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Teaching, Reflecting and Learning: Exploring Teacher Education Study Abroad Programs as Transformational Learning Opportunities

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Abstract

An essential goal of teacher education is to reveal cultural blindness, bias that may be hidden from preservice teachers' awareness. This may include unintentional biases, misunderstandings, and stereotypes, which can affect what happens in the classroom. Transformational learning through cultural immersion experiences can reveal what is hidden, allowing students to critically reflect and revise assumptions and perspectives leading to cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy. Teacher education study abroad experiences can transform preservice teachers' ethnocentric worldviews and lead them to adopt more culturally competent mindsets. Reflection is key to participants understanding the impacts from a study abroad experience, and several years may pass before participants realize how much impact their experiences abroad had upon them. We used case study methodology to examine the meanings four teachers make of the long-term effect of a study abroad experience on their cultural awareness and pedagogical decisions. This use of retrospective methods may help to understand that the impacts of teacher education study abroad are difficult to articulate and assess directly after the program, and thus encourage program designers and researchers to provide participants opportunities to venture out of their cultural comfort zones and reflect upon their experiences a year or more after the study abroad program.

Keywords: study abroad, teacher education, preservice teachers, transformational learning, cultural awareness, cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy

1. Introduction

In recent years, teacher education has included cultural awareness and competence as skills preservice teachers needed to develop in order to engage more culturally relevant pedagogy [1–2]. The optimum is to engage preservice teachers in cultural activities that reveal cultural assumptions and biases (cultural awareness) and celebrate students' varied lived experiences with the goal that these experiences will increase preservice teachers' understanding of different cultures and how

culture impacts communication and social interactions (cultural competence) thus increasing their use of culturally responsive pedagogy [2, 3]. As Cushner argued, “Teacher educators should provide significant intercultural encounters for preservice teachers who typically are not experienced in cross cultural matters.” [4], p. 37.

One way to accomplish this goal is through cultural immersion experiences, which can reveal what is hidden, allowing students to critically reflect and eventually revise assumptions and perspectives to become more culturally aware, which leads to cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy [2–6]. Teacher education study abroad programs can provide cultural immersion, allowing preservice teachers to critically assess what is normally hidden within their own culture and/or the dominant culture of their home country. As Cushner noted, “Teacher education faculty represent a critical link in structuring educational experiences that assist their students to reach out to the international community, both at home and abroad, with the aim of forging relationships based on deep and meaningful understandings of peoples’ similarities as well as differences.” [4], p. 37.

However, cultural awareness does not occur instantly [7, 8]. Guided reflection after thoughtful, dissonance inducing experiences is key to aiding participants in understanding the personal impacts of study abroad experiences and how these experiences have increased their cultural awareness. Students must move mindfully through the process of cultural learning, in order to successfully change their worldview [10]. Given this, transformational learning theory is one framework educators could use to design study abroad programs to help develop preservice teachers’ cultural competence through meaningful reflection activities, leading to changed worldview and behavior [4, 10]. Transformational learning can be defined as the “process of effecting change in a frame of reference” [10], p. 5 and facilitates autonomous thinking that can result in action-oriented behaviors [11]. In order to experience transformational learning, cognitive dissonance is necessary so that participants reflect on their experiences and decide to change perspectives either through behavior change or worldview change [1, 6, 7, 10].

Transformational learning theory also changes the nature of study abroad research. If participants must think long term and longitudinally about their experiences abroad, the time after studying abroad may not be sufficient for getting at the true cultural learning that happened during the experience abroad [12–14]. According to Wong’s evaluation of study abroad assessment, “Dewey’s [1938] perspective suggests that a fruitful place to look for the effect of study abroad experiences is in the experiences that students have after the program” [15], p. 124. Thus, to properly assess the impact of study abroad (i.e. in what context participants teach, participants’ pedagogical practices, and cultural worldviews), researchers must consider a number of strategies, ones that span an extended period of time and include a variety of end goals. This longitudinal perspective allows more time for transformative learning and for participants to deeply reflect on the impacts their study abroad experience truly had on their lives [4, 10, 15, 16, 20].

Given this, we postulate that the impact of study abroad needs to be explored retrospectively as it is difficult to articulate and assess participants’ transformational learning directly after the program [15]. To further explore this possibility, we developed four descriptive case studies of participants from two different study abroad programs. The research questions that guide our chapter are:

What meanings do teachers make retrospectively on the long-term impacts of teacher education study abroad programs in regard to transformational learning?

How do these meanings impact the teachers’ cultural awareness, cultural competence, and pedagogical practices?

2. Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework is transformational learning theory given we hypothesize teacher education study abroad experiences can have a transformational effect on participants' long-term cultural awareness, competence, and culturally responsive pedagogies [1]. For the purpose of our study, we define transformational learning as deep change that stems from experiences of disorientation that make one feel like he or she has a new perspective or understanding. We focus on the three-stage model of transformational learning [1, 17]: 1. Disequilibrium triggering experiences; 2. Critical to frame of reference; 3. Changes in viewpoint and future plans.

We define a disequilibrium or triggering experience as any experience that elicits a sense of disorientation or dissonance [4, 10]. A disorienting experience elicits a sense of a discrepancy between what one thinks is true and what is real. This idea stems from Piaget's theory of cognitive constructivism. Piaget postulated that learning occurs when individuals pass through a time of discomfort or disequilibrium to resolve the discrepancy between their existing schemas and the new information being processed [18]. We define critical viewpoint as a stage of reflection and growing awareness. During this stage, one's frame of reference becomes apparent and subsequently assumptions are critically questioned through deep reflection and discussion [1, 10]. Transformational learning is defined as a deliberate change in actions that were elicited by deliberate reflection, questioning, and discussion about one's frame of reference [10]. Change that is elicited through transformational learning can include exploration of new roles, actions and relationships, planning for future action, revising existing ideas using the new information acquired, and realizing the need for more information and skills [1, 4]. Thus, inherent in transformational study abroad programs are experiences that lead to dissonance, guided reflection and discussion that lead to changed frames of reference and action-oriented behaviors.

We, as researchers and teacher educators, see study abroad experiences as a way to expand the horizons of preservice teachers in order to assist them in serving all students in their classrooms [19]. We postulate that transformative study abroad experiences have the capacity to increase the likelihood of preservice teachers to use culturally relevant teaching practices. These teaching practices are outlined by Ladson-Billings to include having high expectations for academic achievement for all students, being culturally competent and developing their students' cultural competence, and being critically conscious and developing the sociopolitical viewpoints of their students [3]. Teachers who are considered culturally responsive feel that one of their major responsibilities is to help their students become academically successful. A tenet of cultural competence is allowing students to maintain their cultural characteristics while completing academic tasks. In essence, finding value in multiple ways of knowing and experiencing the world. Study abroad experiences with embedded reflection can also encourage preservice teachers to recognize social inequities and be aware of their own biases. In turn, helping their students to recognize social injustices, motivating them to take action to change the status quo.

Given transformational learning takes time [9, 11], we conducted a longitudinal study with a focus on the transformation of preservice teachers that occurs years after a study abroad cultural experience. This aligns with the continuity of experience [17] based on the view that experiences have a lasting impact on each subsequent experience. All new experiences are somehow influenced by the transformational experiences that happened before. The study abroad experiences promoted an imbalance between what preservice teachers understood and what they encountered while abroad, which through reflection changed their frame of

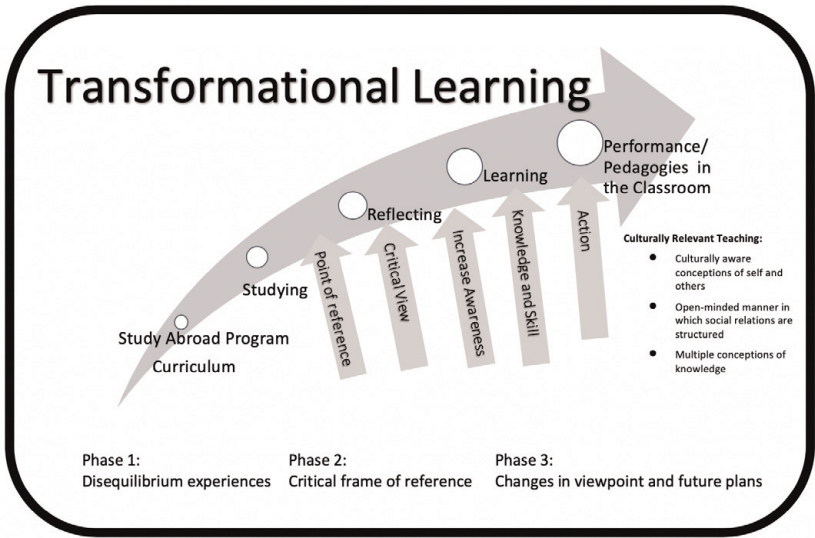


Figure 1.
Sequential transformational theoretical framework in three phases based upon study abroad design [1, 10, 17].

reference and led to transformative learning that led to a change in their teaching performance. In addition, Ladson Billings also outlined three propositions which can be used to improve and evaluate culturally relevant teaching. These propositions are 1. The conceptions of self and others; 2. The manner in which social relations are structured; 3. The conceptions of knowledge [3]. These propositions help us organize the transformation we found in our participants’ frame of reference and how this translated into their classroom practice (see **Figure 1**).

