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Positive impacts for Australian preservice teachers**

Julie Maakrun

*The University of Notre Dame Australia*

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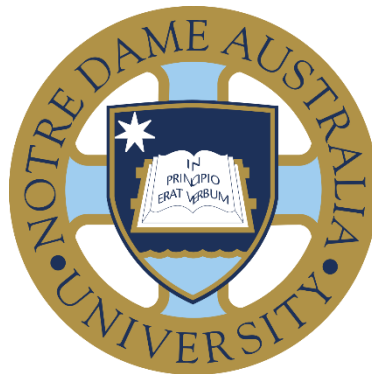
**The Confluence of Short-term Immersion and Intercultural  
Competence: Positive Impacts for Australian Preservice Teachers**

**Julie Maakrun**

Master of Education (Australian Catholic University)

Bachelor of Education (St George College of Advanced Education)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy



School of Education

Sydney Campus

December 2020

## **Declaration**

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2018). The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00418), Approval Number 016141S.

Julie Maakrun

December 2020

## **Abstract**

Increasing global migration across geographical, linguistic and cultural borders has resulted in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms in Australia. In response, teacher education programs are exploring ways to enhance preservice teachers' ability to engage with cultural diversity appropriately and effectively. One way is through the provision of short-term immersion programs. As experiential learning, such programs allow opportunities for students to be embedded in the breadth and depth of human experience, to better understand themselves and the 'cultural other'. These programs also enable an examination of personal beliefs, habits, and values, which may assist students in moving from a rigid dualist view of the world to a more relativist perspective. Increased awareness of the cultural realities of other people can lead to more tolerance, empathy and understanding.

One immersion program offered in 2016 through the School of Education at the University of Notre Dame Australia involved 20 Australian preservice teachers for a three-week immersion in Kenya. The program was characterised by the principles of service-learning, including experiential learning, reciprocity, relationships and critical thinking. The program was designed as a pedagogical tool, was co-curricular (with no course credit awarded to students who participated) and was undertaken outside of the regular academic semester. This mini-ethnographic case study allowed for examination of the participants' experiences and the perceived effects of short-term immersion on the development of intercultural competence.

This research improves our understanding of international immersion programs in higher education and the perceived effect of these programs on participants' development of intercultural competence. The findings are particularly relevant for institutions running such

programs and for teachers and other professionals who, given ever-increasing globalisation, will be required to work with culturally diverse people.

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Finally, to my mum, your love and support throughout this time and during all the immersion programs was unconditional – I dedicate this thesis to you.

## **Publications Arising from the Thesis**

### **Publications**

Maakrun, J. & Kearney, S. (in press) An intercultural immersion: Personal, professional, and cultural expectations of student participants. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
IDPs	internally displaced persons
NGO	non-government organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PS	Preservice Student
STC	So They Can
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter details the study's scope and significance. The overview (Section 1.1) positions the study within the broader context of globalisation, culminating in the significance of the study in relation to the development of intercultural competence for Australian preservice teachers. This is followed by my personal narrative as to the genesis of the study (Section 1.2). The chapter also provides the justification for the study (Section 1.3), the main and guiding research questions (Section 1.4), the study's methodology (Section 1.5) and the thesis structure (Section 1.6).

## 1.1 Overview

Globalisation is a phenomenon resulting from increasing worldwide connectedness that entails economic, political and social changes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009). Globalisation is a driver of higher education, prompting higher education institutions to push for greater international involvement. The internationalisation of higher education can be simply defined as a 'process of integrating international or intercultural dimensions into the teaching, research and service functions of institutions' (Harman, 2005, p. 120), and has seen international activities within universities expand in volume, scope and complexity (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Such activities include study abroad programs, exchange and immersion programs, and internships (Schuerholz-Lehr, 2007).

Australian society, like many societies in a globalised world, is culturally diverse. One in five Australians has a language background other than English, with over 300 different languages present in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). However, 'despite this statistic teachers are drawn mainly from the dominant White Anglo-Celtic majority, a national identity shaped by powerful historical and political discourses' (Santoro, 2014, p. 69). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

(2010), education systems in Commonwealth countries, including Australia, are dominated by females, with further research indicating predominantly white females (Forrest et al., 2017). It is estimated that approximately 87 per cent of the teachers in Australia are of Anglo-Celtic heritage (Carroll et al., 2021; Hartsuyker, 2007). These statistics are reflected in the participant demographics for the present study (see Section 3.2.1). Additional research studies addressing the racial profiles of preservice teachers also note the prevalence of Whiteness<sup>1</sup> and middle-class socioeconomic status, both of which act as initial barriers to understanding the needs of culturally non-dominant children (Cruz & Patterson, 2005).

