International Preservice: Preparing Ontario’s Teachers for Diversity?

By

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Abstract

This research study explores the impact of international teaching experiences on new teachers in Ontario. Teaching experience overseas has been shown to prepare new teachers in supporting the diversity and multiculturalism present in their classrooms. Through semi-structured interviews with three educators in Ontario, I was able to gain understanding into the ways that their experiences influenced their pedagogy and employability. Participants reported that their experiences abroad contributed to their personal and professional growth, strengthened their intercultural competencies and finally, had an impact on their employment. The findings of this study suggest that teaching experience overseas has far-reaching impacts on teachers’ insights on empathy, equity and diversity. Thus teachers with these skills can be an asset in supporting the diverse body of students in Ontario.

Key Words: International preservice, Teacher Education, International Education
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 2
Acknowledgements 3

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context 7
1.1 Research Problem 8
1.2 Research Purpose and Questions 10
1.3 Background of the Researcher 11
1.4 Overview/Overview of Whole 12

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the chapter 13
2.1 Impact of Overseas Classroom Experience 13
    2.1.1 Personal Growth 14
    2.1.2 Implications for Classrooms and Pedagogy 14
2.2 Classrooms in Ontario 17
2.3 Institutional Responses 19
    2.3.1 The Case for Preservice 21
    2.3.2 Ontario Teacher Colleges 22
    2.3.3 Challenges to Establishing Overseas Practicum Opportunities 24
2.4 Conclusion 27

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction 28
3.1 Research Approach and Procedures 28
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection 29
3.3 Participants 30
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria 30
3.3.2 Participant Recruitment 31
3.3.3 Participant Biographies 32
3.4 Data Analysis 33
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures 34
3.6 Methodological Strengths and Limitations 35
3.7 Conclusion 36

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction 37
4.1 Growth 38
  4.1.1 Personal Growth 39
  4.1.2 Professional Growth 40
4.2 Intercultural Competency 42
  4.2.1 Multiculturalism 43
  4.2.2 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 44
  4.2.3 Diversity 46
4.3 Employability 47
4.4 Summary 49

Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction 50
5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance 50
5.2 Implications 52
  5.2.1 Broad: The Educational Research Community 52
  5.2.2 Narrow: Your Professional Identity and Practice 54
5.3 Recommendations 55
5.4 Areas for Further Research 56
5.5 Concluding Comments

References

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Current employment prospects for new teachers in Ontario are bleak. According to Ontario College of Teachers’ (OCT) surveys, full-time teaching positions in the province have been competitive since 2005, citing declining enrolment, postponed retirement and a surplus of teachers as reasons for the deficit of jobs available (OCT, 2016). A startling two-thirds of Ontario’s newly certified teachers were unable to secure full-time employment, in 2014 alone, equating to about 6,336 teachers that were added to waitlists for teaching positions already populated by underemployed teachers from previous years (9,600 teachers were forecasted to be licensed in 2014) (OCT, 2014).

Amidst the context of such a competitive job market, it has become imperative for new teacher graduates to look for ways to gain experience to make them marketable to school administrators. As a direct consequence, an increasing number of Ontario’s teachers are heading abroad to build their resumes before returning to compete for jobs (Crane, 2015). Documented in the June 2014 issue of Professionally Speaking, a headline article asserts: “OCTs are packing up their lesson plans and heading overseas, gaining more than just professional experience along the way,” presenting alluring stories of teaching abroad in Australia or Tanzania (OCT, 2014). The article alludes to the rewarding and abundant teaching opportunities abroad that target the many underemployed teachers currently in Ontario. In fact, 18% of newly certified teachers in Ontario in 2013 were estimated to look abroad or out of province for teaching jobs (Van de Gyn, 2014). 64% of York University Bachelor of Education students surveyed said that they would consider teaching abroad upon graduation, indicating an even greater number anticipating to look abroad in the next few years (York Media Relations, 2011). It appears that teachers in Ontario
are keen on exploring teaching options overseas: looking at employment statistics, it is not surprising (Crane, 2015).

1.1 Research Problem

Despite the glowing reviews on going abroad to gain classroom experience, I have witnessed some reluctance amongst my peers about teaching overseas. There is conjecture among teachers and in the literature regarding the perceived value of overseas teaching experience (Crane, 2015). The concern mainly lies in the relevance of classroom experience abroad to teaching Canadian curricula, and the employability of teachers returning with said experience. An air of uncertainty and stigma is attached to teachers with classroom experience primarily outside of Canada, where there have been reports of administrators being reluctant to weigh foreign experience equally or at all (Crane, 2015).

But why is this the case? Canadian classrooms greatly value multiculturalism and diversity. In 2009, the Ministry of Education in Ontario published an award-winning Equity and Inclusive Education strategy aiming to create classrooms that celebrate diversity and decrease discrimination in order to reflect "fundamental" Canadian values of "multiculturalism, human rights and diversity" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Skills gained in foreign classrooms can easily be translated to benefit Canadian classrooms in accordance with these goals. The pool of research that list both personal and professional benefits from teaching abroad is increasing (Alfaro, 2008; Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; Garii, 2009; Martin, 2012; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). Teachers returning from time abroad report greater cultural awareness, where they are more encouraging of diversity in classrooms and have new perspectives on teaching methodologies (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008).
These are skills that are becoming essential for Canada’s student demographics, which saw a 92% increase in international students between 2008 and 2015 (CBIE, 2015; Garson, Bourassa & Odgers, 2016).

Some argue that teachers benefit more if they have classroom experience abroad early in their career, or as part of their teacher education (Martin, 2012). A study by Barbara Garri (2009) looked at nine teachers, eight from the USA and one from Canada, who had taught overseas early in their professional careers (up to the first two years of professional practice) to study how their experiences affected their classrooms upon returning. The study found that these early experiences helped these teachers not only grapple with ideas of social justice and improve "intercultural competency" in their classrooms, but also have greater pedagogical flexibility (Garii, 2009). Teachers in this study felt that they were more able to "recognize and support their students' learning challenges in culturally dissonant environments" (Garii, 2009, p, 13). Garii argues that while teacher education programs expose students to theories of cultural sensitivity and discussions of multiculturalism, opportunities to gain international field experience is invaluable to developing teachers (2009).

Despite research findings however, Ontario’s Faculties of Education generally show a lag between research and response. A search of the Faculty of Education websites of the five biggest teacher colleges in Ontario (University of Toronto, York University, Nippissing University, University of Ottawa, Lakehead University; as determined by program graduates in 2014) returned with only 2 out of 5 schools having material online on the possibilities of for-credit international practicums (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014). This lack of alternate practicums maintains that more teachers graduate with similar perspectives and understandings of culture. Support from teacher education institutions by providing more opportunities for
teacher candidates to fulfill preservice requirements abroad would be an effective way to better equip teachers with skills to tackle a multicultural classroom, as well as remove the stigma of unrecognized international experience.

1.2 Research Purpose and Questions

In this paper, I argued that there is much to be learned from returning teachers, particularly those with experience abroad early in their professional career. There is an extensive body of work documenting the benefits of teaching abroad, all of which support Canadian values in Canadian classrooms (Alfaro, 2008; Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; Garii, 2009; Martin, 2012; Pence & Macgillicray, 2008). I questioned why there have been few responses to research in this field by teachers’ colleges in Ontario with respect to offering overseas practicum experiences. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a greater understanding for how teaching experience outside of Canada can help Ontario’s teachers gain the skills to support the diverse body of students in this province and build a case for more opportunities offered by the teachers’ colleges in Ontario. While there has been research that supports this idea, there is little research from a Canadian perspective with respect to its multiculturalism and demographic. My goal in this paper was to explore the impact of overseas teaching experiences on new teachers’ pedagogy with regards to intercultural teaching competencies. I aimed to gain greater insight into how offering such programs in Ontario teachers’ colleges might help prepare teachers to better handle culturally diverse classrooms. Additionally, I was interested in how valuable international teaching experience is perceived in teachers’ employment searches in Ontario. This information would contribute to an
understanding of the current context for employment decisions that new teachers face when considering opportunities abroad.

As a teacher candidate, whose overseas classroom experience predates my professional experience, I hope to use this paper to explore and shed light on the ways in which international opportunities can benefit Ontario’s students. More research on this topic from a local, Canadian perspective would promote recognition for its value and hopefully lead to more opportunities available to teacher candidates in the future.

