants, data collection and analysis justification, the results of the research question, and the evidence of trustworthiness. The participants' answers to the interview questions were analyzed and organized by research question. Two themes emerged from the first research question: realization of one's culture through deep cultural awareness and tolerance of cultural differences through cultural experiences. Quotes were provided from each of the participants' answers to support the themes. One main theme emerged from the second

research question: deep and engaging teaching practices. Quotes from each participant were likewise included in this section to support the theme that emerged. The chapter concludes discussing evidence of trustworthiness. This chapter provides a systematic analysis and greater understanding of how Peace Corps volunteer international experience impacts teaching instruction. The participants expressed gratitude for their experience and acknowledged the positive benefits of understanding their own culture at a deeper level, experiencing tolerance for cultural differences, and the importance of teaching cultural acceptance to their students now that they are teaching in the United States. Each volunteer expressed the profound impact living in a foreign culture had on him or her and its continued influence today.

In the following chapter, Chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretations of the findings extending the current knowledge of international experiences impacting teachers' cultural competencies and comparing them with what has been found in peer-reviewed literature. Further analysis led to my interpretation of the findings compared to the conceptual framework used in this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of teachers' cultural experiences as Peace Corps volunteers and if these experiences influenced their intentions to include cultural awareness in their instruction. A pragmatic framework with a generic inquiry approach was the guide for this research. Eleven teachers who are RPCVs were interviewed using a semistructured open-ended interviewing process. The interview data were analyzed using a qualitative examination of pattern identification without preconceived analytical categories (Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2015). Emerging patterns were grouped into themes through a coding process that identified words and phrases that aligned with the research questions. Intercultural sensitivity theory and transformative learning theory were used to explain teachers' perceptions of their Peace Corps experience and its influence on their instruction and provide an approach to solving the current problem of teachers' lack of cultural understanding.

Summary of Key Findings

The research questions were the driving force for this study and were as follows:

RQ1: How do teachers perceive their experience in the Peace Corps to have impacted their cultural awareness?

RQ2: What instructional practices have been prompted by their Peace Corps experiences?

There were three key findings from the analysis of this research that related to the research questions. The first key finding was that teachers who are RPCVs recognized their Peace Corps experience provided them with a deep cultural experience that helped them to better understand their own culture. Of the 11 teachers, seven had a greater

realization of culture while four of the 11 teachers seemed to have internalized their cultural experiences, which provided them with a greater realization of their own culture. The second key finding was the ability of teachers who were RPCVs to adapt to cultural differences, which was easier than before they had their Peace Corps experience. The teachers described how experiencing a deeper cultural understanding provided them with a greater tolerance and easier adaptation when encountering cultural differences. The final key finding from this study was that teachers who served as Peace Corps volunteers choose to use deep and engaging teaching practices in their classrooms upon their return to the United States. To deeply engage their students, the teachers choose different approaches that address the underlying significance and basic principles of ideas to impact individual learning.

Interpretations of Findings

I used intercultural sensitivity and the transformative learning theories to analyze the data collected from this study and address the research questions. The analysis showed that a long-term cultural experience seems to have had a positive influence on returned Peace Corps volunteers' cultural awareness, providing them with the ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences. The analysis also showed that RPCV teachers believe their pedagogy was impacted by their Peace Corps experiences and they now include deep and engaging instructional practices to enhance cultural competencies for their students.

Intercultural Sensitivity Theory Interpretations

The foundation of intercultural sensitivity theory is that people's experiences with and engagement in cultural differences assist in creating a more complex and sophisticated organization of their perceptual differences, which provides the potential for positive intercultural relations to increase (Bennett, 1993). The participants said that their experiences in different cultures while Peace Corps volunteers provided them with a greater understanding and deeper appreciation of culture. Peace Corps participants in this study each spent 2 years interacting and working with as well as participating in the everyday life of cultures different than their own. They learned to speak different languages, ate unique foods, saw unique environments, experienced different home lives and new forms of transportation, experienced new workplace practices, understood different perspectives, experienced different societal norms, and understood diverse government frameworks. These experiences evoked a range of emotions including excitement, fear, shock, surprise, empathy, understanding, appreciation, and amazement. These new experiences and intense emotions generated the need for the volunteers to organize their perceptual differences in order to succeed in the new culture. Some participants remarked that they accepted cultural differences and laughed at their ability to adapt or not adapt. They remarked that they felt uncomfortable with how different they were, but were curious and excited about understanding new perspectives and ways of being. Others reported they did not expect their Peace Corps experience to impact them so deeply. They reflected on the lifelong changes they have seen in themselves and their awareness of their expanded worldview, which Bennett (1993) described as