Preservice teachers have also expressed doubt in their ability to teach students who are culturally different to themselves (Helfrich & Bean, 2011), with studies suggesting that preservice teachers in the final year of their teaching degree feel ill-prepared to teach culturally diverse students (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2010; Glock et al., 2019; Hudson & Hudson, 2011). This finding is supported by Maloney and Saltmarsh (2016), who, after interviewing preservice teachers, found that more than half expressed concerns and anxiety about feeling unprepared to teach in culturally diverse classrooms. Such feelings of unpreparedness may indicate that preservice teacher training in Australia fails to impart in future teachers the understanding required for cultural responsiveness, including competencies relating to social and cultural aspects of diverse classrooms (Miller, 2015). Maloney and Saltmarsh (2016) argue that cultural and social understanding is critical if teachers want to ensure student success.

Within Australia, undergraduate teacher education programs are being transformed as they adopt a set of national professional teaching standards (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). Within these standards is the key tenet of developing greater intercultural competence. Intercultural competence—defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in

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<sup>1</sup> In this instance, 'Whiteness' is defined as an identifier of racial, economic and political privilege (Giroux, 1997).



intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2009)—includes intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills. It has become critical for teachers to have the requisite pedagogical knowledge and skills to effectively manage the increasing cultural diversity of students (Gay, 2010). In addition to its inclusion in the national standards, intercultural competence is one of seven general capabilities included in the Australian Curriculum for schools, requiring teachers to critically view their own cultural perspectives and practices in addition to those of others. The Australian Curriculum considers the development of dispositions including empathy, respect and responsibility as critical for the development of intercultural competence (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2014).

In response, universities are expanding the range and scope of opportunities offered to tertiary students to increase intercultural competency. These opportunities, including study abroad programs, exchange and immersion programs, and internships (Schuerholz-Lehr, 2007), seek to improve students' cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills to effectively interact with people from diverse cultures (Amerson, 2012; Charles et al., 2014). These kinds of programs include meeting new people and forming relationships; challenging one's assumptions, which leads to new perspectives; learning about other cultures; learning skills that can be applied in future academic and professional roles; stepping outside of one's comfort zone; experiencing new environments; and learning about oneself (Paige et al., 2002).

For preservice teachers, international experiences 'add to preservice teachers' knowledge as they encounter new circumstances and experience things that they had not previously known, or had only encountered vicariously, through reading, hearing and viewing' (Buchanan et al., 2017, p. 171). Cruickshank and Westbrook (2013) contend that the cross-cultural understanding, skills and attributes that result from such programs are transferred to one's understanding and skill development in home contexts.

Teacher educators play a crucial role in preparing preservice teachers to respond to the challenges of diversity, equity and global interconnectedness. One response by tertiary

educators and institutions to address the need for building intercultural competence has been the provision of international immersion opportunities (Smolcic & Katunich, 2016).

The specific immersion experience explored in the present thesis was a short-term program entailing three weeks in Kenya. The influence of the length of time of immersion programs is unclear. Regarding study abroad programs, Cushner and Karim (2004, p. 30) found:

it appears that although both short- and long-term study abroad programs have an impact on participants, the longer and more fully integrated the program, the greater the potential for impact. Short-term programs may not be sufficient to affect the psychosocial development outcomes or for the impact to remain after a period of time.

The program explored in the present thesis was not a study abroad program, but an international cultural immersion experience combining living with a host family in another culture and practising the art of teaching. The parameters of this program are partly defined by Riberio (2005), where individuals are removed from a familiar culture and environment, immersed in a different cultural context, placed in homestay accommodation and provided with opportunities to work in a teaching capacity at a Kenyan school.

The literature is replete with models and theories attempting to explain the process of intercultural development. The model chosen for this study is Deardorff's (2006) process model for intercultural competence. This model was chosen as it reflects the aspects of intercultural competence agreed upon by leading intercultural experts (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). These aspects include the attitudes, knowledge and skills required to effectively and appropriately communicate and behave with people from different cultural backgrounds.

## **1.2 Researcher's Background**

In 2010, after 25 years working in primary and secondary schools, it was time for a change and a new challenge. The change and challenge were realised when I became a tertiary

educator. To date, my entire professional life has been in Catholic institutions. I identify as Catholic, and these institutions reflected and strengthened many of my own values. Most importantly, I value human dignity, the importance of service to others and the significance of relationships. It was through my own experiences, as the daughter of Lebanese immigrants to Australia, that I understood what it was like to be the 'cultural other'. The primary and secondary schools in which I spent my formative years were environments where many students were from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. For my parents, language was a barrier to social and economic opportunities; for me, in primary school, my 'otherness' excluded me from creative and practical arts classes as I was withdrawn from these and made to sit through repetitive oral drills in English. Perhaps because of this, I had decided from the age of nine that teaching was my profession of choice. All the schools I have worked in have (through no conscious intention of mine) been in southwest Sydney and had significant numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. During my nine years as the principal of a Catholic primary school in southwest Sydney, my work with fellow teachers and preservice teachers on placement was framed through the lens of access and opportunity. Both my teaching and school leadership experience reinforced for me the absolute critical role that educators play in ensuring that all students, regardless of culture or background, are given every opportunity to succeed. Now, as a tertiary educator, I know the significance of continually looking for ways to enhance, broaden and deepen students' experience of and engagement with learning and, in general, education. These ways need to be grounded in a critical understanding of one's personal and professional identity.