1.3 Background of Researcher

My own experience as an English foreign language instructor in Seoul, South Korea has allowed me to relate personally to the issues presented in this paper. Learning to live in a foreign country with no knowledge of the language or culture gave me a reason to compare my own background and identity to those around me. The similarities and differences that I noticed by teaching in a Korean classroom brought an eye-opening awareness and appreciation of the underlying impact that culture can have in a classroom. Once, I played a well-known pop music video in class to illustrate a point. It was a video that any student in grade-school would have known in Canada but in Korea, I just received strange looks and polite smiles. Teaching in a foreign environment forced me to reconsider not only what I taught, but how I taught it. Upon further reflection, I realized that I had developed skills that I would use in all my teaching, even in non-foreign classrooms. My interest in using the insight I gained from my experience abroad led me to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education for teacher training; I felt that the perspective I had gained was something that I wanted to bring home and share with others.
As a teacher who will enter the job market soon, the current state of availability of teaching jobs in Ontario is a personal concern. As I grapple with the possibility of having to move abroad for employment like others have had to do (Kim, 2013; Sagan, 2013), I’ve come across many uncertainties: those of my own and of my peers. The question of the value of overseas classroom experience to potential employers upon return is a large source of my hesitation. In countries like Australia, overseas experience did not help returning teachers find employment in their home country (Cruickshank, Westbrook, 2010). Would administrators in Ontario have the same sentiment towards the increasingly large number of new teachers returning with a myriad of non-Canadian experiences?

1.4 Overview of the Whole

To explore the research questions listed above, this qualitative research study looked at interviews of three Ontario teachers that have had the opportunity to complete a practicum abroad and are currently teaching in a Canadian classroom. In chapter two, I review the literature on the effects on pedagogy and institutional responses to teacher globalization. I explore some possible reasons as to why there is a lack of opportunities available at the Ontario teachers’ colleges. In chapter three, I elaborate on the study setup and discuss the results and their significance in chapter four. Chapter five provides a discussion of the implications of my findings for the educational community and raise questions for further research. A list of references and appendices are included at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter, I review the literature on the role of early career international experience and its translation into the classroom. More specifically, I examine what has been said about international preservice experiences and attempt to evaluate its value in Ontario’s teacher education programs using current research and literature. I structure my review with three questions: First, I review what international experience can do by examining the literature on the effects of overseas teaching experience on teachers and their pedagogy. Then, I address the question of why there is a need for teachers with international experience by evaluating the relevance of their learnings to better preparing teachers for Ontario’s classrooms. Finally, I look at how teachers’ colleges in Ontario have responded to this body of literature with respect to its teacher education programs.

2.1 Impact of overseas classroom experience

There is a continually growing body of research documenting the benefits of overseas teaching experience on teachers both in personal and professional development (Cushner, 2007; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Merryfield et al., 1997). The numerous impacts have been well-documented in qualitative studies and surveys of returning teachers and teacher candidates. They are briefly noted here to situate overseas classroom experience in the context of better preparing teachers for Ontario’s diverse classrooms.
2.1.1 Personal growth

A primary part of literature in this field is dedicated to documenting the personal growth of teachers as a result of traveling to another country. Traditionally, as well as currently, benefits for teachers to go abroad were mainly documented as ways to advance their careers, fulfill their desires for travel, or simply compensation (Richardson & Mckenna, 2003; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). In recent years, however, discussion has picked up on the impact of cross-cultural experiences on teachers and its implications for intercultural education.

One often cited benefit to teaching in different cultural contexts is the understanding of self in relation to others from different backgrounds and cultures. Teachers who are forced to situate themselves in a position of cultural minority develop greater respect for different cultures and understanding of issues related to diversity and equity (Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Savva, 2013). Returning teachers are more likely to challenge cultural stereotypes (Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009), dissect ideas of race, class and gender (Malewski & Phillion, 2009), and feel more empathy towards students new to the country (Martin, 2012). They also have more positive attitudes towards teaching in schools with diverse populations (Malewski, Sharma & Phillion, 2012). Teachers express greater self-efficacy in their ability to create an inclusive classroom environment as a result of greater intercultural sensitivity and global mindedness (Cushner, 2007; Cushner & Brennan, 2007).

2.1.2 Implications for classrooms and pedagogy

In the classroom, personal growth from teaching abroad can be translated into valuable insight on pedagogy. Returning teachers frequently demonstrate the significance of their experiences through the rich connections they make with sociocultural perspectives in their
lessons (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Pence & Macgilivray, 2008). In one example, Mwebi and Brigham (2007) asked a group of student teachers from Atlantic Canada who had traveled to Africa for a month-long practicum how their experience had affected them (The authors of the study omitted the precise location in Africa they had studied). In summarizing their interviews, Mwebi and Brigham (2007) write that,

> They talk about how they are integrating their African knowledge and experiences into the school curriculum and their teaching practice. They give examples of how they are engaging their students through infusing African resources into school curriculum that promotes a global connection with Africa in terms of environmental, social and political areas (p. 421).

By spending a short month in Africa, these teachers made a lifelong change in their classroom approach towards teaching the curriculum through a globalized lens. Their personal experiences echo what many others have said about the significance of going abroad for their teaching. From their interviews with preservice teachers returning from the Honduras, Malewski, Sharma and Phillion (2012) write,

> They learned that developing effective English language, social studies, and science curricula involved knowing how cultural knowledge works in the classroom how it is constructed, how it serves as a form of interactive pedagogy, and how it relates to issues outside the classroom. Reflecting that a culturally responsive teacher interprets cultural codes and conventions, challenges assumptions, and rejects stereotypes and myths, preservice teachers were able to construct cross-cultural knowledge as well as critique it (p.34-35).
A conversation about the benefits of experience abroad on classroom pedagogy would not be complete without drawing reference to the immense body of literature concerning Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy. First coined and discussed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), “Culturally Relevant Teaching” describes a pedagogy where students’ diverse cultures are brought into the curriculum and used as a starting point for their learning. She writes that students must “develop and/or maintain cultural competence,” and to do so would require that they first maintain their “cultural integrity” through what they learn in school (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that “good teaching” occurs when teachers use aspects of students’ cultures to bridge the gap between home and learning and then extend it to “critical consciousness” of the cultures and groups in the world around them (p. 161). Through this pedagogy, “critically conscious” and “culturally competent” individuals would be better equipped to become active citizens (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.163). On a similar vein, “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy” was proposed a few years later to describe a pedagogy that acknowledged variation in student learning styles due to background and cultural differences (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy was described to have three dimensions in which it would be implemented: institutional (policies and values of schools, school boards, ministries), personal (mindsets and abilities of teachers to understand culture in their classrooms), and the instructional (lesson delivery and classroom practices) (Gay, 2000; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). Today, culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogies are often used together in policy documents as CRRP, Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy in the context of creating equitable and inclusive schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Teachers who are aware of the cross-cultural perspectives present in their classrooms are more able to aid culturally diverse students in integrating new concepts
into existing schema by differentiating their instruction and thus allowing them to feel welcome (Gibbons, 2009). Research has shown that students of teachers who practice CRRP are more engaged in their learning and perform better academically (Gay, 2000; Gibbons, 2009). For instance, using culturally relevant texts to promote literacy has been shown to not only increase students’ motivation to read, but also make fewer miscues when reading out loud (Alanis, 2007).

Hence, teaching abroad allows teachers to gain invaluable experience and cultural knowledge. Teachers who have had these experiences have a greater awareness of the cultural nuances in their classrooms and are better equipped to deal with issues of diversity and equity. In addition, available literature provides ample examples of how overseas classroom experience can be directly applied to facilitate learning in a variety of classroom contexts. Teaching experience abroad plays an indisputable role in developing culturally responsive and effective educators.

### 2.2 Classrooms in Ontario

Research has repeatedly shown that effective instruction from a skillful and knowledgeable teacher can be the deciding factor for student success (Collins, 2006). The important question here is: what makes a skillful and knowledgeable teacher in Ontario? Ontario’s teachers cater to a unique demographic, as approximately 30% of new immigrants settle in Ontario: more than any other Canadian province (OECD, 2010). As the most diverse province in Canada, teachers are on the frontlines to support students’ academic success as well to help them navigate life in Canada (OECD, 2010). According to the 2011-2012 census statistics from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the largest school board in Ontario and Canada, 27% of students enrolled were born outside of Canada (TDSB, 2012). Two-thirds
of students are from immigrant families with both parents born outside Canada (TDSB, 2012).
Taking into consideration that parents are perhaps the most important stakeholders in students’
lives and their direct source of culture, I would argue that parent demographics are a better
representation of not only the diversity in schools but also the need for culturally sensitive
teachers. Knowing that the average classroom in the TDSB has two-thirds of its students with
cultural ties to other countries, there is a clear need for culturally responsive educators in
Ontario.