3. Study design

Our study presents four case studies developed from two different study abroad programs: Maastricht and Manú (see **Table 1**). The Maastricht trip was developed over many years by two universities, and the Manú trip was a first-time endeavor for a third university. These programs were studied because of their similar structure both of which are short term faculty led teacher education programs. In addition, we chose these programs as a way to improve our practice as study abroad curriculum developers, teacher educators, and scholars of teaching and learning. The four focal case study teachers have 2–8 years of experiences since completing the study abroad programs, which enabled our participants to retrospectively reflect on their time abroad and how their worldview, career choices, pedagogical decisions, and their thoughts on bias and privilege were impacted [15, 16]. Our current study was exempted from IRB oversight; previous data were collected under IRB approved projects. Participant consent was obtained prior to data collection.

3.1 Settings

3.1.1 Maastricht

The Maastricht program was 3 weeks (20–22 days) long with a focus on the cultural aspects of education and the education system in an international context. Two universities participated in this trip from 2011 to 2015 and 2017, with a total of 79 students. Most students who participated in this program were education majors. Over the course of the years, the group size varied from 9 to 14 students. The course

Program	Program goals	Pre-departure preparation	Assignments abroad
Maastricht	Compare the American and European educational systems Move from cultural comfort zones Develop cultural competence Use technology for educational purposes Gain transferable skills and knowledge while learning about the option for teaching internationally	4–5 one to three-hour whole group meetings to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dutch & German education system• American and European culture• Packing and general travel information• Former participants as guest speakers• Lesson planning• Creating and building Facebook page for program communication• Transferable goals discussion & selection video log	3-hour alone experiences with video-log reflection (<i>Disequilibrium triggering experiences</i>) 5 inquiry assignments composed of a question about culture or education to be answered through the inquiry process (<i>Critical to frame of reference</i>) One synthesis video/digital story as a culmination of the experience (<i>Transformative change, plans, actions</i>) Post assignments to program Facebook page (<i>Transformative change, plans, actions</i>)
Manu	Compare the American and Peruvian educational systems and ecosystems Develop appreciation for Peruvian culture Move from cultural comfort zones Develop cultural competency Gain transferable skills and knowledge while learning from international scientific endeavors	5 two-hour whole group meetings (2 hour) to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Briefing by Office of International Travel• Program overview and packing• Peruvian culture with guest speaker• Three Basic Spanish sessions• Student presentations of required readings• Intro to art craft• Designing lesson for all day English and ecology fair	Implementation of lessons developed for <i>all-day</i> Environmental Education “Feria” (fair) in English at a free access non-profit school near Lima for K-11 students (<i>Disequilibrium triggering experiences</i>) Participation in lectures, group tours, & group jungle hikes (<i>Disequilibrium triggering experiences</i>) 12 daily reflective journals on cultural, wildlife, and environmental experiences (<i>Critical to frame of reference</i>) ‘Unpacking’ in whole and small discussion groups (<i>Critical to frame of reference</i>) Short essay as a culmination of the experience collected into online book (<i>Transformative change, plans, actions</i>)

Table 1.
Study abroad programs.

was taken for elective education course credit. The program consisted of visits to the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Germany. While abroad, students were accompanied by at least one European guide, a faculty member and a program assistant during all aspects of the trip, and they lived together and attended schools together.

Students visited and examined a number of schools that included International Schools, Dutch and German public and community schools, a Refugee School, and an after school learning/enrichment program. The schools differed in a number of ways. They differed in the demographics of students, the cost for admission, and in the teaching strategies administered. The International Schools were mostly fee-based schools serving some Dutch and German students, but mostly expatriates from other countries around the world. These schools were vastly different from the Refugee School This school was created by the Dutch government as a way to assimilate young refugee students (ages 10–17) into the Dutch society. This

included Dutch language, math, and some English classes. Students who attended this school were new arrivals into the country from nations such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, and Eritrea. Study abroad students had a chance to teach at least one lesson while at the Refugee School. They created a lesson about American culture and a lesson to teach a short performance (e.g. dance or skit) to a small group of refugee students to perform for the entire school at the end of the two-day visit. The study abroad students observed classroom meetings, talked with the students, taught students the culture lesson and other performance. The other school visits were much shorter and included classroom observations and discussions with teachers and principals.

In addition to school visits, students interacted with their peers, Dutch preservice teachers. These teachers in training were working on a degree for teaching English as a second language in the Netherlands. During the day-long interaction, Dutch and American students discussed topics of culture and education. These topics included the cost of an undergraduate education, the structure of after school activities, youth culture, and teacher training.

3.1.2 Manú

The Manú program was 12 days long with a focus on Environmental Education (EE) and educational exchange in cultural immersion with Peruvian scientists, wildlife guides, educators, and a school (K-11). A large public state university in the Southeast instituted this trip. Most participants in this program were elementary education (K-6) majors who had been in either a two-year science or social studies focused cohort. The trip was structured to be part of an existing student teaching seminar class for seniors; therefore, all education students had completed their final student teaching internships prior to commencing the trip. The program's cost was minimal to participants as it was sponsored by a non-profit organization. Despite this, only 11 out of 23 science cohort students and 4 out of 24 social studies cohort students went on the trip. This allowed for five additional undergraduate students from an honors course to participate: four Biology majors and one Music major. Nine faculty and staff also went on the trip (2 Science Education professors, 2 Science Education doctoral students, 2 Biology professors, 1 Biology graduate student, and the Assistant Dean of the School of Education) for a total of 29 people.

The trip to Peru included 4 full days in and around Lima. During this time, participants engaged in: attending a bio-ecology conference at a university in Lima with presentations by local scientists, teaching English ecology-focused lessons at a low-income area philanthropically endowed low-cost private school in Chorrillos, visiting pre-Colombian and Inca ruins, and spending the day at a farm in Pachacamac. For the next week, participants traveled by air, land, and water to explore the southeastern Peruvian rainforest, which included visits to biological study stations and an extended stay at a remote birdwatcher lodge near the Manú Rainforest preserve.

During the Lima and traveling portion of our trip, we sought to help blend the two preservice cohorts and the honors course students into one cohesive group through rooming arrangements and assigned travel groups. We only had two male students, who always roomed together, but we intentionally had all female undergraduate student participants room with different people every day as we traveled to and from the jungle.

The guides knew both the paths and the wildlife well and had us up at pre-arranged hours to leave as a whole group early each morning for our hike. There were few moments for 'down time', but we made sure to preserve the required reflective journal writing and group discussion time each evening and had one evening to watch a documentary about local tribal displacements. At the end of the

trip to the rainforest, when we returned to Lima, students had a day off to explore the city on their own.

3.2 Participants

The Maastricht program had a total of 79 student participants, who were eligible to be part of our study as they completed their study abroad experience prior to 2018. Ten participants volunteered and were interviewed. The Manú program had a total of 21 students, with 16 being eligible for this study as they were education majors. Four participants volunteered and were interviewed.