In August 2010, Cassandra Treadwell, Executive Director of the non-government organisation (NGO) So They Can (STC), gave a guest lecture at the University of Notre Dame Australia. During this lecture, Ms Treadwell shared her experiences of her work in Nakuru, Kenya. This work was centred outside the city of Nakuru, in the Pipeline IDP Camp. The camp was home to approximately 1,000 families; men, women and children who were now internally

displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of the internecine violence stemming from the 2007 Kenyan general elections. As an answer to the needs of the community, Ms Treadwell started a school, the Aberdare Ranges Primary School, and, for the most vulnerable children affected by the violence, opened a children's home, the Miti Mingi Village. In 2015, the Pipeline IDP Camp was officially renamed New Canaan Village. This lecture ignited the motivation for myself and two other academics to organise, coordinate and participate in the first international immersion experience offered by the School of Education (Sydney campus) at the University of Notre Dame Australia. The immersion was designed using the principles of service-learning, including experiential learning, reciprocity, relationships and critical thinking. However, unlike traditional service-learning programs, this immersion was not part of any course of study, did not include academic credit and was held outside of the regular academic year. In addition, all participants self-funded their involvement.

In 2011, the first group of 27 preservice teachers travelled to Nakuru for a three-week cultural immersion. Ms Treadwell's 2010 guest lecture was the catalyst for a program that saw nearly 150 preservice teachers engage in international cultural immersion. I continued to be involved in the Kenya program, but also became involved in and coordinated programs for cultural immersion in Tanzania and Timor-Leste.

In the first two years of the Kenya program, it became clear that this kind of immersion program could potentially facilitate the development of preservice teachers' intercultural competence—a competence integral to being able to appropriately respond to the cultural other. Participants were given an opportunity to develop an awareness of self and, equally important, an understanding of cultural 'others', allowing them to take responsible and appropriate action in cross-cultural situations.

The influence of my own background; schooling experiences; and work as a teacher, principal and now tertiary educator in undertaking this study are perhaps best summarised by the words of Hans Seyle (1956):

Perhaps ... true of every fundamental concept; it's not easy to recognise discovery. It seems to me that most people do not fully realise to what extent the spirit of scientific research and the lessons learned from it depend upon the personal viewpoints of the discoverers at the time basic observations are made. The painter and the message on his canvas ... and the emotional impact of their creations are but different aspects of single natural phenomena. It is surprising to what extent the inseparability of this relationship between work and worker has been overlooked as regards the more impersonal results of scientific investigation. In an age so largely dependent upon science and scientists, this fundamental point deserves special attention. (p. 4)

The fundamental relationship between myself and my work is part of my personal and professional narrative. Through this study, I seek to discover and understand the personal and professional narrative of preservice teachers who, in 2016, participated in a short-term cultural immersion program in Kenya.

### **1.3 Justification for the Study**

While recognised as a key capability of an effective teacher, intercultural competency in Australian classrooms is under-researched (Clinton et al., 2018). The challenge for teacher education providers is to understand how to tailor programs that assist in the preparation of culturally competent teachers (Siwatu, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

McCormack and O'Flaherty (2010) argue that only a few teacher education providers provide a global perspective of education. Kopish (2017) posits that when it comes to global education, teacher educators are often sceptical of further integrating global competencies in 'an already crowded curriculum driven by standards and accreditation' (Kopish 2017, p. 24). Additionally, teacher graduates are expected to prepare students they teach with the requisite global skills, knowledge, and competencies and thus, this expectation has resulted in changes in curricular content related to international education in initial teacher education programmes.

(Larson, 2016; Tudball, 2012). Traditional teacher training in Western countries fails to adequately prepare teachers to critically ‘re-examine their own positions of privilege and cultural superiority’ (Mangram & Watson, 2011, p. 97) or question how their own identity has been constructed. Ochoa (2020) recommends that teacher preparation programs be reimagined to encompass different knowledge, skills and pedagogies to effectively meet the demands of diverse cultural contexts.

Research has found that developing intercultural competence as part of one’s identity (Fernández-Agüero & Garrote, 2019) can be achieved through immersion programs. However, ‘these programs currently provide little hard evidence to illustrate how this is developed before, during and after the experiences’ (Buchanan et al., 2017, p. 181). This suggests the need for carefully designed studies to investigate and understand the ways in which intercultural competence can be developed (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Further research to understand how intercultural competence is developed is also supported by Pieski (2011), who states:

The process of how one learns to be interculturally competent involves understanding how a student consciously constructs labels and make sense of their learning. The road to intercultural competence is a lifelong endeavour with no clear blueprint available on how to achieve it. (p. 236)

Wang (2019) suggests that while short-term, international programs are a favoured form of cultural education, there is limited research on Australian students who have participated in such programs. This assertion is supported by Roy et al. (2019), who identified the wide range of cultural outcomes resulting from such programs and reported that most of the data focused on students from the United States and Europe.