increased potential for positive intercultural relations through long-term international experiences.

For example, Joshua spoke of noticing how selfless the people in Albania were. Their willingness to give when they had so little shifted his perspective of how people should treat each other, which shows Joshua's growing maturity as he reached a more ethnocentric view of his Peace Corps host's culture. The participants also spoke about mischaracterization and negative stereotypes that both American and foreigners have of cultures different than their own. For example, Madison talked about her mother's fear for her safety while she was a Peace Corps volunteer in Namibia. She said:

.The people in my village were very impoverished and so people did not have weapons. They did not have anything. I can remember having a conversation with my mom and she said, "you know things are heating up on the border. I don't feel safe with you there. You need to come home. I was talking to my friends and they said 'I would go get her and bring her home.'" She was saying it was not safe for me to be there. The very next day Columbine happened, and I live in Colorado....

She then explained that her Namibian counterparts expressed the same type of fear. She explained:

And so the following day my teachers sat me down and said "we had a meeting last night. In America and in Colorado, it is not safe. You must not go back there. There are weapons there. It is not safe and you must stay here. You cannot go back there ever again."

Madison's realization that both cultures held negative interpretations about the other illuminates her understanding of the similarities in cultures, which Bennett (1993) described as acceptance of difference. These examples and more from the data indicated to me that as participants were impacted by their Peace Corps experience, they developed a more sophisticated and complex cultural understanding, with a deeper appreciation for culture.

Transformative Learning Theory Interpretations

The foundation of transformative learning theory states transformational learning is a shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters the learner's way of being in the world (Mezirow, 1991). My analysis of the research data from this study helped offer support for this statement. The participants indicated that their Peace Corps experiences deeply impacted their cultural understanding and they felt a need to teach others about cultural equality and complex worldviews. The volunteers indicated that the dramatic differences in cultures were sometimes shocking, leaving them disoriented. To succeed in the culture, the participants explained they had to learn new frames of reference and redefine their experiences through different perspectives. The examples shared here are directly related to three of the stages Meizrow (1991) identifies that are a focus of this study: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational discourse. Olivia reported at the beginning of her Peace Corps experience that she was disoriented in her country of service. She described her disorienting dilemma occurred as she stood in line at the bank. She explained the bank lines moved at an abnormally slow pace compared to her experiences in the United States. People would get in front of her as if

she was not in line. She would confront the people who would get in front of her, and their response was that they were there before. She would become frustrated after continuously getting further back in line, verbally expressing her dissatisfaction. People responded by looking at her with either irritation or pity. By the end of her Peace Corps experience, she figured out how to work through the lines similar to the locals. Her frames of references shifted, expanding her understanding of this culture as a result of her disorientation regarding behavior in lines. She explained that building relationships and experiencing daily life with her counterparts created a bond between them, allowing them to identify her as family, which prompted them to hold a space for her in line. She claimed these experiences have permanently impacted her. She is able to recognize differences in the ways cultures function, allowing her to adjust much easier to situations she may not initially understand both in the United States and abroad. This permanent alteration of her behavior from her shocking experience confirms what Mezirow (1991) explained in transformative learning theory.