To compound the need for CRRP, Ryan, Pollock and Antonelli (2009) found that “the
proportion of visible minority teachers in the teacher workforce decreased relative to the
proportion of visible minority citizens in the Canadian population” between 2001 and 2006
according to Census Canada statistics (p. 597). Several studies have found that students learn
best from teachers who reflect their cultural backgrounds. There are two possible solutions to
this problem. The first would be to recruit teachers with different backgrounds. Historically,
Ontario has attempted to recruit teachers from overseas through programs such as Teach in
Ontario but with the current lack of jobs, it was discontinued in 2009 (Ryan, Pollock, &
Antonelli, 2009; Teach In Ontario, 2009). The alternative would be to actively train teachers
available in Ontario to appropriately teach in response to the diversity present in their
classrooms. As Colombo (2005) states, “teachers who do not share children’s cultures can
provide culturally compatible instruction if they understand the children’s “cultural funds of
knowledge,” which can be thought of as the different ways of knowing, communicating, and
doing that exist within diverse homes” (Moll 1994, 2001 cited in Colombo, 2005, p.1). One way
of understanding one’s cultural fund of knowledge could be to experiences other cultures
firsthand.
In response to classroom demographics, Ontario’s Ministry of Education refers to the value of multiculturalism to Canadians in its justification for its Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009). The document aims to create an equitable and inclusive education system that reduces discrimination and increases respect in classrooms. It also illustrates the Ministry’s attitudes and priorities towards creating classrooms conducive to cultural differences. In the full report, the strategy lists professional development as an area of focus for teachers as a step towards equity and inclusivity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The strategy would provide teachers with opportunities to attend professional learning workshops for inclusive education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). As others have, I question the effectiveness of such workshops and wonder about ways to enrich opportunities in teachers’ college that allow for teachers to gain experience in creating equitable and inclusive classrooms.

2.3 Institutional Responses

While educating teachers to approach diversity and multiculturalism has been discussed for decades, conversation has grown within the last decade about the effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing teachers to adequately address the growing diversity in their classrooms (Garson, Bourassa & Odgers, 2016). Some argue that teacher education courses are rooted too deeply in theory and do not have lasting impacts on practicing teachers. Mahon’s (2006) survey of 155 teachers’ intercultural competencies, for example, found that two-thirds of teachers responded to cultural differences in their classrooms by minimizing and avoiding them. Furthermore, despite mandatory diversity courses in teacher education, it was found that in fact, new teachers as a group were the most likely to underemphasize cultural differences in their classrooms (Mahon, 2006). Other similar surveys support this finding, also reporting that new
teachers have little confidence in addressing cultural issues in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Furman, 2008) and feel that they are ill-equipped to adequately teach values of diversity, equity, and interconnectedness (Merryfield, 2000).

There are a few reasons for teacher education programs falling short of producing culturally-knowledgeable teachers. First, Merryfield (2000) argues one shortcoming is that teacher educators in the United States lack diversity in both race and experience. She found that multicultural education at higher institutions is often limited through a Western lens, as teacher educators were disproportionately White and had few experiences overseas, thus undermining the inclusion of cultural perspectives (Furman, 2008; Merryfield, 2000). Furthermore, Cochran-Smith (2003) postulates that despite the aims of institutions to include multicultural education into their curriculum, implementation is often irregular and disorganized. As a result, teachers do not integrate it into their pedagogy, but rather address multiculturalism in their own classrooms in a similar haphazard way. An example of this was addressed in Gorski’s (2008) reference to his elementary school’s “Taco Night,” which was intended to promote intercultural understanding, instead perpetrated stereotypes of Mexican culture with its obsession with sombreros and piñatas. He stimulated discussion in the field that “despite good intentions, most of what passes for intercultural education practice, particularly in the US, accentuates rather than undermines existing social and political hierarchies” (Gorski, 2008, p. 516). Gorski (2008) made the case that intentional discussion of cultures, power and privilege was essential and crucial to true intercultural education. He argued that without careful framing, much of the cultural activities that schools partake in perpetuate stereotypes rather than promote inclusivity (Gorski, 2008). Hence, it is imperative for teacher education programs to invest in creating meaningful learning of intercultural education before it can be fairly implemented in classrooms.
As such, the literature points to an important criticism of having multicultural education solely in the context of coursework. As multiculturalism continues to increase in Ontario, the need for teachers who are trained and comfortable with addressing students’ cultures becomes increasingly important. This shortcoming in teachers’ colleges with respect to multiculturalism education points to a need for change in the way it is taught.

2.3.1 The case for preservice

Most, if not all literature in this field has documented experiences of teachers going abroad early in their journeys as teachers: either before entering teachers’ college, during preservice, or in their first few years as certified teachers (Garii, 2009; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). While all studies have been shown to benefit the teacher’s pedagogy (see Section 2.1), there is evidence to show that including overseas classroom experience as part of teacher education programs would be the simplest way of improving multicultural programming as well as ensuring that teachers get the most out of their training.

Having teacher candidates exposed to overseas experiences as part of their program allows them to see first-hand how multicultural education would be implemented in an authentic classroom setting (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). In addition, studies place recurring emphasis on the importance of structured learning experiences and critical reflections during and after overseas placements in order to develop teachers’ intercultural teaching competencies and pedagogies (Garii, 2009; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009).
The timing of key experiences has been shown to be pivotal to teacher development. Teachers are most sensitive and flexible in their pedagogy at early stages in their development (Cushner, 2007; Garii, 2009; Mahon, 2002). Their effectiveness and goals toward student learning are also most significant within the first few years of teaching. Enabling teacher candidates to go abroad for preservice experience would allow them to center themselves in a student-oriented approach early in teacher development: before hitting their "plateau" (Maynes & Hatt, 2013, p. 8).

Furthermore, once teachers have entered the classroom permanently, there are few opportunities for teachers to gain insight on providing quality multicultural education. When addressed, it is through workshops that do not “provide the quality time needed to fully explore and understand issues of multiculturalism and are unlikely to bring about key and personal changes” (Cruz-Jansen, Taylor, 2004, p. 17).

2.3.2 Ontario teacher colleges

Despite scholarship advocating for international preservice opportunities, “for the most part, colleges and schools of education have responded without urgency in restructuring their field and clinical experiences, and few have organized international field and clinical experiences that meet intercultural competencies, international collaboration, global awareness or motivation to teach from a global perspective” (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010, p. 47). Ontario’s teacher colleges have been similarly slow in creating opportunities for students.

There are 16 teachers’ colleges that feed members into the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), the governing body for teacher certification in the province. To learn about what is available in terms of international field experience, I looked at the faculty of education websites
of the top 10 teachers’ colleges in Ontario in terms of student enrollment. These ten schools account for 85% of the new OCT members in 2014. Their websites show a concerning lack of opportunities for teacher candidates to pursue opportunities abroad. At the top of the list, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto graduated 1,163 teachers in 2014 (OCT, 2014). OISE offers no opportunities for students to pursue practicums abroad. This is despite the fact that one of the objectives in OISE’s Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 is to “establish an internationalization strategy for OISE in all areas including recruitment and retention, teaching and research, continuing and professional learning” in (OISE, 2014). While the school has been successful in participating in and hosting various international conferences, I was unable to find any resources online or in-person at the Registrar for overseas practica. Of the remaining nine schools, five schools did not mention the possibility of practicums aside from those with partnered school boards. Four mention the possibility of alternative practicums, but with differing approaches. One approach involves allowing teacher candidates the choice to complete an alternative practicum abroad, where they are able to elect to go abroad. One example of such a program is present at Queen’s University, which requires students to complete a 3-week alternative practicum outside the traditional classroom setting. Students are responsible for connecting with the schools they wish to visit and setting up their placements with both schools (Queen’s Faculty of Education, n.d.). Another approach includes pairing teaching with travel opportunities or humanitarian work with nonprofit organizations. While four out of ten education programs in Ontario seems to be a fair indicator of the number of opportunities available for teacher candidates in the province, I would be reluctant to place equal value on some of the practicum programs being offered. Of the four schools mentioned, only two provided extensive information such as contacts and application procedures. Such
information is typically indicative of an active program. Also, if international field experience is meant to develop culturally sensitive teachers, then the unstructured nature of some of the programs would be ineffective. As previously mentioned, reflecting on teaching experiences and being in the minority is critical to understanding multiculturalism education, a component that seems to be overlooked in these alternative practicums. In one case, almost half of the time abroad is devoted to travelling outside of the classroom.