In Australia, educational research needs to have the definite purpose of explaining phenomena with the intent of improving educational practice (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). In alignment with this, the present thesis investigates what constitutes intercultural competence

and what practices best prepare teachers to respond to culturally diverse classroom contexts effectively and appropriately.

The present study seeks to address the identified gaps in the literature by adding to our knowledge and understanding of the perceived effects of short-term international immersion programs on the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers. The implication for preservice teachers is the potential for an enhanced level of confidence and ability to respond to the cultural diversity in Australian classrooms. As such, the study offers a distinctive insight into the process of intercultural competency development. Further, the findings are particularly relevant for tertiary educators involved in teacher education that seek to utilise short-term immersion programs to enhance intercultural competence.

#### **1.4 Study Setting and Research Question**

This study was conducted in 2016, through the School of Education (Sydney campus) at the University of Notre Dame Australia. The study involved 20 preservice teachers (90% female and 10% male) who participated in a short-term immersion program in Kenya.

Experiential learning, both as a methodology and pedagogy, involves learning through experience and by engaging in critical reflection. Experiential learning relies on developing specific communication and behavioural skills needed for effective intercultural interactions (Pieski, 2011). These skills are connected to a mindset that consists of knowing and understanding your own cultural values and respecting the differences in others (Hoopes, 1980). In order to address the main research question: ‘In what ways can a short-term cultural immersion program impact the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teacher? To assist in answering the main research question, guiding questions were designed for both pre and post the immersion (Appendix D) so as to better understand the development of intercultural competence in preservice teachers who had elected to participate

and then who participated in a short-term cultural immersion program. To understand participants' perspectives prior to the immersion, the following questions were asked:

- What expectations do you have of participating in the Kenya immersion?
- What are you most/least looking forward to as part of the Kenya immersion?

The following questions sought to understand participants' perspectives post immersion:

- Have you been impacted personally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Have you been impacted professionally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Reflecting back on the culture in Kenya, what were some things that stood out for you?
- What have you found most confronting since returning to Australia?

Post immersion data was collected 8 weeks after participants arrived back in Australia. The timing of collection was purposeful, taking into consideration that participants arrived back home just prior to Christmas. This time frame gave participants the chance to connect with family and friends as well as time to reflect more deeply on their immersion experience.

During the immersion, participants kept written journals of their experiences in Kenya. The following question sought to understand participants' perspectives during the immersion:

- What critical experiences do participants document and what is the impact of these experiences?

The programmatic elements of the immersion within the pre and during phases of the study included: Pre (attendance by all participants at 2 whole day workshops; fundraising events; purchasing of school-based resources and planning of arts and sports activities); During (involvement in service activities; homestay accommodation; community activities. The three phases—pre-, during and post immersion—enabled the reporting of a complete narrative while also providing the foundation for answering the study's overarching question: In what ways



can a short-term cultural immersion program impact the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers?

## **1.5 Methodology**

A mini-ethnographic case study was used to study the experiences of participants in the immersion program and to further understand the effects of the immersion on the development of intercultural competence. A qualitative design and methodology were used to allow for a better understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) reported that the use of multiple data collection methods adds to the trustworthiness of the data. To add to the knowledge and understanding of the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers, the study utilised multiple data collection methods—application forms, questionnaires, semi-structured focus group interviews, participant journals, researcher observations and fieldnotes. It was decided to collect data pre-, during and post immersion to allow for a complete narrative to emerge. The capturing of a complete a narrative was considered important both from a researcher's perspective and to facilitate clear understanding by the reader by providing them with a complete narrative: 'If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 120). The multiple data collection methods provided sufficient avenues to fully investigate, examine and describe the complete cultural immersion experience.

Pre-immersion data were elicited through a questionnaire, an application personal statement and two semi-structured focus group interviews. The collected data were used to understand participants' expectations and perspectives prior to the immersion experience. Data were collected during the immersion experience via participants' reflective journals chronicling their in-country experiences and the researcher's observations and fieldnotes. Post-immersion data were elicited through a questionnaire and two semi-structured focus group interviews. The

collected data were used to understand participants' perspectives upon returning to Australia, including any personal and professional impacts resulting from the immersion. The study adopted data triangulation (Denzin, 1978), correlating data from multiple data collection methods (Denzin, 2012). Data from application forms and pre-immersion questionnaire responses (Appendix E: Coded pre-immersion question) were triangulated with that from the pre-immersion semi-structured focus group interviews. Data from participants' journals and post-immersion questionnaire responses were triangulated with that from the post-immersion semi-structured focus group interviews and the researcher's observations and fieldnotes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (Appendix F: Extract of focus group interview transcript). The study attempted to 'secure an in-depth understanding' through multiple data collection methods and the process of triangulation as triangulation adds 'rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form, and all submitted an application to participate in the immersion. To ensure participant anonymity, all data were de-identified and securely stored, on a private computer and in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office and participants are referred to using the code 'PS' (Preservice Student) followed by a number (e.g., PS1 and PS2).