The participants also spoke of assessing their experiences as Peace Corps volunteers, which involved analyzing their beliefs, feelings, values, and actions with competing interpretations and alternative viewpoints which Mezirow (1991) described as critical reflection. Participants' experienced intense situations that often left them feeling confused. This confusion was an important stage in solidifying their cross-cultural understanding. After they were able to assess their situation, create new frames of reference by expanding their view through understanding multiple perspectives they

found their worldview had grown more complex and sophisticated. One volunteer explained her most memorable cross-culture experience as follows,

The grieving process in Azerbaijan was very different from what I had experienced where when somebody dies you—well they're a Muslim majority country so they will prepare the body, like clean it ritually in the mosque, and the biggest thing though is that people like scream and cry and kind of like hit themselves and have these visceral grieving reactions when somebody dies and you just let it all out and you just cry. I'd never seen something like that where people were wailing all in unison.

This participant was able to critically assess this situation and understand that cultures have a magnitude of ways to express important events such as death. Over time she sought to better understand why the people reacted they way they did. She critically examined her own and others' perspectives. She validated others' actions and she ultimately came to the conclusion that there are two culturally different yet equally appropriate ways to mourn death. She essentially raised her consciousness through her critical reflection of her Azerbaijani mourning experience.

Participants also discussed that their shift in consciousness and new way of viewing culture from their Peace Corps experience increased their need to address equality and acceptance and include it in their educational instruction incorporating rational discourse techniques once they returned to the United States. Participants reported that they make a conscious effort to ask their students to explore in great detail, encourage them to create their own arguments, and ensure they assess reasons behind

alternative viewpoints. One participant discussed the materials and methods she includes in her kindergarten classroom to bring awareness of cultures from around the world. She includes voice recordings from teachers she worked with in her country of service so the students can hear another language and their accents when they speak English. She incorporates acceptance of differences in her curriculum by including lessons on equality while reminding the children how to see through multiple lenses. The analysis showed that the participants' intense cross-cultural experiences deeply impacted their cultural understanding and they felt a need to teach others how to rationally view other cultures and complex worldviews as Mezirow (1991) found in his transformative theory.

Interpretation in Light of Current Research

Some research findings that focus on developing teachers' cultural awareness were supported by the findings in this study. Studies have shown that international programs provide cultural experiences through external world interactions prompting participants to culturally adapt which increases their cultural understanding (Bradley & Emerson, 2016; Conner & Roberts, 2015; Cushner, 2007; Dunn et al., 2014; Lewis, 2005; Rieffel & Zalud, 2006). All of the teachers who participated in this dissertation study mentioned their cultural interactions in their country of service assisted in transforming their mindsets and behaviors of cultural understanding which helped them prepare for working in a global society, confirming Moore McBride et al.'s (2012) and Brook et al.'s (2007) findings. In addition to transforming participants' mindset, studies also showed that longer durations abroad significantly impacted intercultural sensitivity development (Bennett, 1993; Bridgeland et al., 2011; Carano, 2013; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004).

Many participants in my study mentioned that they believed it was their length of stay that allowed them to gain a deep cultural understanding. It provided them the time to learn to adapt and integrate into the new culture as well as reflect upon their own cultural norms comparing the two and expanding their understanding of culture. Participants also mentioned their Peace Corps training that included being given permission to form relationships, understand cultural norms, and ascertain community needs provided them the means to accept the differences that they encountered and assisted in their understanding, acceptance, and eventual adaptation into the foreign culture. Similar consequences of developing cultural understanding, raising development awareness, and promoting social cohesion were found in the research and findings of Bloomberg (2014); Cross, (1998); Unterhalter et al. (2002); and Vian, et al., (2007).

The need for teachers in training to have a transformational experience through international programs was evident in both the existing research and in the findings in my study. International programs provide college students studying education with a heightened cultural experience that would be difficult to achieve in a classroom and thus offers them a transformative experiential opportunity (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Rundstrom & Williams, 2005; Smith & McKittrick, 2010). Several of the participants in my study mentioned their Peace Corps experience was deeply meaningful to them because of experiencing and interacting with a foreign culture, which could not have been replicated in a traditional classroom setting. All the participants discussed disorienting events that evoked an emotional reaction in which they had to learn new ways of seeing the world to function effectively in their new environment which supports the research