From the 14 interviews, we selected 4 participants to focus on as case studies. Selection consisted of certain requirements: marginalized racial and ethnic groups, a participant from each of the three universities, two participants from each study abroad program, a variety of grade levels taught, and inclusion of at least one male and one female (see **Table 2**).

3.3 Methodology

For this study, we used a descriptive case approach [21]. We selected this approach as we are interested in understanding our participants’ perceptions of their time abroad through multiple sources of data [22]. Our bounded unit was two study abroad programs which focused on providing preservice teachers cultural experiences abroad and comparing/contrasting these with the students’ culture. The descriptions of our participants’ lived experiences and reflections during and after a teacher education study abroad programs helped to define the theoretical constructs under which study abroad programs can be used as transformative learning experiences for preservice teachers.

3.4 Data collection

Data sources for the Maastricht program included participant video logs, researcher field notes, researcher prior knowledge of participants as students when applicable, and semi-structured post interviews. Data sources for the Manú program included reflective essays written immediately after travel, researcher field notes, prior knowledge of researcher of participants as students, and semi-structured post interviews. All post interviews were video and/or audio recorded using the same semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). Two co-researchers, one from each

Participant	Program	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Current school/grade	Years taught	Years since program
Devon	Maastricht	Mixed race American	Male	27	Urban high school in Southeast U.S./9th grade	3	8
Andrea	Maastricht	Hispanic American	Female	22	International school in Honduras/Kindergarten	1	2
Tanyia	Manu	African American	Female	26	Urban elementary school in Southeast U.S./4th grade	5	5
Lucia	Manu	Hispanic American	Male	28	Urban middle school in Southeast U.S./6th grade	5	5

Table 2.
Case study descriptions.

program (Maastricht and Manú) conducted the post interviews of participants from their respective program.

In the interviews, we asked questions to help us capture our participants' cultural awareness and developed cultural competencies as evidenced in their descriptions of their pedagogies. Interview questions were structured in such a way as to elicit participants' perceptions and reflections on their lived experiences while abroad, how those experiences may have affected their intercultural sensitivity development [16], how their lived experiences afforded cultural awareness and added knowledge and skills, and how this has influenced the current pedagogies they employ.

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis was theory-guided [23]. Ten a priori codes were determined that aligned with our theoretical framework of transformational learning theory ([4, 10], see **Table 3**). Dedoose software was used to analyze our data sources for each round of our coding process. Two of us performed the majority of the data analysis so that the third author could provide member checking in how coding was implemented.

In our first round of coding, we independently coded each focal case study using the 10 a priori codes. Then, we met together to compare our first round of coding to come to agreement on how we were defining the 10 parent codes. Next, we individually analyzed each of the 10 parent codes for emerging patterns and themes and then met together to decide on the final blended coding, which lead to five subcodes (see **Table 3**). We then compared our coding across our participants. Through this process, we fine-tuned our common definitions of terms and codes, as well as the range and limits of each code for this study.

Once the essays, video transcriptions, and interview transcripts were coded, data were analyzed with Dedoose software features that allowed us to spotlight high frequency codes on an x-y axis graph for two codes and sized 'bubbles' for a third code. Using graphic visualizations of the code frequencies in data codes helped us as researchers to systematically compare and contrast codes for the four focal case studies. Once we felt we had captured all the salient codes, we compiled our four descriptive case studies' 10 parent codes and the five subcodes into three emerging themes. These three emerging themes were: History/Context; Study/Reflect/Learn; and Perform/Pedagogy. These three themes became the case study framework for reporting our findings with regard to transformational learning and culturally relevant pedagogy (see **Table 3**).

3.6 Validity

Triangulation of the data collection was achieved through multiple sources of data and through agreement upon emerging themes that served as the basis for organizing our focal case studies. The emerging themes were connected back to our theoretical framework for alignment with our participants' lived experiences and perceptions. Our third author provided peer debriefing or analytic triangulation as she was not engaged in the data collection or analysis process, so she was able to help us reflect on our thinking through these processes and to look for researcher bias or assumptions.

4. Case studies

In this section we present our four case studies, using pseudonyms for people and places to maintain confidentiality. Each case study narrative provides a brief

A priori parent codes	Case study themes	Discussion themes
1. Increased cultural awareness	Perform/pedagogy	Phase 2: Critical frame to reference Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans Cultural awareness, competence, and relevant pedagogical practices
2. Knowledge and skills i. Cultural ii. Pedagogical iii. Higher tier	Study/reflect/learn	Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans
3. Identity transition and skills	History/context	Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans
4. Seeking out cultural experiences	Perform/pedagogy	Phase 2: Critical frame to reference Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans Cultural awareness, competence, and relevant pedagogical practices
5. Taking cultural action	Perform/pedagogy	Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans Cultural awareness, competence, and relevant pedagogical practices
6. Challenging own culture	Study/reflect/learn	Phase 2: Critical frame to reference Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans Cultural awareness, competence, and relevant pedagogical practices
7. Connection to place	History/context	Phase 1: Disequilibrium triggering experience Phase 2: Critical frame to reference Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans
8. Culture of origin iv. Subculture USA	History/context	Phase 2: Critical frame to reference Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans
9. Recognized by others v. Culturally	History/context	Phase 3: Changes in viewpoint and future plans Cultural awareness, competence, and relevant pedagogical practices
10. Reflection	Study/reflect/learn	Phase 2: Critical frame to reference

Table 3.
Coding map.

overview of the participant’s personal ‘history and context’, what they learned, noting evidence of transformational learning and subsequent development of pedagogical knowledge and skills.

4.1 Devon

“The biggest thing in my point of view that this study abroad has done for me is opened my eyes to other ways of life and education besides the American way. After this study abroad, I can honestly say I have improved as a person and a teacher. I’ve grown simply because of the fact that I have learned new things from every teacher I have talked to over here.” Vlog Synthesis while abroad [2011].

4.1.1 History and context

Devon was a 27-year-old, male teacher. He self-identified as mixed race. He taught for 3 years. Devon always knew he wanted to be a teacher in an urban setting. His passion for urban education grew from his own experience at a Title I midwestern urban school. This passion led him to study in the urban education cohort at a large Midwestern public university. The cohort provided Devon the

chance to take education courses that emphasized urban learning environments and the impact of context on teaching and learning. Eventually, Devon completed his year-long student teaching experience in a classroom in a large urban midwestern city. In 2011, at 19 years old, Devon participated in the Maastricht study abroad program. Before the study abroad program he had only traveled to Mexico with his family. He is now a teacher in an urban school district in a large southeastern city. He taught ninth grade at this school for 3 years. Currently, Devon is pursuing his Master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching with an emphasis on cultural and socioeconomic components of teaching and learning.

Devon is passionate about cultural issues including race and privilege, and how these intersect with education. It was apparent that Devon's educational background influenced his career choice. As his instructor, I was impressed with his ability to challenge his own cultural understanding of the world, which included his growing awareness of his privilege. He reported that the experience abroad assisted in his evolving understanding of implicit bias and how privilege plays out in the world.

4.1.2 Study, reflect, learn

"...it (study abroad) just really did a great job at breaking down my ideas, kind of breaking down the blinders I had (in) relation to privilege and what good education is, and what we can do as teachers and the things that we are equipped with, and know how to overcome things like that." Post Interview [2018].

The study abroad experience had a significant impact on his views and assumptions on privilege. "...how race, socioeconomic status, gender, sex, religion, plays a role in education and as we develop as teachers, it's got so many different layers and just things to learn about what you learn in actual classes. So, it was just life changing on so many different levels." To him, this was especially significant as an American undergraduate student studying abroad in Europe. As a teacher in an urban school he reflected back on the experience abroad as a truly impactful experience for examining privilege in the classroom.

Devon viewed education as an essential component of a well-rounded life but also recognized education as a system with global implications. He gave credit to the study abroad experience, the urban education cohort courses, and his experience teaching in an urban setting to his pursuit for equity in his classroom. He was globally aware and understood that his knowledge and experiences were possible based on his identities and how those identities intersected with his position in the world.

The Refugee School exposed him to people and their personal stories of survival that he had never heard before. Devon's privilege once again came to light after an intense, and somewhat disorienting conversation [6, 10, 24] with a refugee student and a Dutch interpreter.