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

Chapter 1 has presented the purpose, significance and background of the study; the research question; and the chosen methodology.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the research literature on immersion programs and intercultural competence. This chapter commences with an overview of the significance of the present study. This is followed by a contextualisation of immersion programs as educational pedagogy, experiential learning and transformative experiences. Service-learning is explored and critiqued, and participants' motivations and expectations regarding participation in

immersion programs and the benefits of such participation are examined. The significance of culture and identity are defined and explored, with a further focus on cultural immersion programs. The chapter concludes with a conceptualisation of intercultural competence and the resulting transformation.

Chapter 3 presents the overarching methodology for the entire research study. The objective of the study was twofold: 1) to examine the perceptions and experiences of participants in an immersion program and 2) to better understand how these experiences affect the development of intercultural competence, especially in preservice teachers. A mini-ethnographic case study was used as it allowed for ample examination of the field of interest and was able to be completed within a reasonable timeframe and budget (Parthasarathy, 2008). The research design facilitated a deeper understanding of people's behaviour, worldviews, and perspectives of life, being contingent on the circumstances and environment in which they find themselves. Part of the study aimed to identify and understand the multitude of ways in which the research participants perceived, understood and behaved within a particular time and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). The chapter discusses the theoretical foundations of the mini-ethnographic case study, the participants' demographics, the various data collection methods used, the data analysis techniques, the reporting decisions, and the research issues and considerations.

Chapter 4 reports the results and analysis of the study, presented in the three phases of pre-, during and post immersion. Each respective section reflects the format constitutive of a journal article, including an abstract, introduction, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. The findings and discussion from the pre-immersion phase have been accepted for publication by a peer-reviewed journal.

Chapter 5 discusses the key themes that emerged from the findings, with the discussion grouped according to the three phases (pre-, during and post immersion) and the overall research question. This discussion also highlights and interprets the intersections between the

cultural immersion program and Deardorff's (2006) process model for intercultural competence. The chapter concludes with a summary of how this short-term cultural immersion affected the development of intercultural competence, resulting in several key assertions.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a discussion of the key assertions elicited in Chapter 5, the study contributions, implications of the findings, study limitations and recommendations for future practice.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Chapter 2 presents a review of the research literature relevant to the study, primarily, literature allowing for a broad and in-depth understanding of cultural immersion programs and intercultural competence. The review was guided by three overarching ideas. First, acknowledging that the individual is at the core of both immersion programs and the development of intercultural competence; and while institutions continue to grapple with the complexities of how to embed immersions and intercultural competence into various programs, given the political, pedagogical, and institutional limits and pressures incumbent on institutions, the nexus between the who and how becomes critical. Second, how an individual understands themselves, the way they respond to an experience and their ability to think critically will, to varying degrees, affect their ability to be globally minded individuals and interculturally competent. Third, can a short-term cultural immersion program—characterised by the principles of service-learning, designed as a pedagogical tool, delivered as a co-curricular program (with no course credit awarded to students who participate) and undertaken outside the parameters of a regular semester—affect the development of intercultural competence in preservice teachers?

Guided by these overarching ideas, Chapter 2 commences with research literature that outlines the background and significance of the present study (Section 2.1). This is followed by

a contextualisation of immersive international service-learning programs as pedagogies of engagement and transformation (Section 2.2). Service-learning is explored and critiqued (in Section 2.2) and participants' motivations and expectations regarding participation in immersion programs (Section 2.3) and the benefits of participation (Section 2.4). Given, the central aspect of culture in both immersion programs and intercultural competence, a review of culture, cultural identity and cultural immersions is undertaken. The chapter then presents a conceptualisation of intercultural competence and the resultant transformation.

## **2.1 Overview**

Universities are expanding the range and scope of opportunities offered to students to increase intercultural competency. Increased global interconnectedness has opened communities to diverse cultures, beliefs and events that transform understandings of the world (Bamber et al., 2018). One of the many developmental outcomes of globalisation is intercultural competence (Meyer-Lee & Evans, 2007). Intercultural competence fosters and enables community growth across social, cultural, political, environmental, geographic, and economic boundaries. This competence includes certain cultural knowledge, values, dispositions, and skills to enable people to act in an informed manner and engage in effective intergroup communication in culturally diverse situations (Amerson, 2012; Charles et al., 2014; Whaley & Davis, 2007).