findings of Adler (1975), Church (1982), Lyon (2001), and Mezirow (1991). In a cross-cultural experience, a disorienting dilemma is important for the learner to develop new schemes and understandings which typically takes up to 12 months after the initial immersions to solidify, according to Harper (1994), Holt (1994), Taylor (1993), and Whalley (1995). Three participants in my study specifically mentioned that the first year was incredibly difficult due to all the disorientation, perceived strange behaviors, shocking experiences, and feeling like an outsider. They described the second year as immensely pleasurable since they began to understand, adapt, integrate, and feel like part of a family. They explained the feeling of being wanted in the second year allowed them to be fully committed and make the most advancement in relation to their assigned job.

The influence that an international experience has on teachers instruction was evident in both current research and in my study. Although I found relatively few studies focused on international experiences and teachers instruction, recent literature showed the impact an international experience has on teachers' pedagogy. Dunn et al. (2014) found that enabling teachers to engage in interactions in an international environment as well as challenging teachers to think about global/local dynamics during and after an international experience prepared them for understand issues pertaining to local/global diversity and pedagogy. What I heard from all 11 teachers in my study supports Dunn et al.'s (2014) research findings and as they felt their Peace Corps experience influenced the way they interacted with their students by providing them with a greater understanding of culture as well as a greater awareness of minorities and global/local diversity. A more recent study by Bradley and Emerson (2016) showed preservice teachers who became

immersed in an international community moved beyond surface-level ideas of culture to a deeper understanding. While all 11 teachers mentioned having such a deeper understanding of culture due to their Peace Corps experience, they also described their need to teach their students deeper and more engaging teaching practices. Seven out of the 11 teachers noted the need to reach their students at a deeper level. They chose practices that promoted students' exploration in great detail and enticed them to desire basic principle understanding rather than memorizing and recalling facts. Four of the 11 teachers mentioned the need to promote students' engagement such as service learning and pragmatic tools for positive multicultural interactions. One teacher in higher education and one k-12 schoolteacher noted that although it was clear that their Peace Corps experience has broadened their understanding of culture and multiple perspectives they also had training through their jobs and universities classes about cultural understanding, which also influenced their inclusion of cultural competency in their pedagogy.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations for this study were recognized in the study's design. The first limitations are related to the study participants. By focusing in on the very specific sample population of RPCVs, the ability to generalize these findings to other international program types and volunteers is limited. Further, as the study participants were recruited through invitation and only European Americans (Caucasians) responded, the resulting sample was homogenous. This may present some challenges with generalizing to volunteers from other subcultures of the American population.

Another limitation of this study was the small number of participants interviewed. A total of 11 teachers participated in my study. Although the sample size was small, which limits the transferability to other populations, the focus was on the depth of the data and an exhaustive analysis of the perceptions of the participants, and saturation in that process was reached. The depth of focus provided detailed accounts of teachers' cross-cultural experiences that deepen our understanding of the importance of international experiences, cultural awareness, and the impact an international experience has on a teacher's pedagogy.

The last limitation is the possibility of my own personal bias as I conducted the interviews. I share a similar background and experience with this study's participants. I was a Peace Corps volunteer with a positive disposition to the program and enjoyed my long-term international experience. In order to limit my bias I used a variety of methods qualitative researchers have found to be successful. First, I acknowledged and interpreted my biases (Mehra, 2002). This was accomplished through examining my own Peace Corps experiences, desires for teachers to have a cross-cultural experience, and examining counter arguments to my biases. Second, I thought of myself as a learner approaching the participants as a knowledgeable source regarding the topic I was exploring, which assisted me in monitoring my subjective emotions. Next, viewed myself as an outsider placing the participant as the dominant voice in our conversation. The last method I employed was peer review by two early career doctoral education researchers, who reviewed my research to learn how they see the research design, process, and information generated. My committee guided me continuously throughout