If faculties of education are to adequately prepare teachers for multiculturalism using international practicums, teacher education programs need to put more thought into their international practicum. It is not enough for schools to provide them as an option; properly setting up students for success and giving them the opportunity to debrief and reflect on their experiences from a multicultural lens is essential for the program to be effective. A good example of such a program exists at York University, which allows students in its consecutive Bachelor of Education program to complete an international education specialization. The specialization requires students to complete coursework with a focus on globalization prior to completing their final three-month practicum placement in either Kenya, Nicaragua or China. The program was introduced in 2011 to better prepare the growing number of teachers planning on teaching in an international setting (York Faculty of Education, n.d.; York Media Relations, 2011). This program at York is exemplary in what overseas practicums need to look like if they are to be meeting the objectives of such programs.

2.3.3 Challenges to establishing overseas practicum opportunities

There are several considerations that may affect the decisions of teachers’ colleges in Ontario to promote overseas practicum. This section attempts to briefly outline some of the
considerations in the context of Ontario while acknowledging that there are facets that cannot be addressed due to the limited scope of this paper.

One reason for the lack of opportunities is the limited job market that has been present in recent years (OCT, 2015). Despite expectations to see an increase in opportunities as literature continues to accumulate on the benefits of international field experience, the availability of opportunities has, in fact, been decreasing. Increasing competition for teaching jobs has led schools to focus on providing students with opportunities to market themselves in local schools. Similar trends have also been observed in other countries with low new teacher employment rates (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). Teachers’ colleges are concerned that new teachers would have less networking opportunities if they complete a practicum away from where they would ultimately look for employment. While this is valid in some respects, recent changes in Ontario legislation regarding teacher hiring practices may be cause for reconsideration. According to Regulation 274/12 passed in 2012, school administrators are required to hire teachers based on seniority, in order to decrease the backlog of unemployed teachers in the province (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, 2012). This controversial piece of legislation holds important implications for the weighting teacher candidates place on networking with administrators during practicums and building dynamic resumes that may be more rewarding in the long run.

A related issue is the stigma attached to classroom experience abroad, where there are questions surrounding its validity for employment purposes. This is an important issue to address when considering the main reasons for teachers’ reluctance to go abroad. Thus far, most teachers that leave Ontario to teach abroad plan to return to compete for full-time teaching positions after a few years abroad (Kim, 2013). Perceived lukewarm responses to returning
teachers, however, has cast a shadow of doubt among teachers (Crane, 2015). This sentiment has been echoed in isolated studies in countries such as Australia where teachers felt that going abroad did not aid them in finding jobs upon returning (Cruickshank and Westbrook, 2013). There is hesitation among members of the teaching community to see overseas placements as learning opportunities and not opportunities for tourism (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Quezada, 2004). A paper by Richardson and Zikic (2007), from York University, addresses the risk of pursuing overseas experience. Their work is cautionary for teachers when weighing a “risky” overseas experience against a more standard and recognized local experience. They state that one important factor of the marketability and employability of returning candidates is based on the extent of similarity between the host country and the candidate’s country of origin. Their findings suggest that “the perceived risk of international experience not being recognized and/or rewarded was closely connected to the perceived “cultural distance”” (Richardson & Zikic, 2007, p. 176). Hence, the countries that teacher candidates complete their overseas practicum in could have an impact on the perceived value of their classroom experience an employers’ perspective. They concede that while this attitude should shift in the future as more teachers return from overseas with years of classroom experience, in terms of job searching, it would be in teacher candidates’ best interests to pursue practicums in countries more similar to Canada (Richardson & Zikic, 2007).

Interestingly, there is some evidence to suggest the contrary in a survey of hiring practices of school administrators and the qualifiers they looked for. When hiring new teachers, 72% of administrators stated that they valued candidates showed that they were "developing instruction [that] will support students' awareness of global issues and contexts" as either important or very important (Maynes & Hatt, 2013, p. 21). According to the article,
administrators would identify and recognize “global approach[es] to lesson planning” and “involvement in the school, community building awareness of global issues and contexts” in their resumes as evidence for such globally-aware education. It is questionable why then, experience abroad is not held to the same prestige if many of the benefits pertain to this qualifier. As Cruickshank and Westbrook (2010) state, “The contexts of teaching overseas do not mean that the identified domains of teachers’ work are bypassed; on the contrary, the overseas practicum experience challenges and extends preservice teachers in their professional knowledge, practice and commitment” (p. 66).

2.4 Conclusion

This review elucidates the slow response of teachers’ colleges in Ontario to this emerging shift in education and raises questions about the need for additional opportunities for emerging teachers to complete preservice requirements abroad. It points to the need for further research on how to better prepare emerging teachers for the dealing with multiculturalism in their classrooms. In light of this, the purpose of my research was to build a case to illustrate how overseas experience can be translated to promote values of diversity and inclusion in Canadian classrooms and to highlight the need for more opportunities for emerging teachers in Ontario’s teachers’ colleges.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the research methodology I used to complete my investigation into the impact of international pre-service experiences on practicing teachers in Ontario. I will begin by describing my research approach and procedures for data collection. I will then elaborate on the selection criteria and sampling procedures for participants in the study before providing brief participant profiles. I continue by describing the procedures for data analysis and ethical considerations before discussing the strengths and limitations of this study’s methodology. Finally, I conclude my chapter with a summary of key methodological decisions and preview of what is next.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This study was qualitative in nature and includes a literature review and semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach was determined to be the best fit because it allows for more personable and open-ended accounts (Creswell, 2007). The depth of insight into participant experiences is important in understanding the context and role of overseas experience in Ontario’s classrooms. Consequently, the goal of this paper was not to generalize findings to the entire teaching community, but instead present evidence for the benefits of including international experience in teacher development (Maxwell, 2012). A qualitative approach may answer the “hows” and “whys” related to international practicums and their roles in shaping culturally responsive teachers (Wallace, 1984). Rather than quantify the teaching experiences of teachers in Ontario by asking them to numerate or rank, the semi-structured interviews allowed study participants to freely express their thoughts without having to justify the numerical value
they’ve assigned. In addition, the open-ended questions allowed for participants to share information they deemed significant, allowing for responses that may not have been conceived by the researcher *a priori* (Wallace, 1984).

### 3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, the primary instruments of data collection were semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews enable participants to include additional information that allow for a deeper understanding of the issues at hand (Creswell, 2007). As participants can only be interviewed once, the semi-structured interviews allowed for a balance between participants being able to freely share what they deem significant about their experiences and the interviewer’s need to keep the interview on track (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). As experiences can vary greatly between individuals, the freedom to ask unscripted questions during the interview was important for deeper understanding of the participants’ attitudes and reflections. To facilitate this, I used open-ended questions to guide the interviews towards the discussion of pre-determined topics once the participant indicated they elaborated fully.

Data from the interviews was collected in-person through interviews set up via email communication. Communication with prospective participants was initiated with an email describing the study and asking for consent to be interviewed (see Appendix A). Upon receiving consent, a time and place was decided upon. During interviews, participants were voice recorded as they responded to predetermined interview questions. In addition to participants’ responses, non-verbal cues such as body language and tone were also used as indicators of underlying sentiments.
As the main questions in this study were related to the impact of overseas teaching on pedagogy in culturally diverse classrooms, interview questions were structured to follow a similar format. Interview questions fell into three main categories including: participant background information, perspectives and supports/challenges.