"There's one story where we had gone to what I believe was, like, a Refugee School in the Netherlands, and I had asked a question to one of the students. It was like a high school age student, and he was from Iran or maybe Afghanistan. I'd asked him what he wanted to do with his life, (how) he had gotten over (to) the Refugee School and his translator had looked at me and apologized cause he's like, "he hasn't given it any thought because he never expected to live to this age," so he had not considered what to do with a job. He came to the conclusion that he was going to be killed in the fighting in his country, so that was a really eye-opening experience for me, and as a privilege that I have and the privilege I think us, as Americans, have."

In addition, Devon transferred his critical reflection to the news media in the US. Devon changed his frame of reference and thus viewed the messages received from the American news media differently. He became highly critical of the messages being shared about refugees and people who are from other places. With this new first-hand knowledge, he began to be critical of his “blindness” (biases) as well. Devon remembered that after hearing about the horrific experiences that young refugees experience throughout their lives, including their journeys to their asylum country, he began to examine his assumptions about others from places outside of the United States and tied these to his teaching practice.

Devon became keenly aware of injustices in the world. After the visit to the Refugee School, the group visited an International School in the same city. Devon continued his critical reflection, noting the stark differences between the two schools.

“Then I think the other story that really stood out to me was in the same town we visited, that very-very high-end type school that had, maybe it was middle school, that had children speaking multiple languages, one to one technology, and all sorts of bells and whistles that I think it just kind of reaffirmed that the socio-economic gap is not something that happens in America, for education. Obviously, as educators and going to colleges, in America, we’re often taught to and talked about those socioeconomic gaps that actually happen in our schools. But we need to be mindful they exist all over the globe and it’s not just United States’ issues. We have to work as educators globally to figure out how to solve that and how to make sure all students receive that equity in the classroom no matter how much money their school does or does not have.”

4.1.3 Perform/pedagogy

“I think I was making progress towards being a more globally responsible citizen, and educator.” Post Interview [2018].

Devon had a strong sense of obligation and service to the education field. Since Devon had the privilege of studying abroad, he felt that he must take action and share his experiences with other educators. According to Devon, the experience led him to feel more responsible for the continued evolution or growth of education. To him, going to another country to study education was a true privilege that should not be wasted.

Since traveling abroad, Devon saw his students as people with values, beliefs, and perspectives that may differ from his own [4], and he understands the importance of appreciating, recognizing, and empathizing with his students [4, 5]. “It eases their (students’) mind a little bit to know that they have a teacher who tries to be kind of, as culturally responsible as I can. And who is, tries to make them as comfortable as I can, with accepting and celebrating the cultures in different places and different ideas that their families come from and have. “His students come from a variety of countries and regions (e.g., Mexico, Peru, Central America, Africa, Middle East, Asia), speak a number of languages, and view the world in ways that differ from Devon’s perspective. Despite the level of discomfort, Devon finds ways to connect with his students, essentially maintaining a fluid teacher-student relationship and connecting with students at a level outside of the classroom [3]. He consistently works to explore his students’ cultures. He talks with parents, attends community events, and reads to gain knowledge about his students’ diverse backgrounds. For instance, he mentioned even though he cannot speak Spanish and does not know much about the Catholic religion, Devon recently attended his student’s Catholic confirmation. “So, it was definitely an interesting event, but the

fact to be there for her because it meant a lot to her and it's something that I'm not comfortable with or not familiar with or likely, and it just is something that is near to me and you know, just is always fun of learn new things even if they are uncomfortable at first." Devon continued to develop his global competencies and his cultural competence, by seeking out culturally uncomfortable situations. "I've got to start thinking outside of the box and expanding (my) horizons that way."

4.2 Andrea

"I feel like I was confident abroad, which is something I've never really considered myself that back in the states. That was something I noticed this past summer when I was traveling. My friend said, 'You just carry yourself in a different way... And it looks like you lived here. You know what you're doing.'" Post Interview [2018].

4.2.1 History and context

Andrea did not attend university with the goal of becoming an elementary teacher but made the decision after a year on campus. Andrea participated in an education study abroad program to Maastricht as a junior in the spring of 2017. Before the study abroad experience, she had traveled to Mexico to visit her father's childhood home. She completed her undergraduate studies at a small southern private university. At the time of the interview, she was a 22-year-old Latina, and a first-year kindergarten teacher at an American International preK-12 school in Honduras. Most of her students were English Language Learners from Honduras. The interview took place only a month after she started teaching. During her interview, she mentioned that she would not have decided to teach abroad if it had not been for her experiences in the 2017 program.

4.2.2 Study, reflect, learn

While abroad, Andrea's confidence grew as a result of connecting with others, trying new things, and experiencing life abroad during her hours alone. She had a sense of self efficacy and a belief she could accomplish tasks she normally could not do or would not try to complete in the US. She was able to challenge her own perceived limitations. After the trip, Andrea became more open to experiences, more willing to take calculated risks, and more open to spontaneity. Ultimately, she became more comfortable connecting with others, and as she shared, she now sees that "we're all interconnected in some way."

For Andrea, the study abroad experience allowed her to evaluate herself and her cultural identity as a Latina American. "I guess before I went to (university) I have never really thought about my culture or I guess maybe meeting other people from different cultures and interacting with them." She shared how this was prompted by her ease of conversation about issues with her Dutch peers during a cross-cultural education experience. This disorienting experience led her to examine herself in relation to her Dutch peers. In turn, she acted on her revised understanding of intercultural communication and her ability to communicate with others by pushing herself out of her comfort zone and taking action to continue gaining new knowledge and skills from her new Dutch friend. She told about how at the end of the day-long intercultural experience with the Dutch preservice teachers that she finally asked to connect with one of the students via social media. This connection allowed her to be in continued conversations with this student. Because of the bold move to ask to connect, she met up with the Dutch student a number of times to talk, explore Amsterdam, and experience a karaoke night together. This provided

her with a “cultural translator” [4], increased her access to the Dutch culture, provided her with a richer experience beyond the prepared activities of the program, and in turn changed her cultural frame of reference about intercultural communication and the Dutch culture. Making new friends was one skill Andrea mentioned as making an impact on her experience abroad. She has continued communication with at least one of the Dutch students. They speak periodically over social media. She shared another example about how she connected with one of the refugee students and then attended an Afghan night sponsored by a local Afghan group in the Dutch city.

Andrea was also able to transcend her ethnocentric worldview [11] because of her time in International Schools and interacting with Dutch students. Because of the program abroad, Andrea became more concerned with the events that were happening overseas. Her thoughts on culture and her worldview have become more congruent with her newly developed assumptions and perspectives leading her to take a more ethnorelative stance.

4.2.3 Perform/pedagogy

During the interview, Andrea mentioned speaking with an American international teacher in a German International School. After that conversation, she realized that like this teacher, she could also see herself as a teacher in an international setting. After this, her identity as a teacher began to shift. “I guess in relation to me teaching abroad, it was when we met a woman teaching in Germany. And she’s from Frisco. So right next to my hometown. “So, for me that was a wakeup call is just to, oh my gosh, this is possible.” She decided to pursue international teaching. The February after her study abroad experience, Andrea attended the International School job fair. During the fair, she was able to connect with a school in Honduras. In response to experiencing different cultures abroad. Andrea’s career trajectory changed during the study abroad program. “(I) wouldn’t really have considered teaching abroad if I wouldn’t have gone on this.”

Andrea emphasized the importance of culture in the learning process. Being a teacher at an International School has helped her focus on students and their individual needs. She found it necessary to mine for information or pull information out of her students [3] to better serve them. “I would say I’m trying to bring in different cultures into my teaching. I’m trying to see, okay, where are my students coming from, what are their experiences like?” She was more aware of her students’ previous cultural knowledge and how that impacts her teaching practices. During the first few months, she found a few ways to integrate learning about culture into her lessons. For instance, she found a video that followed students from different cultural backgrounds around their daily lives. She showed her class the videos and had them answer questions such as “How is this person’s life different from yours? What did they do? What did they like? How is this person’s life the same as yours?”

This practice helped her students become curious about the concept of culture as it influences worldviews and understanding. As she continues to improve her teaching practice, she plans to continue including global education examples and experiences into her teaching.