the process to ensure I adhered to scholarly guidelines, ensured precision, and held me to the highest levels of academic research standards. Also, all participants were provided with the transcripts through which they were able to review and subsequently approve the transcript, only 3 responded with a simple “thanks”.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for further research. All the participants in this study were of European American descent. I would like to conduct a second study that includes participants from several American subcultures to find if it supports, extends, or refutes the current findings. All the participants in the study were Peace Corps volunteers. I would be interested in comparing the differences and similarities in the experiences of Peace Corps volunteers and other volunteering programs such as UN volunteers and volunteers from non-government organizations. Also, it would be interesting to study what is the shortest length of stay, internationally, that can provide the results indicated in this research. Research suggests universities are interested in providing students international experiences through short trips and semesters abroad but indicates the shorter stays do not provide the depth of experience needed to gain a deep understanding of the complexities of culture (Dwyer, 2004; Engle & Engle, 2003; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004).

Each of the participants in my study enthusiastically shared the impact the Peace Corps experience had on their need to share an understanding of culture in their U.S. classrooms. The statements offered by Emma point to the potential of these experiences impacting practice long into a RPCV teacher’s career. A longitudinal study that

followed recent participants throughout their teaching career would allow for an opportunity to show if they continued to feel strongly about implementing culture awareness in their instruction, if the intensity weakened as time progressed, if their methods changed, and/or if they sought out more cultural experiences as life long cultural learners. The study would follow participants who had been in the Peace Corps at least 3 years ago but no longer than 20 years ago to find out how it might be perceived to continue to shape their teaching in the middle years of their teaching experience. The results of the longitudinal study could support, extend, or refute the research findings and current research that indicates the depth of the impact from a long-term international volunteering experience and the sustainability of its impact to influence positive cultural understanding.

Another recommendation for further research is to conduct a meta-analysis study combining the results from research that shows international experiences expand teachers' cultural awareness and influence to their classroom instruction, assuming enough quantitative findings are available. All the teachers in this study explained their cultural awareness and teaching practices were impacted by their Peace Corps experiences. A meta-analysis would add credibility to my results and other studies examining the influence of abroad experiences and its impact to teachers instruction. This type of analysis would improve estimates of the size of the effect, increase transferability, and could minimize any uncertainty of the powerful impact an international experience can have to educators teaching and instruction.

The last recommendation would be a study that examines how Peace Corps volunteers adapted to cultural differences during their Peace Corps experience and the methods they use, upon their return to the United States, that help them develop, maintain, and promote a positive disposition towards American subcultures and help others to do the same. The Pew Research Center (2018) and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2018) addressed the need for positive perceptions of immigration and foreigners in the United States. They explained that even though the United States is a nation of immigrants, many citizens have conflicting views about immigration, and most believe there are too many “foreigners” living in the country. There appear to be limited studies addressing ways to educate and expand views on culture, subcultures, and immigration. A study of this nature could provide citizens with methods to understand and address the uncomfortable feelings when experiencing cultural differences, which would assist in clearer communication between cultures and subcultures, supporting individual identity, and strengthens our countries integrity, freedom, and democracy.

Implications

The results of this study could potentially be used by universities and by policy makers to start a discussion about how to prepare culturally competent teachers to be ready for the challenges of our globalized age. The results revealed teachers who are RPCVs expanded their understanding of the dynamics and complexities of culture to the extent that they prioritized cultural awareness in their pedagogy, activities and curricular choices, drawing directly from their international experiences. This information could

help open dialogue between professors, university departments, university officials, and policy makers about the essential need for promoting diverse ideas, worldviews, global approaches, and building intercultural skills to prepare students for the challenges of work, life, and citizenship in the 21st century. Further, this research could potentially increase their attention to promoting active learning, intellectual curiosity about the world through innovative international volunteering experiences, support international dimensions in higher education curriculum and teacher-training programs.

This study showed that the Peace Corps experience had a positive impact on teachers' cultural awareness and implementing cultural understanding in their learning and instruction. It also indicated the importance of the 2-year length of stay in a culture to deeply understand the complexity of culture and to impact teaching instruction. The results further suggest that by participating in a long-term international experience teachers gained a greater understanding of their own culture and other cultures through a meaningful experiential learning experience. Teachers felt that the Peace Corps experience provided them with an opportunity that could not be replicated in a traditional classroom experience. They felt that through this experience they became more knowledgeable and could possibly have a greater influence on their students.