Australian society, like many societies in a globalised world, is culturally diverse. One in five Australians has a language background other than English, with over 300 different languages present in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). However, 'despite this statistic teachers are drawn mainly from the dominant White Anglo-Celtic majority, a national identity shaped by powerful historical and political discourses' (Santoro, 2014, p. 69). According to UNESCO (2010), education systems in Commonwealth countries, including Australia, are dominated by females, with further research suggesting predominantly white

females (Forrest et al., 2017). It is estimated that approximately 87 per cent of the teachers in Australia are of Anglo-Celtic heritage (Hartsuyker, 2007).

The challenge of preparing teachers for culturally and ethnically diverse classrooms is not confined to Australia; for example, teachers in the United States are predominantly white, female and monolingual (Nganga, 2016). Preservice teachers have expressed doubt in their ability to teach students who are culturally different to themselves (Helfrich & Bean, 2011). Miller (2015) suggested that preservice teacher training in Australia fails to impart in future teachers the understanding required for cultural responsiveness, including competencies relating to social and cultural aspects of diverse classrooms. Miller's (2015) findings are supported by Maloney and Saltmarsh (2016), who found that over half of preservice teachers felt unprepared to teach in culturally diverse classrooms. They argued that teacher's cultural and social understanding is critical for ensuring student success.

Within Australia, undergraduate teacher education programs are being transformed as they adopt a set of national professional teaching standards (AITSL, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). Within these standards is the key tenet of developing greater intercultural competence. It has become critical for teachers to have the requisite pedagogical knowledge and skills to manage the increasing cultural diversity of students (Gay, 2010). In addition to intercultural competence's inclusion in the national standards, it is one of seven general capabilities included in the Australian Curriculum for schools, requiring teachers to critically view their own cultural perspective and practices in addition to those of others. The Australian Curriculum considers the development of dispositions including empathy, respect and responsibility as critical for the development of intercultural competence (ACARA, 2014).

Given that teacher education students will be working in a globally connected world, one challenge is how to ensure they are adequately prepared for this (Mangram & Watson, 2011). Thus, teacher educators play a crucial role in preparing future teachers to respond to the challenges of diversity, equity and global interconnectedness. McCormack and O'Flaherty

(2010) assert that only a few teacher education providers worldwide provide a global perspective of education. Traditional teacher training in Western countries fails to adequately prepare teachers to critically 're-examine their own positions of privilege and cultural superiority' (Mangram & Watson, 2011, p. 97) or question how their own identity has been constructed. A further challenge for teacher education providers is to understand the kinds of programs that address cultural diversity to assist in the preparation of culturally responsive teachers (Siwatu, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Compounding this challenge, research suggests there is long standing view that teacher education programs should prepare teachers to teach in local contexts, and that local contexts will always be more important than global demands (Sieber & Mantel, 2012). Cultural responsiveness requires teachers to learn and teach through the lens of global mindedness, requiring the capability to teach students how their actions and the actions of others affect people in all parts of the world, and encouraging students to be change agents driven by their own critical thinking and actions (Chareka et al., 2010). A potential way for teacher educators to develop intercultural competence and global mindedness in preservice teachers is through the provision of cultural immersion opportunities.

## **2.2 Immersive International Service-Learning Programs as Pedagogies of Engagement & Transformation**

The internationalisation of teacher education has resulted in a range of international initiatives, which have included the internationalisation of curricula; growth in international; service and field-based experiences as well as cross-border initiatives (Larsen, 2016). A global dimension to education has been advocated by various researchers (Merryfield, 2000; Ochoa, 2010); this and the associated questions as to the preparation of teachers for the demands of a globalised world has led to teacher education programs increasing the number of international cultural immersions (Pickert, 2001; Schneider, 2003). However, despite the increased number of immersion programs, student participation in these programs remains low. In 2012, only

13.1% of Australian undergraduate students participated in an immersion program. These programs are often viewed as extracurricular or optional extras, rather than a vital tool for transformation, personal growth and pre-professional training (Olsen, 2013, p. 14). Of particular interest to the present study, Cushner (2009) found that relatively few education students participate in these programs compared to students from other disciplines. Consequently, teacher education providers are working to further develop and improve international programs, including attaching academic credit to such programs (Hutchins, 1996; Lewin, 2009).

Within educational institutions, one form of immersion pedagogy is service-learning. Service-learning in education has its roots in the writings of philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952). Dewey’s work is credited as the philosophical and pedagogical inspiration for experiential, democratic, civic education, and service-learning (Gyles & Eyler, 1994; Stanton et al., 1999). Dewey’s work led to a reconceptualisation of education to actively connect knowledge to experience in and reflection on the world outside of the classroom. Dewey advocated for a more pragmatic approach to education that emphasised reality being experienced. Students need to interact with their environment to adapt and learn. Various approaches to experiential learning have emerged, including volunteerism, service-learning, internships, work-integrated learning and practicums (Lim & Bloomquist, 2015; Moore & Ward, 2010).