Andrea, as a way to be a member of her new community, challenged her own assumptions by pushing herself out of her cultural comfort zone. For instance, she visited a mountain village with a few of her teaching colleagues. During the experience she was curious about the openness of the houses (i.e., no doors on bedrooms and bathrooms) and the way the people of that village interact with each other. Andrea continued to question her previous understanding of Honduran culture as she traveled through the country.

4.3 Tanyia

“I realized how we have to take care of the world” Post Interview [2019].

4.3.1 History and context

Tanyia was 26 years old and grew up in the US in the fifth largest metropolitan area in her southeastern home state on the Atlantic coastal plain. She taught fourth grade for 5 years in two of the largest cities in her home state. Robinson Elementary, located but a short block away from one of the city’s main thoroughfares, is where Tanyia currently teaches fourth grade, a Title 1 public elementary school. The school’s racial/ethnic breakdown is over half African American, a quarter Hispanic, and a mix of other races—similar to the racial/ethnic makeup of the surrounding low-income residential community where Tanyia’s students lived.

As an instructor, I met Tanyia 2 years prior to her participation in the Manú program as her instructor in her science-focused Teacher Education cohort at one of our state’s largest public universities. Tanyia stood out as keenly intelligent with a true understanding of science, which she often shared with the cohort class. She was self-assured, knowledgeable, and competent in teaching science in her internship at a local science magnet elementary school.

Tanyia also instinctively stood up for the oppressed and was culturally competent. During an advocacy exercise in a cohort seminar course she chose to share her first-hand knowledge of the lag-time of police response to 911 calls in her Black neighborhood. By choosing this issue in 2014, she chose a more controversial race-based community problem to advocate for in a class where others identified issues experienced by most college students, such as problems with the parking system on campus. Tanyia naturally had a marginalized frame of reference in addition to well understanding the dominant White culture in the South.

4.3.2 Study-reflect-learn

Tanyia recalled how “fresh” the Manú jungle was because it had hardly been affected by humans. Then she caught herself as she remembered there were some humans in the jungle, because, as she said, some tribes had chosen to stay there. She noted that the trip to Manú did boost her cultural awareness. “I was always out of my cultural comfort zone on that trip, this was the first time I’d travelled outside of the country without my family,” she said, “without anybody from my family with me, but that’s how we learn, and I went out of my comfort zone”. She had traveled internationally before going to Manú, but only on a family cruise to Mexico that was “geared to tourists”.

The trip to the jungle was a disequilibrium triggering event for her, wrought with new and overwhelming experiences in the wild for most participants. Hiking in the jungle was not always easy for Tanyia. One day she asked if she could stay in her room instead of hike. We required the whole group participate in each EE activity the lodge organized for us, but she had swollen ankles, her feet hurt and were blistered from walking so much, so we thought it was better for her that she stayed back that day with one of the grad students. But, after the trip to the Manú Rainforest she was confident enough to travel abroad again, and “stayed with the locals” in Aruba.

What stood out to her about the Manú program was socializing on the trip. She remembered trying to communicate as best she could with the people that worked at the lodge in the jungle at the Manú River site. As she reflected upon her experience, she said it “opened her mind” when she saw how different people lived. “I just

saw how different it was, and how people, even if they do things different, that's not bad" she said, "it's just different".

4.3.3 Perform-pedagogy

In her post interview, Tanyia said that study abroad did influence her teaching. Her favorite part of the Peru program was interacting with the kids at the Lima school, seeing how they do things there, and having lunch with them. In the jungle she said, "We talked with the people who worked there (at the birdwatchers lodge on the Manú River)... I'm still Facebook friends with Guillermo (one of the guides)... he's some kind of bird specialist". She shared stories about her study abroad travels with her fourth grade class in the US, and noted that some of her students have not traveled; they have not even been to big shopping centers in their city close to where they live. She said that her students consider her well-traveled. Tanyia also had some of her students take action and "send off" to help preserve the rainforest as part of her pedagogy, teaching them to "take care of the world". She tells them her story of how big the base of the Kapok tree is, "as big as this classroom", and how a fellow student in study abroad stood in the space between the roots at the base of the Kapok tree and bats flew out. She deeply understands her students' lives, and helps broaden their cultural and environmental awareness and knowledge with amazing true stories from her travels.

As to her personal aspirations for the future, Tanyia is currently seeking a Master's degree, and she expressed on social media that "... there are other things more important to me, like being called Dr. Jones one day."

4.4 Lucia

"Before the trip, I didn't understand the complexity of how the world really works, and the complexity of just... life itself." Post Interview [2019].

4.4.1 History and context

Lucia, 28 years old, self-identified as Latina, and identifies strongly with her country of origin, where she immigrated from to the US and still has family, and is bilingual in Spanish and English. She had visited Columbia in the past, while a child growing up in the United States. She said, "It's been for me, something that I've always kind of struggled with... am I American or am I Colombian?" Her frame of reference before traveling to Manú was multifaceted.

As an undergraduate, Lucia interned and student taught at a science magnet elementary school as part of a science-focused cohort in her K-6 licensure program in Teacher Education at a large public southeastern state university. She was not one to take on leadership positions in her cohort. Neither was she one to shirk her share of the load as she worked hard in designing her science lessons. She had developed superior pedagogical skills in setting up science inquiry lessons by the time student teaching was over.

She taught 6th grade science at the largest middle school in her metropolitan district. Academic tracking was utilized in her school ($\frac{1}{3}$ high, $\frac{1}{3}$ medium, and $\frac{1}{3}$ low tracks in each grade). Lucia taught what she referred to as the "low" group. Most of her students were youth who came from feeder Title 1 elementary schools, and the majority were African American, with a large percentage of Latinos. New immigrant students were often assigned to her class as her school district did not have a designated school for new immigrants.

4.4.2 Study-reflect-learn

“I would say, just my worldview, and how big the world really is changed” after the study abroad trip. For Lucia, the size of the knowable world literally grew before her eyes in the jungle. She remembered sitting out on the dock on the river at the birdwatcher’s lodge near the Manú Rainforest Preserve and looking up to a clear night sky unhampered by lights on Earth and seeing many, many stars. She said she had never seen anything like it before or since, and that she felt small, “in a good way”, with the full expanse of the universe before her, visible.

Nature and culture in Peru were both different from what she knew in the United States or Colombia. It was disorienting “... with just the exposure of seeing other cultures and knowing what it feels like to not be of that culture, and not really understand what’s going on. And then, now you’re here, you’re immersed in it,... you’re trying to navigate”. She was making her way through new experiences. She said, “I think it (the trip to Peru) was one of those things too that kind of helped me also learn how to navigate between cultures as well. Because at the end of the day, I did grow up here in the United States. And so, I understand the cultural group that I’m coming from that I’m with. And then, also navigating between that cultural group with this new cultural group that we’re immersed into”.

Through her assignment teaching a lesson she had designed, a read aloud, at the EE fair at the K-6 primary school, Lucia developed empathy for her classmates and other study abroad students there with her who did not speak Spanish. “I can empathize with people not knowing any of the language whatsoever, and feeling completely lost” she said, “So it did help a lot being able to speak the language. And also, connect with the kids, just because I was able to have actual conversations with them, instead of just trying to figure out what you’re saying” She knew that others in the group who could not speak Spanish could not figure out what the children were saying, if they spoke in Spanish. “So,” she said, it was, “... me just wanting to help people navigate, because I understand that it’s not an easy task.” She commented that it wasn’t that she wanted that role or sought to be a leader, but because of her empathy she took on the role of interpreter for others in the group. She realized it was hard for others in the study abroad group to navigate between cultures, and she felt that by doing so, and doing so for others, this helped her develop intercultural competencies.

4.4.3 Perform-pedagogy

Lucia was able to connect with new immigrant students, and she linked this ability to how she was able to connect with Peruvian students at the school we visited in Lima. Though she spoke Spanish fluently and had lived in and visited Colombia, she was still challenged by immersion in Peruvian culture, and connecting with the Peruvian students was not simple, so this connection was one of her proudest memories. She mentioned it repeatedly. She also developed an awareness of nuances in the cultural differences between herself and her new immigrant students. She pointed out that one of her students, from a Central American country that spoke Spanish, was of native descent and did not speak Spanish. She also noted that “...yes, I have an added advantage (in Peru) because I can speak another language, but even within that, my dialect is different. Our cultural forms are very different. So, I think being able to connect with those (immigrant) students (in my classes) in a more meaningful way had a lot to do with my trip to Peru.”