The information in this study could have further implications for k-12 public schools and higher education institutions. It could be helpful to school administrators in their hiring process by providing them the knowledge of what it may mean to be a Peace Corps volunteer and the benefits such applicants bring to the classroom. It could also be beneficial to education majors in higher education who are seeking an experience that

will increase their cultural competencies. Further studying the impact of international volunteering programs on students that were suggested in the recommendation section would provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of American subcultures in an international experience, how long and how deeply these international experiences impact those who participate, and ultimately help us understand ways to create more positive inclusive global communities that support each others diversity, worldviews, and approaches to life.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, what intrigued me most was my hope that it was going to shed some light on other teachers' pedagogy changes due to their Peace Corps experiences. I was quite interested in knowing if others were as impacted by their Peace Corps experience as I was; so impacted that it prompted me to include cultural awareness in my pedagogy as an art teacher. Once I interviewed the 11 volunteers who participated in my study, I realized their stories were more than just notes for my research and a way to advance my knowledge about similar experiences. Their experiences were deep, emotional, alive, and funny. We found ourselves laughing over our reactions to shocking experiences and the stages we went through to accept cultural differences. These compelling volunteers conveyed their Peace Corps experiences and how they use those experiences as teachers in the United States. Through their experiences they learned that they came from a culture, which is as unique and different as the culture they resided in during their Peace Corps experience. They critically analyzed their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to help them adapt and integrate into their new culture. They found they

were more empathetic and adapted quickly to cultural differences once they returned back to the United States. They realized that everyone is part of a culture and that each culture is valid. These awarenesses prompted them to include cultural understanding in their classrooms. All the teachers used different cultural awareness teaching methods, showed great determination to improve cultural understanding, and ensured their students show appreciation for other cultures as well as their own culture.

The findings showed that teachers who served as Peace Corps volunteers for the 2-year length of service were impacted and their cultural awareness was honed. The teachers increased their appreciation and awareness of U.S. culture through experiencing a deep, engaging, and lengthy international experience. They also recognized their ability to adapt to cultural differences during their Peace Corps experience and upon their return back to the United States. They expressed a deep understanding and empathy with cultures different than their own. Also, the teachers attributed their inclusion of cultural awareness in their instructional practices directly to their Peace Corps experiences. They found they wanted to engage their students with the underlying significance and basic principles of ideas to impact their individual learning. They ask their students to explore in great detail, encourage them to create their own arguments, and incorporate practical teaching practices.

This study highlighted the experiences of teachers who were Peace Corps volunteers and uncovered the deep impact they perceived it had upon them. A long-term social change implication from this study is that teachers who participate in the Peace Corps volunteering program become more culturally aware, which positively impacts

their teaching instruction. An international experience aids in the preparation of teachers for the 21st century classroom. It prepares them to provide an equal education to all their students and increases the likelihood of stimulating cultural understanding amongst their students. One lesson that was reiterated to me through this research process was that a long-term international experience was related to teachers deeply understanding the complexity of culture. The teachers were driven by their passion to understand others, by their cultural similarities and differences, and by their desire to succeed even when faced with intense challenges. These experiences impacted them so deeply that it influenced their teaching, instruction, and pedagogy, all of which will positively impact their students and generations to come.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Qualitative Research Design: Semi-Structured Interview, Pragmatic Overarching Theme, Summative purpose, Instrumental-use multiple-case sampling and analysis design, and content analysis approach.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Set One Questions (Cultural Awareness Questions):

Question 1: What drew you to the Peace Corps and prompted your decision to become a volunteer?

Question 2: Can you tell me a few things that stand out for you about your Peace Corps experience?

Question 3: Describe how your cultural awareness and perspectives have evolved since your Peace Corps experience. Were any of those changes a result of your Peace Corps experience? Could you tell me about them?

Probing Question 3a: Please describe your cultural origins and some of the values, beliefs, and behaviors you held regarding how you interacted with people and places new to you prior to your Peace Corps experience.