Information collected for the literature review was collected from peer-reviewed journals and media sources. Media sources were included because they provide a different lens in which to view first-hand, personal accounts of experiences and without the rigid, academic formats. Faculty of Education websites of Ontario teacher colleges were also used to gain information about the programs offered with respect to preservice abroad. Site maps and site search functions were used to navigate and help locate pertinent information about the programs.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I will elaborate on the selection criteria and recruitment procedures for participants in this study. As this is a qualitative study, the bulk of empirical evidence is gained from the participant responses in the semi-structured interviews. Thus, careful deliberation has been put into the selection of participants.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

As this study sought to identify the effects of teachers’ overseas experience prior to beginning their careers as public school teachers in Ontario, participant selection criteria were based on the timing of their teaching experience and their consent to participate. More specifically, participants for this study were selected with consideration of the following criteria:
1. Participants have had teaching experience outside of Canada early in their teaching career (early defined as either during teachers’ college or within the first two years of completing teacher college)

2. Participants are either currently teaching or have taught in an Ontario school

3. Participants have taught in countries that are different from one another

4. Participants have consented to being interviewed

This study was limited to teachers in Ontario schools as a control for the variation in ministry-mandated curricula between provinces. By doing so, I hoped to focus the information gathered on how teaching abroad affected the participants’ instructional approach to the delivery of Ontario’s curriculum and multiculturalism and diversity goals.

Participants were also selected based on the geographical location of their teaching experiences abroad. To avoid limiting the findings to specific countries or locations, participants selected had teaching experience in different parts of the world. A variety of experiences in different settings allow for richer data and more meaningful analyses of teaching abroad as a whole.

3.3.2 Participant recruitment

This study made use of both purposive and snowball sampling. In purposive sampling, researchers follow a set of criteria to choose participants that they believe will yield the most useful data for their research purpose (Denscombe, 2014). Candidates for this study were also identified using snowball sampling techniques where participants were asked if they could nominate other teachers that would fulfill research criteria (Denscombe, 2014). This method was
effective in identifying research participants that do not have as much of an online presence, but whose testimonies are equally important.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Three participants were invited to participate in this study of which, three consented. The participants in this study have a variety of experiences with teaching abroad in different contexts. The differences in the timing of their experiences as well as their different teachings roles help to provide multi-faceted insight into what can be gained by pursuing teaching opportunities abroad. The three participants interviewed in this study have taught overseas before: during and after their teacher education programs. They have also taught and observed classrooms in paid and unpaid positions at private and public institutions around the world. All three participants are graduates of teacher education programs in Ontario and have been successful in attaining teaching positions in the Greater Toronto Area. These participants fulfilled all selection criteria and made themselves available for interviews. Below are brief participant profiles. Real names and positions are not included for the privacy of the participants involved.

John taught abroad in South Korea for a total of two years. After finding that he didn’t “hate teaching” after teaching for a year, returned to Canada to complete a one-year B. Ed. at Nippissing University. He then returned to South Korea to teach for a second year. In South Korea, John taught English at “hagwons” (private institutions) to junior/intermediate students. He is currently in his third year of teaching at a private school in the Greater Toronto Area.

Pamela is a graduate of the International Education specialization program at York University. As a part of the program, Pamela completed an exchange in Europe where she observed a variety of classrooms. After being OCT certified, Pamela also taught in the United
Kingdom. When she returned, Pamela was a supply teacher for an Ontario school board. Pamela is currently in graduate school.

Carmen is a graduate of the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the University of Toronto. After her undergraduate degree in science, Carmen taught an English communications course to adults at a university in China for a summer. In the summer between her two-year education program, she also taught TOEFL preparation classes and International Baccalaureate Chemistry in South Korea. Carmen has been on an Ontario school board supply list and is currently conducting workshops for preservice teachers while completing her graduate degree in education.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of data collected was completed in three stages. First, audio-recordings of interviews were transcribed. Themes in data within the interviews were identified and noted. Second, horizontal comparisons between the themes and categories of participant accounts will be made. As described by Polkinghorne (1995), an analysis of participant narratives elucidates common themes and allows for researchers to reveal and describe relationships between responses. Finally, responses were coded for common themes and divergences. Additionally, the number of experiences and depth of detail provided in the responses were looked at. These factors were reflective of teachers’ learnings from their experiences abroad as well as evidence for their reflexive thinking.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Care has been taken to minimize the risks to participants in this study. Ethical considerations include participant risk, right to withdraw and confidentiality. Prior to the study, participants were asked to sign a letter of consent, (Appendix A), which explained the study, addressed ethical considerations and outlined expectations for participation in the study.

Possible risks to participating in this study may include invoking strong emotions about their experiences abroad, which may cause distress or discomfort. To minimize this risk, interview questions were shared with participants prior to the interview for review. Interview questions, (Appendix B), were also worded neutrally to only illicit information that participants were comfortable in sharing. Further, participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that they had the right to pass any question they were uncomfortable with answering and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Participants were also assured that all data collected would be strictly confidential in their letter of consent. Any personal information collected from them that could be used to identify them, such as real names and locations would not be omitted or replaced with pseudonyms. The audio-recording of the interview will also be destroyed after the paper has been written and presented, within five years.

With regards to ensuring accuracy in the representation of participant responses, a copy of the interview transcript and my notes were provided to the participants for review.

3.6 Methodological Strengths and Limitations

As this paper was written to fulfill requirements for the two-year Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the amount of time that was allotted to
this study was limited. This study was required to be completed within two years and consequently was limited to a small scale. Further, participants were chosen based on their online visibility as well as their willingness to participate. As a result, the qualitative data collected may be subject to sampling bias as participants were not selected randomly from the population (Wallin, 1949). The voluntary nature of participant consent may lend to more polar reviews on their experiences as participants may be more likely to share their experiences if they are very positive or negative. While this bias could become less significant with increased sample size, the small scale of this study brings with it limitations of time and ethical reviews (Wallin, 1949). The sample size of this study was limited due to time constraints and as such, the findings in this study cannot be extended to all teachers that have taught abroad. Nevertheless, the data collected in this study can be valuable in providing insight on the merits some teachers have placed on overseas.

Conversely, the small-scale semi-structured interview approach has merits in providing more detailed and in-depth analyses of participant experiences than a survey. Participants are able to share what is important to them without being restricted to rigid questions, thus leading to richer, more authentic responses and a more meaningful study.

3.7 Conclusion

In this section, I outlined the some of the key methodological decisions in this study. Among these was the key decision to collect qualitative data about the overseas teaching experiences of Ontario teachers through semi-structured interviews. The rationale for this strategy is due to the exploratory nature of this research and limits of time and ethical reviews. A qualitative approach will be sufficient in answering the key questions in this study, given that
this study aims to elucidate the value of overseas experience on teacher development. In the next chapter, I will report the findings of my research.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss my findings from interviews conducted with three Ontario-certified teachers that have had early-career overseas teaching experiences. The diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants were valuable in elucidating the nuances of teaching abroad and its impact on their teaching. Collectively, participants in this study spoke about their experiences teaching in a variety of school systems and contexts in private and public sectors in Europe and Asia. These different experiences and perspectives were reflected in the insights each teacher brought to the study and were invaluable in illustrating the issues in the field of teacher development and international education.

This chapter will report on three themes found in interviews with the study participants and examine the convergence or divergence of these with current research. I will then discuss what these educators’ perspectives can inform us about early career international teaching experiences and the implications of increased preservice opportunities abroad. This chapter is organized into three main themes: growth, intercultural competency and employability, and several subthemes that transcended across the interviews. I have endeavored to group similar ideas into themes and subthemes; however, some ideas do transcend and overlap the groupings that I have presented here.

4.1 Growth

All three educators were eager to speak about their experiences overseas and spoke positively about their experiences teaching abroad. One recurring theme that arose in their interviews was the amount of growth that took place while in an unfamiliar environment. As Pamela put it, “whenever you are outside your comfort zone, growth takes place. That is true in
the classroom as well.” Studies on international teaching also often speak to the growth that teachers experience when teaching in cultures unlike their own (Cushner, 2007; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Martin, 2012; Savva, 2013; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). While growth can take place across both dimensions, I have separated discussion of growth into personal growth and professional growth. In this paper, personal growth refers to understanding of self, development of character traits and changes to the individual. Professional growth refers to the growth specific to the teaching profession.

4.1.1 Personal Growth

**Empathy**

The topic of empathy reiterated itself in different forms and relationships across all interviews. First, participants felt that their experiences being in a foreign environment and culture helped them to develop empathy and a heightened sense of awareness for minority students in their classes. Pamela articulated,

> when you are not put in that situation yourself, you can try to be as empathetic as you want but it’s really hard unless you’ve actually been there yourself. I knew what it was like to feel a language barrier and what it was like to feel culture shock.

She later applied her understandings her previous classroom experiences at home,

> I thought of students that I teach who are in the [English as a Second Language] program and you know what, that can be frustrating sometimes! I was more empathetic to the students in the classroom when I came back who were coming from other backgrounds, and other school systems, and other cultures because it kinda put me in their shoes.
Like Pamela, both Carmen and John expressed similar feelings of discomfort living abroad and felt that they were more mindful of students feeling similar discomfort following.