She felt it was an achievement to be able to connect with her students from many different cultures, even with students from countries that did not speak Spanish. “I feel as though I’m open to other cultures and experiencing learning. And

that to me is what's important, is being open-minded and really wanting to learn and be mindful that just because your culture is different than mine, doesn't make it wrong." For instance, she shared how she went to an Ethiopian fair and ate a dish one of her immigrant students from Africa enjoyed, and she was able to connect with the student by talking about the dish.

"A lot of these kids... are not even aware that these things exist, that these can happen..." referring to what she saw and experienced in Peru, "... any of that, because they're so caught up in whatever is just in front of them" she said of her students.

"So had I not had that experience (in Manú) I could have been like them, and not understood the importance of taking care of our planet and doing our own part—and how even if it's just that one little part that we do, it still contributes... And so, it's really important that they hear it from a (witness). Look, I actually went. I actually know about this. I've seen it. It gets them excited, it gets them to think outside of what they've been ... exposed to already, because they haven't been exposed to much of anything else."

Lucia's recognized identity was as a cultural leader during the study abroad trip to Peru, as she was one of the few Spanish-English bilingual participants. In the jungle when we had to split the group of 29 people into 6 jeeps to cross a remote land bridge between boat rides on the river, Lucia was the assigned Spanish speaker/leader in one of the jeeps, even though she was an undergraduate student. In addition, she noticed that other students turned to her when they did not understand what was being said around them. She felt she had to continually "negotiate" this space between two cultures and languages while in Peru.

Lucia admitted that she was not a leader when she was an undergraduate preservice teacher, but she became a recognized leader at the middle school where she worked, as well as in the school's Spanish-speaking community. She was called on frequently to communicate with Spanish-speaking families, as she was the only staff member who spoke Spanish. Lucia finished, as she put it, her "last" year of teaching in 2019. She will finish her Master's program in educational administration in 2020, and then planned to spend some time in Colombia before going back to the elementary school level as a principal in her home state. She noticed there are not too many Latinas in administration, so she wants to move into that career. Study abroad, Lucia said, "Literally changed my life. Seriously, I'm so serious. When people ask me (what's) one of the most important pivotal experiences of my life, (Manú) that's literally one of them... it completely changed my life.. . I remember everything. I talk to my students about it all the time".

5. Findings and discussion

Our data evidenced pronounced lasting effects of study abroad, especially increased cultural awareness, knowledge and skills [25]. Our participants described their study abroad experiences as transformational learning. The experiences that were mentioned the most were cross-cultural social interaction and intensive school visits with opportunities to teach. These experiences are examples of disequilibrium or triggering experiences that elicited in all four teachers a reevaluation of existing cultural assumptions. Our study points to the necessity of creating thoughtful experiences abroad that push students outside of their cultural comfort zone to explore a new culture in order to experience dissonance for cultural learning. In addition, our findings indicate the strong importance of guided reflection and discussions that helped students to retrospectively analyze and examine their assumptions and knowledge about culture. The combination of disorienting experiences and thoughtful reflection promoted transformational learning outcomes

that capacitated the development of cultural awareness and cultural competence. This, in turn, had positive impacts on reflection skills, curiosity, and a new conception of how culture influences knowledge construction, further leading to the development of culturally relevant teaching practices, as was evidenced in teachers' narratives of their pedagogical actions and decisions. The findings suggest implications for other teacher education programs interested in using study abroad experiences in their programs to promote teachers' development of culturally relevant pedagogy [3].

5.1 Transformational learning

5.1.1 Phase 1: disequilibrium experiences

Cultural competence does not just happen because someone travels abroad. It must be developed, cultivated, and tended to through intentional planning and action. A well-executed study abroad experience gives students the opportunity to have an experience that expands their perceptions and makes them feel dissatisfied with their existing understanding. Both programs provided participants with disorienting, cultural immersion experiences that led to disequilibrium [4, 10, 18]. In the Maastricht program the teaching experience at the Refugee School and the intercultural interaction with Dutch preservice teachers had an impact on both Devon and Andrea. On the Manú trip, Tanyia and Lucia found that navigating cultures and learning about hidden cultures were experiences that triggered dissonance and wonder. These experiences were powerful in the way they were executed. The program designers provided opportunities for their preservice teachers to experience cultural dissonance [5, 10] in turn exposing participants to their own cultural assumptions, some they may have been blind to. As evidenced from our study, any teacher education program that wants to cultivate intercultural sensitivity, cultural competence, and awareness in their preservice teachers needs to create extensive intercultural immersion experiences for their participants [5].

School visits proved to be experiences that exposed discrepancies in the preservice teachers' views on culture, teaching, and learning. The Refugee School experience was culturally disorienting to Devon [6]. He developed a new frame of reference after discussing life with the students at the Refugee School [10]. In turn, he began to question the US media and his own views on refugees and immigration. In essence, Devon began his critical stance of the knowledge [3] portrayed by the US news media. This was the first step to thinking critically about cultural knowledge and could be translated to his students and their sociopolitical situations.

Social interactions in cultural immersion were challenging for our participants, who had traveled little or not at all internationally before study abroad. Andrea experienced disequilibrium as she interacted with the Dutch people. Her initial exposure to a new culture and people who were different from her caused her to consider herself a cultured being with certain views and perspectives shaped by her context and experiences from a new frame of reference [10]. The local people that students communicated with on study abroad trips were in effect cultural translators [5], and as such they were a key component to making sense of new information about culture. They provided participants with a person who could answer questions about assumptions, and could provide context to triggering experiences, further enhancing the chance for participants to learn new knowledge and skills such as intercultural communication and inquiry.

Intercultural interactions during study abroad provided opportunities for participants to acknowledge and grapple with cultural nuances, such as language dialects. For Lucia, the Spanish spoken in Peru was disorienting as it was different

from her Columbian Spanish. It was helpful to her as a future teacher to learn to be a 'cultural translator' [5], interpreting while in cultural immersion for herself between her own culture of origin and that of Peru; and then interpreting for herself and for others in the group between the US dominant culture and the Peruvian culture. She reflected in her interview upon the fact that she had developed intercultural competence [2] because she realized that her Spanish dialect was distinct from the dialects used in different regions of Peru, and that there were cultural norms in Peru which varied from those in her country of origin and the US, all of which she had to "negotiate" during study abroad. The ability to acknowledge nuanced cultural differences is a valuable skill for teachers in diverse school districts with a variety of immigrant students from recognized language-dominant countries possessing varying dialects and/or subcultures.

Cultural learning experiences, such as watching and discussing a video about tribes in Manú protesting against the Peruvian government's attempt to develop an area of the jungle where they lived, were triggering experiences for Tanyia that led her to question her initial assumptions about the jungle being devoid of humans. In reflection, she adapted her schema [18] to include the Manú tribes living deep in the preserve, even if she had not seen them, or the effects of their living there. She caught herself during the post interview when she said that the jungle was "fresh" and unaffected by humans. She then immediately changed her frame of reference, prompted by the documentary we viewed during the trip one evening at the birdwatcher's lodge with one of the guides, to include the local native tribes as humans who chose to live there, and who could affect the jungle, even if minimally, and even if they were trying to save it as a natural preserve. This activity pushed students to develop sensitivity to the existence of varied sociopolitical epistemologies by bringing to light the viewpoints held by native tribes that had been hidden even to local politicians in Peru, until they protested against economic development of their rainforest home.

5.1.2 Phase 2: critical frame of reference

Cultural disorienting experiences abroad are not sufficient for cultural competence and awareness to develop. Thoughtful and intentional reflection is a mandatory next step [5]. Each program provided participants with opportunities to examine their perceptions before, during, and after the experience. Participants were asked to reflect upon their own culture and the host country's culture a number of times. The essence of the critical viewpoint is much like what Devon mentioned during his interview: "I think just sitting and letting it stew a little bit and letting those ideas' kind of, sit, and develop over time has obviously positively changed my life for the better."