Programs designed as service-learning aim to combine academic goals and instruction with experiential learning through the delivery of organised service activities that meet the objectives of community partners (Crabtree, 2013; Hammersley, 2012). Key principles underpinning service-learning are reciprocity, where the service provided meets the needs of the community served; structured opportunities which lead to civic engagement by participants and critical reflection (Bringle & Hartcher, 2012). In education, service-learning is considered a pedagogy, a philosophy and a form of inquiry or methodology (Le Grange, 2007). As a



pedagogical tool, service-learning is a prevalent strategy that combines learning in community contexts with academic knowledge. As pedagogy, it seeks to combine service and academic learning to promote increased understanding of course content while helping students develop knowledge, skills and cognitive capacities to deal effectively with complex social issues and problems (Hurd, 2006). Service-learning as an educational methodology combines community service with clear learning objectives, preparation for community work, and purposeful and critical reflection (Gelmon et al., 2001). As a sustained immersive practice, service-learning has transformational potential (Butin, 2005a). As a transformational methodology, it allows for questions to be raised, actions to be taken and, importantly, cultural competencies to be enhanced. Service-learning as transformational experiences are realised in local, national and international settings. Global service-learning is a growing area in the field of cultural immersions and provides student participants with opportunities to live, interact and learn about the host community (Onosu, 2020). It combines academic goals and instruction with experiential learning through the delivery of organised service activities designed to meet the objectives of community partners (Crabtree, 2013; Hammersley, 2012; Bringle & Hartcher; Hartman & Kiely, 2014). Global service-learning programs include short-term global service learning; co-curricular and curriculum embedded global service-learning (Garcia & Longo, 2017). For this study, participants stay with host families in homestays (Niehaus & Crain, 2013) and whilst in community they engage in service projects (Hartman & Kiely, 2014).

Intercultural learning that occurs in service-learning is a desired student outcome ‘as students who are not interculturally observant cannot be of any real service to others who are different to themselves’ (Savicki, 2020, p. 247). Research suggests that a range of factors can affect the effectiveness of service-learning programs, including the type of program, opportunities offered to participating individuals, length of stay and degree to which students are prepared for the service-learning (Van’t Klooster et al., 2008).

Criticisms of service-learning label the service as charity or ‘forced volunteerism’, as well as arguing that the method reinforces established hierarchies and is paternalistic (Boyle-Baise, 1998; Cooks et al., 2004; Cruz, 1990; Forbes et al., 1999; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Levinson, 1990; McBride et al., 2006; Pompa, 2002; Sleeter, 2000). Many of these programs take place in developing countries, many of which have a long history of experiencing paternalism in the guise of colonialism (Kearney et al., 2018). In other words:

Unless facilitated with great care and consciousness, ‘service’ can unwittingly become an exercise in patronization. In a society replete with hierarchical structures and patriarchal philosophies, service-learning’s potential danger is for it to become the very thing it seeks to eschew (Pompa, 2002, p. 68).

In general, the same criticism can be levelled at immersion programs which, unless carefully designed and facilitated, can reinforce notions of privilege and patronisation.

The service-learning literature highlights three elements of the practice: service, learning and community. Sadly, to the detriment of service-learning itself, there appears to be limited research on service-learning’s impact on members of the host community. Cruz and Giles (2000) suggest that this may in part be due to the theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic difficulties of defining and analysing elements such as ‘community’ and ‘community impact’. Research is also limited in relation to community perspective on cross-cultural experiences and any long-term impact of experiences on individuals within the communities (Crabtree, 2008). Stoecker and Tyron (2009) contend that there is a continuing bias towards research on student learning goals, to the exclusion of community outcomes, as a result of service-learning programs. Eby (1998) argues that community voice is often ignored or not heard and, as such, to include the voice of community leaders in service-learning would be of particular benefit so that any potential of harm or dissatisfaction because of the service can be avoided.

Maakrun (2016, p. 9) highlights that the community being served must have a ‘critical voice’ in the service provided—the needs of the community, determined by its members, should illustrate what the service will and should be and that a focus on relationship building is paramount. For any immersion partnerships to be authentic, they need to incorporate the perspectives of all stakeholders. Stakeholders include students, teacher educators, institutions, organisations and members of the host community. Crabtree (2008) acknowledges that relationships are central to immersion experiences, regardless of whether the learning is conceptualised as teaching, development work or social justice.

Experiences within immersion programs are anchored in the pedagogy of engagement (Lowery et al., 2006) and postmodern pedagogy (Butin, 2005). Russ Edgerton (2001) introduced the term ‘pedagogies of engagement’ in his *Education White Paper*, in which he reflected on higher education:

Throughout the whole enterprise, the core issue, in my view, is the mode of teaching and learning that is practiced. Learning ‘about’ things does not enable students to acquire the abilities and understanding they will need for the twenty-first century. We need new pedagogies of engagement that will turn out the kinds of resourceful, engaged workers and citizens that America now requires.