Pamela’s interview brought to light a perspective of empathy not commonly mentioned in studies of international teaching. She shared an observation of the German school system and the lack of empathy between German teachers and some of their students that inspired her to reflect on the values present in Canadian schools. In Germany, students are tested in grade four and separated into three academic streams: *hauptschule* (focus on the workplace), *realschule* (applied), and *gymnasium* (academic). She explained that students in *gymnasium* were prepared to attend university and that students in the different streams were often in different school buildings or different wings in the schools. She recalled a discussion with a friend teaching in Germany:

> In order to be a teacher, you had to have gone through the *gymnasium* stream … so a lot of teachers cannot empathize with the *realschule* and *hauptschule* students because they’ve never been in their position before. So, one of my friends who is a *realschule* teacher was saying that she was feeling bad because a lot of the kids in her class have very low morale and they don’t see the point in going to school and they’re like, well we’re stupid, what’s the point, we don’t need to learn it. She was having a really hard time trying to encourage them [despite] having them in a situation where they are already limited.

Interestingly, this specific form of empathy is not one that is commonly described in the literature yet is one that has had a strong emotional response by Pamela. While there are limited studies to compare to, it is clear that her first-hand encounter of the streaming system impacted her views on empathy and compassion.
It is unsurprising that empathy was a topic that all participants mentioned both directly and indirectly on multiple occasion as studies shows that increased empathy towards diverse students is a common with teachers that have taught abroad (Malewski, Sharma & Phillion, 2012; Martin, 2012). Having to live as an outsider in a foreign environment is a memorable experience that provides a shared experience that the teacher and student can relate to.

4.1.2 Professional Growth

_Becoming a better teacher_

Any kind of teaching experience and reflective practice will develop skills for teaching. When asked what skills they felt they gained from the experience, participants gave a range of answers, some of which were similar.

Pamela, who taught in England’s more bureaucratic school system felt that the structured teaching helped her become a more organized and accountable teacher. In contrast, Carmen, who taught in a South Korean cram school felt that it helped her to become accustomed to being over-prepared for her lessons. All three teachers maintained that teaching abroad helped them to become more flexible and adaptable teachers. John described his experience: “in Asia, everything is changing on a dime so you need to be really flexible. You’re often expected to deliver a lesson on the fly, and it really just teaches you to think on your feet.” In terms of adaptability, Pamela felt that having had experience in Germany prior to teaching in England equipped her with strategies to the differences in education philosophies. “I think that it made me a more flexible and adaptable teacher, where you can see things with an open mind and pick and choose what you like as opposed to being resistant to change,” Pamela explained.
**Bad habits**

Interestingly, two participants commented on the “bad habits” they picked up while overseas. John acknowledged, “I learned a lot about teaching. I learned a lot of good habits and I learnt some bad habits.” Carmen also mentioned a similar phrase, “I learned a lot there over the summer – not always for the positive.” While John did not elaborate on his “bad habits,” Carmen explained that teaching abroad in private institutions was a different style of teaching than she was used to: “I learned that I like to be much more visual and animated with the way that I teach, kind of different ways of expressing the same idea. Kind of like differentiated learning which I was unable to do which really frustrated me.” From my own experience teaching in a hagwon in South Korea, I interpret this as her referring to the expectation for teachers to adhere to prescribed texts and teach towards success in standardized tests. She added,

[I learned] the importance of using specific types of assessment, not what it is, but when to do it and different ways to do it for different students. I was given so many restrictions when I was in Korea, I didn’t want to give them the same vocab test every day. I wanted to make it fun and interesting for my students.

The discussion on “bad habits” is one that is linked to the argument that not all overseas teaching experiences are equally beneficial to developing teachers.

**Context for growth as a teacher**

Pamela and John commented on the value their overseas teaching experiences had on their overall growth as a teacher. By going overseas, both educators felt that it set the stage for
their continued development as teachers in the future. Pamela remarked that going abroad helped her understand the kind of teacher she wanted to be:

> When you're a preservice teacher, you take a lot of courses on philosophy and education and Plato and different things and you talk about pedagogy a lot but it’s not until you experience things in general that I was able to shape my own philosophies on pedagogy until I had done that, until I had known what I wanted and what’s is important to me and what I don’t want and what’s not important to me. So when I came back, I was like very clear and appreciative of the things that I thought mattered in education.

Similarly, John, who taught for a year before attending teachers’ college, expressed how impactful his experiences abroad were on his formal education to become a teacher. He felt that topics in teachers’ college became more relevant to him and that he got more out of his courses than his classmates because he had experience teaching in a classroom. In terms of timing of overseas experiences, he insisted that because he had classroom context, he could integrate what he learned into his own teaching philosophies. John felt strongly that teaching prior to teachers’ college was the best way to develop as an educator. Pamela expressed that teachers should be “young” when teaching abroad because “you are at that time in your life when you are shaping your views and values.” Both Pamela and John’s reflections affirm what has been said in literature about the impact of concentrating pivotal learning experiences early in teacher development (Cushner, 2007; Garii, 2009; Mahon, 2002; Maynes & Hatt, 2013).

### 4.2 Intercultural Competency

All three participants spoke of their increased understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Travelling abroad allowed participants to learn how to live in a culture unlike their
own. All three participants spent time living abroad and felt that learning to mediate the cultural differences and learning from others from different cultures allowed them to think more about multiculturalism and diversity.

4.2.1 Multiculturalism

Living abroad allowed the educators to experience multiculturalism by learning from others and experiencing about different school contexts. All three educators agreed that the school systems they taught in were different that those present in Ontario and Canada. Reflecting on what she learned about school cultures in her experiences abroad, Pamela felt that:

The school system plays a big part in creating culture since all children are socialized similarly when they go through school. So, I think being able to experience a different school system gave me insights into the culture that I would otherwise not get by just walking down the street. It was eye-opening because it is not like home and I surprised as to what they valued. I was surprised for example, that there’s no special education program, no German as a second-language program.

Despite the differences in school systems and cultures, Pamela also shared her empowering experience of interacting with other pre-service teachers from around the world. She found that despite their differences, they could all find aspects of teaching that were relatable across all their experiences. She recalled a fond memory with other preservice teachers where they “all realized that kids will be kids, no matter where they are, and it was just so fun to be able to relate to them.” Carmen had similar interactions in both her placements and felt that her experiences helped her to be able to talk to people from different countries. A study by McMillan & Opem (2004) found that people working in an unfamiliar host culture quickly bond and learn from one
another to aid the transition. Participants in the study reported that they maintained those relationships long after returning and felt more open to forming relationships with people with culturally diverse backgrounds. Both Carmen and Pamela mentioned that they were still in contact with other educators they had met overseas.

4.2.2 Culturally relevant pedagogy

After returning, the participants found that they could reflect on their experiences as an ‘outsider’ and who they were as a global citizen. Participants felt that teaching in a classroom with cultures different from their own forced them to be more mindful of differentiation strategies and culturally relevant pedagogy. They felt that they could situate themselves more readily as an instructor in a global context and could envision how they would approach teaching students from different cultures in their own classrooms. As Carmen explained:

Teaching in a different culture but [also] living life in a different culture helps you understand that when [students are] in your classroom, [not only do] they have different backgrounds but what they have for dinner, what they’re going through, what they’re talking about at the dinner table and what they do before going to bed can be very different and is sometimes very much tied to their cultural backgrounds. [Working abroad] really helps you see how much culture has an effect on a person.

Pamela felt that gaining empathy and understanding the challenges for students from different cultures led naturally to incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction. When asked how applicable culturally relevant pedagogy was to them, all three participants emphatically answered that it was essential to their pedagogy and that they tried to include it as much as possible. While Pamela and John did not provide any examples of how they
incorporated culturally relevant pedagogy, Carmen connected her beliefs about culturally relevant pedagogy to her current role conducting math and science workshops:

Culturally-relevant and context-driven pedagogy is really important because if a student doesn’t see themselves in what you are teaching, doesn’t see a connection between what their life is right now and what their life could be, they won’t want to learn it. Because I specialize in science and math mostly, this is something I focus on because it is often forgotten. [They are] often thought of as quantitative and numbers is seen as a universal language. You think that everyone can connect to it but how it’s delivered really does affect how students relate to it.