The study abroad course curricula in both programs allowed students to reflect, share their feelings, and be critical of their assumptions [1, 4]. This process of reflection allowed participants to become more culturally aware, thus making cultural comparisons and learning to be critical of their own culture, reducing, in effect, their ethnocentrism [26]. During the Maastricht program, the video log assignments were crafted to elicit a critical viewpoint on the participants' global competence development and the emotions that surfaced during culturally unfamiliar situations, while an essay project required participants to inquire about culture or education related topics that made them curious. In the Manú program, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences abroad by journaling daily and then participating in guided discussions with faculty and scientists.

Assignments before traveling, such as the assigned reading about the role of trees in the making of America, acted to set up a more informed frame of reference

[10] in the United States for students. The assignment introduced a critical view of deforestation in the United States, and as such helped prepare students for a better informed and critical view of proposed destruction of the rainforest home to native tribes in Manú, as portrayed in the documentary we viewed and discussed while on site near the natural preserve. Teacher educators can intentionally set out to help students with growing their cultural awareness through carefully planned experiences and assignments.

Critical reflection was required in assignments. After experience visiting two starkly different schools in the Netherlands, Devon began to critically reflect on the global inequalities that exist in education. After talking with a refugee student, he became increasingly critical of the American media's view on immigration and his existing perspectives on refugees in the US. Even before study abroad, Tanyia had an informed critical view of US mainstream culture, and she was not afraid to share her own interpretations publicly, so her willingness to see and share her critical cultural stance well prepared her for taking on a critical view of how mainstream culture may see Latin American cultures or native cultures in Manú in her reflections and discussions during study abroad. Tanyia took on a critical view of mainstream negative views of Latin American culture in the US at the time. She found new cultures she encountered in Peru were different and not to be considered as less, but as she said, "just different". Taking on a critical stance of cultural assumptions happens when students are asked to compare those assumptions to real experiences. In this way stereotypes are revealed as such.

New cultural self-awareness, when participants realized that they too had a culture of their own with certain perspectives, traditions, and ways of being, was prompted by school visits and socialization. Through the auspices of a cultural guide, a Dutch preservice teacher, Andrea's new realization of her own heritage and culture led her to reflect on her identity as a Latina American. As an in-service teacher, in order to better serve her students, many who were from Honduras, she went on to critically assess her assumptions about Honduran culture. She had recently explored a Honduran mountain village. In doing so, she continued to seek perspective consciousness [27] and continued to develop her cultural competence [4]. This provided continued evidence that the skills developed during an education study abroad experience can have far-reaching impacts on classroom teaching and learning.

5.1.3 Phase 3: changes in viewpoint and future plans

Through the use of guided reflection and retrospective research methods we were able to examine how the teachers felt that the study abroad experience was transformational, helping them gain new knowledge and skills, and a more critical awareness of culture and its effects on pedagogy. This learning, in turn affected their teaching practices. Learning from a study abroad experience does not end after a study abroad program has ended the impacts are much more long term [16]. Based on our findings, we suggest the impacts of teacher education study abroad should be analyzed years later to examine the greatest impact on teaching practices.

We connect transformational learning to performance and culturally relevant pedagogy [5]. Essentially, a change during transformational learning can lead to a change in performance, either within teaching practice or in daily practice. Devon, Andrea, Tanyia, and Lucia all reported some form of transformation directly related to their undergraduate teacher education study abroad experience.

The new knowledge, skills, and awareness gained from the study abroad experiences led to meaningful engagement in communities and new cultures years after participation in the study abroad experiences. This form of engagement was an

essential part of both study abroad programs. Through planned activities in each programs' study abroad curriculum, preservice teachers stepped out of their cultural security zones to engage with local people on their own, overcoming cultural and language differences, learning to communicate with people from different cultures who spoke a different language or dialect. Cultural immersion prompted them to adopt a new frame of reference [7] when they realized through intercultural comparisons that they had a culture of their own, and a dialect of English or Spanish of their own. Cultural immersion with the support of guided reflection in the form of video logs and journal writing forced participants to acquire new knowledge in order to function, leading them to change their thinking about culture and its effect on their ability to connect and communicate with others around the world. As teachers, Devon, Andrea, Tanyia and Lucia continue to deliberately make efforts to be a part of their local communities [3], and in particular the new immigrant cultures within.

Global perspectives of education are not easy to take on without international travel to schools, as Devon expressed in his interview. Experiences such as visiting and teaching at schools abroad prompted a transformed cultural awareness of the larger implications of education as a global imperative, not merely a local mission. Teacher educators want students to grapple with ideas about the purpose of an education and social justice as they move through their respective programs [5]. Observing teaching styles and the mechanics of teaching were important learning opportunities for Devon. His experience with the Refugee School and the private International School impacted him by transforming his views of what effective culturally responsive teaching should include for optimal student success. As he said, "Really (the study abroad experience) just kind of readjusted the idea of what good teaching is, and what responsible teaching is, and what responsible cultural pedagogy and curriculum is, and things like that. So, it was very beneficial to me, even at such a young age, cause I was only nineteen during that time." This acquired view of education prompted him to pursue a Master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching with an emphasis on cultural and socioeconomic components of teaching and learning further enhancing his understandings of cultural competence and how that correlates to classroom practices at a diverse urban school.

Seeking out new cultural experiences was an activity we as teacher educators included in our study abroad programs, hoping to assist students in reaching out to the international communities we visited, hoping they would forge relationships based upon meaningful understandings of other peoples' similarities and differences to their own culture [4]. We found overwhelming willingness on the part of interviewees to still engage in new cultural explorations in the years after their study abroad experience, in personal life and in both the classroom and through personal relationships with students and their families. Devon moved beyond his cultural comfort zone to attend a student's confirmation. Lucia tasted an Ethiopian dish that one of her students knew of and could bridge cultures by talking to him about it. Most notably she transformed her sense of confidence after the roles she took on negotiating cultures and as a bilingual interpreter in Peru [4] and became a valued cross-cultural expert at her school as the only interpreter and translator for Spanish-speaking families in her school community. Andrea continues to experience new cultures and works to be a part of her new Honduran community. She became aware of her ability to effectively interact with new cultures and explored her new role as an intercultural communicator by befriending others from other countries [28]. Tanyia said the most rewarding part of the trip was visiting the local school in Chorrillos where she taught and socialized with children all day. She said she would have liked to have had another day there. She later traveled to stay with the "locals" in Aruba, instead of in tourist areas, as she had in the past when she traveled with her family, and she shared stories of her experiences with her students. Seeking out

new cultural experiences after their study abroad showed, as multiple participants described it, an “open-mindedness” to cultural differences.

5.2 Cultural awareness, competence, and relevant pedagogical practices

To become more culturally competent teachers, those who incorporate culturally aware plans and actions in pedagogy, study abroad participants can utilize their increased cultural awareness, knowledge and skills that they found that they gained through transformational learning from their study abroad programs. All four of our study participants coincidentally sought out/chose challenging positions for these first few years of teaching, either going abroad to teach or teaching in a high needs urban diverse classroom. All four were from minority and marginalized populations in the teaching profession (Male, Mixed Race, African American, and Latina), but this alone did not prepare them to be culturally competent teachers in these complex contexts. Study abroad experiences, for these teachers, were pivotal through transformational learning towards cultural competence in their teaching practices.

While we as teacher educators can implement classroom activities [29] that promote cultural competence and awareness without study abroad, what is difficult to do in class is to provide lived experiences within another culture. We found that lived intercultural experiences significantly increased cultural awareness for our study participants. Overall, participants realized the interconnected nature of the world after study abroad. This shift in increased cultural consciousness is a strong indicator for culturally relevant/responsive teaching [4, 5, 30]. This happened in part by offering them opportunities for reflection in journals and discussions, making visible new frames of reference from which to critically view alternatives to their own lives and culture, by showing them different social structures, and by presenting different epistemologies, in alignment with three elements of culturally competent teaching, as per Ladson-Billings: “Conceptions of self and others. ... the manner in which social relations are structured... and conceptions of knowledge” [3], p. 478.