Probing Question 3b: Please describe one of your most memorable cross-cultural experiences you had as a PCV. Are you aware of ways this experience has informed your understanding of culture and the way it informs beliefs, values, and actions? Can you tell me about it?

Probing Question 3c: Have you had any cultural experiences since you returned? Can you tell me how you approached them? Do you think your Peace Corps experience influenced the way you responded?

Set Two Questions (Culture & Pedagogy):

Question 1: Were there any experiences you encountered as a PCV that prompted you to examine the way you teach and the way others' learn? Can you tell me about them?

Probing Question 1a: What do you think it was about those experiences that brought your new understanding of teaching/learning?

Question 2: Please describe examples of how your new perspective and awareness gained from your Peace Corps experiences has impacted your teaching approach.

Probing Question 2a: Thank you for sharing that, can you tell me in more detail in what ways has this new perspective influenced:

How you plan your lessons?

How you structure your classroom environment?

How you engage your students and the activities and techniques you use?

How to assess your students?

Question 3: Are there ways in which this new cultural understand of teaching and/or learning due to your Peace Corps experience has helped you establish and maintain a purposeful and equitable environment for learning in your current classroom? Can you tell me about them?

Question 4: Are there other ways that your Peace Corps experience and enhanced cultural awareness have influenced your life?

Thank you so much. Is there anything you would like to add or a question you think I should have asked?

Demographics:

Gender-

Ethnicity-

What state do you reside?-

Country served-

Dates served-

Area of Service (job)-

Current occupation-

Thank you. Is there anything you would like to add or a question you think I should have asked?

Thank you so much for your time and information. Your contributions are assisting in clarifying how long-term international experiences may impact pre-service teachers understanding of cultural sensitivity.

Appendix B: Research and Interview Questions Alignment

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>RQ1: How do teachers perceive their experiences in the Peace Corps to have impacted their cultural awareness?</p>	<p>Set One Questions:</p> <p>Question 1: What drew you to the Peace Corps and prompted your decision to become a volunteer?</p> <p>Question 2: Can you tell me a few things that stand out for you about your Peace Corps experience?</p> <p>Question 3: Describe how your cultural awareness and perspectives have evolved since your Peace Corps experience. Were any of those changes a result of your Peace Corps experience? Could you tell me about them?</p> <p>Probing Question 3a: Please describe your cultural origins and some of the values, beliefs, and behaviors you held regarding how you interacted with people and places new to you prior to your Peace Corps experience.</p> <p>Probing Question 3b: Please describe one of your most memorable cross-cultural experiences you had as a PCV. Are you aware of ways this experience has informed your understanding of culture and the way it informs beliefs, values, and actions? Can you tell me about it?</p> <p>Probing Question 3c: Have you had any cultural experiences since you returned? Can you tell me how you approached them? Do you think your Peace Corps experience influenced the way you responded?</p>
<p>RQ2: What instructional practices do RPCV teachers attribute to their enhanced cultural awareness?</p>	<p>Set Two Questions:</p> <p>Question 1: Where there any experiences you encountered as a PCV that prompted you to examine the way you teach and the way others' learn? Can you tell me about them?</p> <p>Probing Question 1a: What do you think it was about those experiences that brought your new understanding of teaching/learning?</p>

Question 2: Please describe examples of how your new perspective and awareness gained from your Peace Corps experiences has impacted your teaching approach.

Probing Question 2a: Thank you for sharing that, can you tell me in more detail in what ways has this new perspective influenced:

How you plan your lessons?

How you structure your classroom environment?

How you engage your students and the activities and techniques you use?

How to assess your students?

Question 3: Are there ways in which this new cultural understand of teaching and/or learning due to your Peace Corps experience has helped you establish and maintain a purposeful and equitable environment for learning in your current classroom? Can you tell me about them?

Question 4: Are there other ways that your Peace Corps experience and enhanced cultural awareness have influenced your life?

Thank you so much. Is there anything you would like to add or a question you think I should have asked?