As a researcher, it is interesting to note how enthusiastic the participants were towards culturally relevant pedagogy but more interesting that two out of three participants did not share examples from their teaching despite being prompted. While Mahon’s (2006) study suggests that teacher education courses aimed at developing interculturally-sensitive teachers are ineffective, it is uncertain that teaching abroad is enough to spur culturally-sensitive teaching. Referencing Richards, Brown & Forde’s dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy (2006), interviews in this study suggest that teachers undergo significant learning in the personal dimension. The instructional dimension, the ability to create Culturally Relevant lessons and learning opportunities, seems to have developed to a lesser degree. That being said, it is possible that participants embody and model intercultural sensitivities throughout their pedagogy and thus were not able to name a specific instance.
4.2.3 Diversity

The words multiculturalism and diversity are often used together and interchangeably, however Carmen, who taught in both South Korea and China, raised an important point about diversity and student populations. Carmen noted that relative to her experiences living in Vancouver and Toronto, “teaching abroad is less culturally diverse because I find that in the places I’ve taught, students are all from one culture.” Having grown up as an immigrant in such multicultural cities, she felt that going abroad actually gave her the experience of teaching in classrooms with less diversity. Pamela had a similar experience with teaching in Germany however she felt that she learned about diversity by being in an environment that lacked it. Pamela commented:

   It was very different from areas in Toronto and [city] because they are very diverse so we have that background of going to school in diverse communities and then being able to teach in diverse communities. Teachers there don’t have that experiences so sometimes they’ll say things or they won’t understand [issues of diversity] purely because they lack knowing anything else. And so, you gain an appreciation for where you’ve come and an insight into the fact that there are people out there who don’t know a lot of things about Canada or diversity.

Ultimately, it was the lack of diversity that elucidated the presence and significance of diversity in Ontario’s classrooms. It is interesting that both Pamela and Christina commented on the limited diversity they experienced outside of Canada because many studies, most of which were conducted in the United States, speak to the value of teaching in diverse countries (Merryfield, 2000; Moll, 2001). Since there are limited studies on Canadian teachers, Pamela and Christina bring a valuable Canadian perspective on issues of diversity in overseas teaching.
Interestingly, when asked about intercultural competency, Pamela shared that although parts of Germany were not very diverse, there was a focus on intercultural learning in teachers’ college. All preservice teachers at her university were required to participate in a study abroad and courses usually had some discussion on multiculturalism. Despite this focus on intercultural competency, Pamela expressed her doubts on its effectiveness, “I just don’t know how well that translates into the classroom and that’s not really anyone’s fault, it’s just the lack of diversity.”

4.3 Employability

A question often posed by teacher candidates or teachers considering work abroad is how relevant their experience will be in getting a teaching job back at home. Since all three educators interviewed in this study were successful in finding teaching-related employment within the Greater Toronto Area, they were asked how they felt their overseas experience contributed to their job interviews for teaching positions back in Ontario. Pamela felt that her experience gave her an “edge” during interviews because it was “rare” for candidates to have “studied specifically international education.” When asked how much she mentioned her experience abroad, she shared, “it comes up a lot. I find that its very interesting and it adds a little flavor and a little pop to my resume; at least I’ve done some hours.” Meanwhile, Carmen was also eager to share her tie her experiences abroad into her interview but was more reserved in attributing her interview success to her international experience:

Oh yeah, I definitely mentioned my experience abroad especially where the multicultural questions came into play. I always talk about culturally relevant pedagogy and it helps to be able to talk not only about students but also about the parents and the greater community. In my opinion, I don’t think [experience abroad] was received as negative
ever, I mean I got the job so I’m assuming that it was somewhat positive but I really don’t know.

John, on the other hand, was quick to say that the “pop” he got on his resume was from the amount of teaching experience he had and not from teaching English overseas. “At the end of the day, you are still teaching English and you can do that here in Toronto. The edge I got was just hours. At least they know I’ve been in front of a classroom in the last couple of years,” he explained.

The participants’ responses show enthusiasm for incorporating their international experiences abroad but there is hesitation in assigning a causative relationship between teaching experience abroad and employment in Ontario. Pamela and Carmen speak about how their experiences gave them something to talk about in their interviews but also added additional clauses as alternative explanations for why they were offered jobs. Pamela, for example, spoke about how it was rare for someone to have a specialization in international education and Carmen mentioned that her international experience counted as “hours” in the classroom, something that John echoed in his interview. This interpretation supports Crane’s survey of school administrators on the value they place on overseas experience when hiring (2015). Her survey found that while 44% of those surveyed stated that experience abroad was an advantage during hiring, this was in conjunction with conditions relevant to the school’s demographics. Hence, overseas experience was interpreted to be a stepping stone and an initial indicator for a candidate’s success in hiring but was not a deciding factor.
4.4 Summary

In this chapter, participants spoke of the personal and professional growth they experienced while overseas and reflected on the ways they have applied their skills and knowledge to their classrooms in Ontario. Participants also spoke to their understandings of multiculturalism and diversity and the role they play as educators in a diverse Canadian community. They found that teaching overseas provided them with perspectives and experiences regarding culture that they have since employed in their classrooms. Finally, participants discussed how they felt their experiences overseas affected their hire-ability in Ontario’s tough job market. In the next chapter, I will provide a discussion of the implications resulting from the findings presented in this chapter.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

This study began with questions about teaching experiences outside of Canada. I sought to understand how international teaching experiences could impact new teachers’ pedagogy and how they could be used to prepare teachers for a diverse student demographic in Ontario. I wanted to understand the hesitation from both preservice teachers and university institutions alike, to pursue overseas teaching practicums. These questions emerged in a context that sees many teachers seeking to gain teaching experience abroad whilst permanent teaching positions in Ontario remain scarce (OCT, 2015). Just as importantly, these questions arose against a backdrop of hesitation that teaching experiences outside of Canada would be perceived as a back-up plan or less valuable than Canadian experience in terms of employment (Crane, 2015). In this study, I sought to unpack the experiences of three returning Ontario teachers from overseas experiences to explore the ways in which their international experience have impacted their employment and subsequent views on pedagogy in Ontario. In this final chapter, I will discuss the key findings of this study and their significance, as well the broad and narrow implications on university institutions, and as a teacher-researcher. I will then conclude by outlining recommendations and areas for future study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Many of the findings in this study agreed with similar research studies on international preservice and provided a more local, Ontario-based perspective on the issues. The findings across the three interviews revealed that the educators felt that their experiences contributed to their personal and professional growth, broader understanding of cultures, and had some effect on their employability.
First, the educators reflected that they experienced personal growth as a result of teaching abroad. They felt that it enabled them to develop greater empathy for struggling students in their classrooms and agreed that it helped them to be more accepting of new ideas and experiences. In terms of professional growth, the educators felt that they returned to Ontario as better teachers. They expressed that the change in the overseas environment taught them to be more flexible and creative in their personal pedagogy. The educators also felt that going abroad gave them the opportunity to apply the skills they learned in teachers’ college and truly understand what was important to their own teaching philosophies. These learnings echo and support other similar studies of teachers who have taught in different countries and contexts outside of Canada thus suggesting that growth is not specific to travel to a specific country. These findings suggest that overseas teaching experience can have lasting impacts on both teachers and their future pedagogy.

In addition, with respect to the multicultural theme of this study, all three educators felt that their time abroad enabled them to gain a different perspective on multiculturalism and diversity. When compared to Dimitrov and Haque’s (2016) Intercultural Teaching Competencies, the educators in this study were found to have developed the foundational skills necessary to facilitate intercultural learning through the curriculum. All three educators also expressed that they place great value on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy indicating that they were less afraid to address issues of race and culture in their classrooms.

Finally, in terms of employability, the teachers felt that their experiences abroad gave them an edge in obtaining employment in Ontario; however, they noted that teaching abroad was not the deciding factor, but rather it was the way in which they used their specific overseas classroom experiences that made them ultimately successful.
5.2 Implications

The implications of this study traverse many stakeholders including: teachers as individuals, the institutions that prepare them, and the greater community of students and learners in Ontario. The findings in this study suggest that teacher education study abroad programs are an underrated resource for preparing culturally-sensitive educators for Ontario’s diversity and inclusivity initiatives.