Conception of self as a capable professional and others as capable learners are cultural competencies that we as teacher educators hoped to model and support in our programs. As an after effect of study abroad experiences, researchers found that students feel an increased sense of self efficacy and confidence in their abilities [4, 7, 28, 31], and our findings supported this. What was transformational about study abroad for preservice teachers was carried forward into professional life and practices in the classroom. Teachers in this study, once back in the US, were aware of the cultural heritage immigrant students had, the limited cultural experiences some of their students had, and recognized in themselves the broad experiences they had gained. Ladson Billings described culturally relevant teachers as “risk takers.” [3], p. 479. We, too, would describe our study participants as risk takers. They were willing to step outside of themselves to teach at low income, Title I schools or international school. They were also willing to learn new things and have new experiences to better serve their students and their school districts. Lucia saw an all Latin American teaching and administrative staff at the school we visited in Peru, and subsequently became culturally aware of how few Latinas there are in teaching and administration in schools in the US. From taking a back-row seat in her undergraduate cohort courses and quietly minimizing her participation in class, to being recognized by her colleagues and administrators as a trusted leader and invaluable in communicating with Spanish-speaking families, Lucia’s trajectory evidenced increased cultural awareness, knowledge and skills. She evidenced an incredible character change from her preservice teacher days, seeking leadership roles as she planned to work as a school principal upon completion of her Master’s degree. She attributed her first step towards her new career choices to the

experiences she had on the trip to Peru, “I’ve never sought out to be like, ‘Oh, I’m going to be this leader.’ And now, five years later, I’m going to be... the leader. The trip to Peru,” she said, “was that stepping stone into the next direction of my life.” Andrea also experienced transformational learning in response to her experiences in Europe. She began to behave and think in a way that was more congruent with her newly acquired cultural perspectives [4, 10].

The manner in which social relations are structured is important to culturally relevant pedagogy [3]. Reaching out to socialize with students at schools we visited, finding ways to explore cultures, were common practices during study abroad. Devon, Andrea, Tanyia, and Lucia deliberately made efforts to be a part of their school communities as teachers and explore different cultures within their communities [3]. Study participants had developed intercultural sensitivity [4] to the differences there were between their cultural backgrounds and the cultures they encountered while on study abroad, and later between their culture and the cultures in their communities and classrooms. This deeper understanding, cultivated from the study abroad experience, led them to be a part of their community by attending student activities outside of the school, exploring different parts of the community, or as in Lucia’s case, serving as an interpreter to assist students and their families. All of which helped to “maintain a fluid student-teacher relationship” [3], p. 480 that does not end at the classroom door.

Evidenced by the teacher narratives, we found conceptions of knowledge as global, able to be understood from multiple epistemologies, and not static but constructed [3]. They thought that multiple forms of knowledge should be valued in the classroom and beyond. In addition, these participants also brought their new ideas and study abroad experiences to their classroom pedagogy, enhancing their curriculum and the relationships with their students. Tanyia became more aware of biodiversity through lived experiences in the rainforest, and her world view became increasingly complex [28]. This new cultural awareness of the jungle context became part of her pedagogy. She stood under an enormous Kapok tree and could describe the experience to her students. She was more aware of nature conservation and of the local tribes in the Manú preserve who fought to save Manú from the Peruvian government’s land acquisition and resource exploitation efforts. Lucia’s new knowledge of native South American culture was an awareness she could also use in her classroom. Students from native cultures unfamiliar to her were arriving in her classroom. She developed the skill to recognize students who were from native populations, such as from indigenous Central American populations. She was aware of students who did not speak Spanish but were from Spanish-speaking countries, even if those of the dominant culture in their country of origin were Spanish speakers. Her deeper knowledge of native cultures and recognizing cultures espoused by new immigrant students arriving in her classroom in the United States was, as she described it, helped by what she learned on the trip to Manú.

Cultural awareness, knowledge and skills mentioned by the teachers in our study can be considered stepping stones along the path to cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy [3], which we would expect them to develop further over time. Andrea was in her first year of teaching, and the other three teachers in the study were in their third and fifth years of teaching while pursuing a Master’s degree at the time of their post interviews.

6. Conclusion

We found that engaging preservice teachers in deliberately designed study abroad programs to culturally new settings was transformative. Our participants

discovered what they could only imagine before, and these discoveries grew to become new perspectives positively affecting pedagogies and actions in the classroom and their career trajectories. Our findings show that these cultural immersion experiences in the form of short-term faculty led study abroad programs had a lasting impact on the development of our participants as culturally relevant teachers, which is still felt incrementally and articulated by the participants years later. The preservice teacher participants shed their cultural blindness by analyzing their culture while being in the context of other cultural behaviors and ways of doing things. The preservice teachers began to see knowledge as something that is influenced by culture and context, and became critical of the way knowledge was communicated, valued, and transferred. We suggest study abroad experiences are essential to developing the skills necessary to develop culturally relevant teaching practices. In particular, the ways preservice teachers conceive of themselves and others, the way they socialize and communicate, in the way they view knowledge, and in how they value different ways of perceiving the world.

Study abroad experiences paired with mindful activity and reflection are propitious components for training preservice teachers to be culturally relevant practitioners. Transformational learning opportunities abroad provide preservice teachers with the experiences, knowledge and skills necessary to reduce ethnocentrism, and helps them become aware of their culture, and how culture affects worldviews and learning. These cultural immersion experiences can assist preservice teachers in developing the skills necessary for cultural competence that leads to culturally relevant teaching practices—uniting cultures they find in others into a multifaceted prism reflecting their own illuminations, so as to light up the room and help prevent cultural blindness.

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Appendix: interview template

1. Race/Ethnicity

- a. White or Caucasian not Hispanic/Latino
- b. Black or African American
- c. American Indian, Alaska Native
- d. Asian
- e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- f. Hispanic/Latino

2. Gender/Sex;

- a. Male

- b. Female
 - c. Do not want to share
 - d. Other
3. Age;
4. Where teach/work? grade/job description;
5. Highest degree;
- a. Associate's Degree
 - b. Bachelor's Degree
 - c. Master's Degree
 - d. Doctoral Degree
 - e. Professional Degree
6. Years teaching;
7. Traveled before study abroad trip?
8. Traveled since study abroad trip?
9. What do you remember about your study abroad experience? What stories do you most often share with others about your study abroad experience? Why was this important to you?
- a. Prompt memory of trip with some events that happened on the trip (e.g. migrant school visit, charity school visit)
 - b. Prompt detail with, "Could you tell me more about this?", or "Could you give me some details?"
10. How would you describe yourself in relation to the world before your trip? After your trip?
- a. Do you identify with one specific geographic place on earth, or more than one? How? Why?
 - b. Do others see you the same or differently since your trip? If different.. .
 - i. Would others see you as an "environmentalist"? (remind interviewee of an event on the trip that was environmentally focused) Why or why not?
 - ii. Would others see you as "cultured"? (remind interviewee of an event on the trip that was culturally challenging) Why or why not?

- c. Do you feel you identify with a specific place on earth? Where? Why?
- d. Do you think your study abroad experience influenced/changed your life? Why or why not? In what ways? If yes,
 - i. Describe one example of how your experience influenced/changed your life.
 - ii. Did a new awareness have something to do with it? If so, please describe.
 - iii. Did new knowledge and/or skills gained through activities have something to do with it? If so, please describe.
 - iv. Did your experience change your perspectives on
 - 1. Perspectives on education?
 - 2. change your teaching?
 - 3. If so, did new awareness have something to do with it? If so, please describe.
 - 4. If so, did new knowledge and/or skills gained through activities have something to do with it? If so, please describe.
- 11. Do you think your study abroad experience influenced your teaching?
 - a. If yes, how has this experience influenced your teaching? Describe one way in detail.
 - b. If no, why not?
- 12. How do you seek out experiences that take you out of your cultural comfort zone?
 - a. Describe one experience since your study abroad, in which you were out of your cultural comfort zone.
- 13. How did your study abroad experience take you out of your cultural comfort zone?
 - a. Describe one experience where you were out of your cultural comfort zone
- 14. Have you shared your study abroad experience with your students? If so, what stories have you shared?
- 15. Have you taken any action to preserve or protect the environment since your trip?

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