5.2.1 Broad: The Educational Community

*Fostering inclusivity in Ontario’s diverse learners*

In Chapter One, I asked how offering teach abroad programs in Ontario’s teacher colleges might help to prepare educators for the culturally diverse students in our province. Also in Chapter One, I presented Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education strategy (2009) that was created in response to the need for safe learning environments for all students, regardless of race, class or gender in Ontario’s schools. Instatement of this strategy led to policy makers to place renewed priority on inclusivity and equity and since then, both have been the focus of every school board’s initiatives and practices (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Through the voices of three Ontario educators, this study suggests that cross-cultural teaching experience abroad can work to further the Ministry’s goals. All three educators felt that their time overseas influenced their self-efficacy in mitigating and supporting the cultural diversity in their classrooms through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Theorists linking this pedagogy and inclusive classroom atmospheres illustrate the link between Ontario’s equity and diversity goals and international preservice (Gay, 2001; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006).
While this study was originally focused on the impact of cultural dissonance on teachers’ pedagogies, a greater theme emerged. The topic of empathy recurred in multiple ways across all three interviews. All participants shared personal experiences and reflections about experiencing greater empathy and compassion for their students upon returning to Ontario. Despite there being many other ways to inspire empathy without going abroad, the teachers in this study as well as many others in the research studies, noted the impact their first-hand experiences of being an outsider have had on their awareness of the others in their classrooms (Cushner, 2007; Martin, 2012). At the time of the call to action for equity and inclusivity in 2009, only forty-three of seventy-two school boards in Ontario had an equity policy in place (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The need for such a policy was due to acts of discrimination that were not limited to racism but also homophobia, religious intolerance, and gender-based violence occurring in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 7). I have come to realize that the experiences of teachers that have gone abroad are not limited to just supporting multiculturalism but can be extended to all students that have felt the impact of othering. All three participants in this study spoke of the challenges of living in a culture that is different from their own, challenges that most students in Ontario have faced. Teachers that embody empathy and values of inclusivity and equity can empower students to do the same, creating the safe learning environment that Ontario strives for.

Employment

At the start of this study, the perceived value of overseas classroom experience for teaching employment in Ontario was discussed with uncertainty. My conversations with preservice teachers resounded my own doubts about whether teaching abroad would be deemed
advantageous and whether it was a “smart career move” to invest a practicum in gaining overseas experience rather than traditional local experience. In this study, all three educators felt that their experiences overseas gave them an “edge” in the employment interviews because it was different. All three spoke of their international experience during their interviews but felt that the true selling point was their ability to use their classrooms abroad as examples. In other words, the educators felt that the value of the experiences lay in their ability to talk about them in the context of Ontario’s education goals. None of the educators felt that having had overseas experience was the deciding factor in getting hired. These findings support survey data of Ontario administrators’ that indicate that overseas teaching experience can be beneficial in local hiring but there is no tendency to automatically view overseas experience as favorable or unfavorable (Crane, 2015). Thus, teaching abroad can help beginning teachers to gain classroom experience that may be helpful in gaining employment locally, but only if they can apply their knowledge in a Canadian context.

5.2.2 Narrow: Your Professional Identity and Practice

As a teacher-researcher that has taught abroad and hopes to teach abroad again in the future, this study has given me insight on how I can capitalize my overseas experiences to further my development as an educator. When abroad, I must continue to be open-minded in embracing cultural differences. I must take an active role in critically reflecting on how my experiences affect my pedagogy as a Canadian-based educator and the students I will teach. Finally, the research, both my own and in the field, has encouraged me to challenge the ways in which culture is presented in classrooms. As Gorski (2008) wrote, “good intentions are not good enough” in educating students about culture and its underlying complexities of power and privilege (p. 515). It has reminded me to question how I, as an educator, can help my students
develop a critical understanding of culture and its value in our diverse community.

5.3 Recommendations

To foster the inclusive classrooms described above, it is imperative that teach abroad programs are designed with a clear goal to develop teachers’ intercultural teaching competencies. When I began this study, I anticipated that interviewees would elaborate on the ways in which they incorporated their learning into their classrooms. Surprisingly, while the educators agreed that CRRP was important to them, they were less ready to explain how they incorporated them in their classrooms. Notably, others in the field have also commented on the challenges that some preservice teachers have with connecting their learning abroad and to application back at home (Casale-Giannola, 2005; Garson, Bourassa, Odgers, 2011; Tang & Choi, 2004). Consequently, this study highlights the need for Ontario’s teacher colleges to consider the design and goals of their own Teach Abroad programs. One way that institutions can overcome this is to facilitate and guide the learning of preservice teachers while overseas via structured and strategic placements. Effective programs should actively promote critical cultural reflective thinking rather than assume that cultural dissonance will translate to intercultural development (Marx & Moss, 2011). Ontario’s faculties of education should also be wary of offering programs that advertise themselves as opportunities to travel and work on the side.

On a more personal level, educators should consider their objectives for going abroad and choose their international experiences wisely. The results of this study points to a dichotomy in the kinds of international opportunities that preservice teachers should pursue. On one hand, teaching experience in more culturally dissonant places can give teachers different perspectives on intercultural education and have arguably greater impacts on their pedagogy. However, teaching experience in classrooms that are more similar to those in Canada may be more
favorable in local hiring (Crane, 2015; Cushner & Mahon, 2002). To navigate this conundrum, university institutions should consider these nuances when choosing the placements they offer and advise students accordingly.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Further research on the subject of international preservice in Ontario can be extended in a few ways. First, the small scale of this study provides only a limited snapshot of the experiences of teachers returning to Ontario. A larger scale study of more educators as well as a study to investigate the long-term impacts of teachers and their pedagogy would be valuable and informative. In addition, a more-thorough evaluation of the design of current Teach Abroad programs being offered in Ontario is needed to identify areas that are successful or which need improvement. Areas for consideration might include location, institutional supports during the placement abroad, and follow-up course work, all which are important in the development of effective international preservice programs. Greater understanding of how international preservice can be used as a vehicle to prepare Ontario’s teachers for the diversity in our classroom, can have lasting impacts on students, educators and institutions.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The findings of this study indicate that the perspectives and learnings of educators returning with experiences abroad can have far-reaching impacts on their pedagogy, with respect to intercultural sensitivity and empathy. While further research and careful planning are required, Ontario’s Teachers’ College can equip interested preservice teachers with skills to create inclusive and equitable classrooms, and in turn, help administrators to recognize the value and capital these teachers bring to their schools.
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Appendix A: Letter for Consent for Interview

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Dear ________________ ,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. As a student in a pre-service teaching program that has had experience teaching abroad, I am interested in how overseas teaching experience has affected teacher pedagogy in Ontario’s public schools. Findings obtained from this study may be informative for not only current and prospective preservice teachers but also teacher education programs in Ontario’s teacher colleges. I believe that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I will be writing a research paper on this topic as a requirement of the Master of Teaching program. My course instructor, Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer, will be providing support for this project this year. The purpose of this research project is to allow us to become familiar with conducting research in the field of education. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of your interview will be used for my project, which will include a final paper and informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. Your name or anything else that may identify you in any of my written or oral presentations of my work will be omitted. Your information will remain confidential and the only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and course instructor. I would like to stress that you are welcome to change your mind at any time or withdraw even after consenting to participate. During the interview, you may decline to answer specific questions. After the paper has been presented and/or published, the audio recording of our interview will be destroyed. There are no known risks to participating in this study however to allow you to feel more comfortable during the interview, I will share the interview questions with you ahead of time. I will also share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy. Please sign the attached form if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Name: Sabrina Kuah
Email: sabrina.kuah@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Phone Number: 
E-mail: 
Consent form:
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty. I have read the letter provided to me by Sabrina Kuah and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): _________________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study and for agreeing to participate in this research study. This research study aims to learn about the value of international teaching experience on classroom pedagogy in Ontario. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your teaching experiences both overseas and at home. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Background Information
- What is your current teaching role?
  - What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
- What has been your experience overseas?
  - Where did you teach?
  - What subjects did you teach?
  - When did you complete this experience and for how long?
  - Tell me about your experience abroad- positive/negative?

Section B: Teacher Perspectives
- How has that international experience affected you as a person?
  - Did you learn anything about yourself?
- How has that experience affected your classroom pedagogy?
  - Can you give me any examples?
- Do you think that having that experience had an effect on gaining employment in Ontario?

Section C: Supports and Challenges
- Would you recommend going overseas to others currently in teachers college?
- Do you think it is valuable for Ontario’s teacher colleges to be offering students opportunities to go abroad?

Section D: Next steps
- Are there any recommendations you have for this field or this study?