As a pedagogy of engagement, immersion programs are transformative in nature (Jones, 2002; Rosenberger, 2000). Service-learning as transformational experiences are realised in local, national and international settings. Programs in international settings provide opportunities for students to act globally, optimising the potential for their actions to be reflected in their personal thinking and in their responses locally (Maakrun, 2016). For teacher education students, international experiences offer distinctive opportunities to enhance both academic achievement and professional development (Brindley et al., 2009; Miller & Gonzalez, 2010). Willard-Holt (2001) echoed the positive outcomes of international immersion experiences, stating that international experiences may potentially change preservice teachers’

thinking about themselves, curriculum design and teaching strategies (McKay & Montgomery, 1995); enhance their skills and abilities; force examination of personal beliefs, habits, and values; and encourage commitment to open-mindedness (Mahan & Stachowski, 1992).

International experiences allow ‘Participating individuals to acquire a new understanding about life, culture, self and others’ further, as indicated above ... teaching abroad makes more significant and long-lasting changes in teachers’ classroom practices’ (Walters et al., 2009, p. 152). Students who participate in these experiences undergo personal transformation that makes them more aware of other’s cultural realities (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001). Further, ‘the greatest benefits included growth of tolerance, acceptance of self and others, and independence’ (Willard-Holt, 2001, p. 506). In many cases, such travel even questions the very cultural identity of those who experience it (Dolby, 2004).

While the benefits for students are evident, not all students who participate in such experiences are transformed as a result (Jones et al., 2015). Students’ ability to engage with all aspects of the immersion experience depends on their understanding of their own socio-cultural background, their developmental stage of learning readiness and the privileged situation that allows students to come into these experiences in the first place (Jones, 2002). Additionally, while the culmination of the experience has the potential to be transformative, the process by which transformation occurs is under-researched (Nickols et al., 2013).

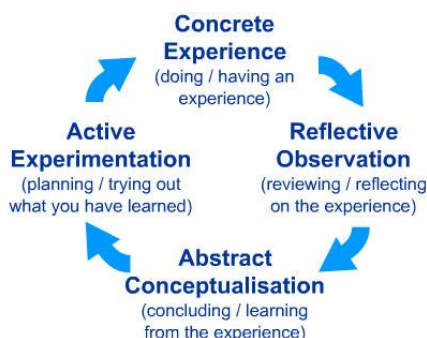
Research on study abroad programs (Strange & Gibson, 2017) highlight the importance of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning in immersion programs has been linked to perspective transformation (Strange & Gibson, 2017) and the development of intercultural competence (Ng et al., 2009).

Experiential learning theory defines learning as ‘the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience ... knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Kolb (1984) describes two learning modes to understand the nature of grasping and transforming experience. Grasping experience

lies in both the concrete or actual experience and in abstract conceptualisation. The transformation is centred on reflective observation and active experimentation (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1**

*Process of Grasping and Transforming Experience*



*Note.* Adapted from Kolb (1984).

Both the grasping and transforming modes are essential for learning to occur. However, having an experience is not sufficient if no action ensues; transformation is impossible if an experience cannot be acted upon (Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018). Further, transformation may only result when the experience is a disorienting event (Kiely, 2005), which become the catalyst for significant changes in an individual’s meaning making and personal frames of reference.

The theory of transformational learning was first proposed by Mezirow in 1987, located within a social constructivism paradigm. Mezirow regarded personal cognitions as ‘internalised by-products of publicly shared discourse’ (1997, p. 3). Further, learning is viewed as a psycho-cultural process of meaning making, resulting in meaning structures which in turn shape and delimit the meaning-making process. Mezirow (2000) defined transformative learning as:

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove truer or justified to guide action. (pp. 7–8)

Transformative learning theory focuses on how individuals learn to negotiate confronting or unfamiliar situations to evaluate their own or others' purposes; critically evaluate their own and others' values; and understand the complexity of social structures through the values of tolerance, social justice and equity (Mezirow, 2000). Immersion experiences as transformational learning accommodate situations and circumstances that lead to changes in perspective. Further to Mezirow's work on transformative learning, researchers posit that transformative learning is a process, most recently defined as 'processes that results in significant and irreversible changes on the way a person experiences, conceptualises, and interacts with the world' (Hoggan, 2016, p.71). A recent study by Onosu (2020) suggests that transformative learning can occur before, during and after an immersion experience and any changes are part of a multi-dimensional and unique process that differs for everyone. Further, Onosu (2020) contends that for transformative learning to occur during the immersion, there needed to be both program and personal factors. Program factors are cited as being the intentionality in pre-immersion preparation coupled with the intensity of the cultural immersion, whilst personal factors included a willingness to engage in reflection both during and post the immersion. A longitudinal study by Kiely (2002, 2005) cited transformational learning can occur post an immersion experience, particularly resulting from high intensity dissonances and critical reflection. Essentially, through and in an intercultural experience, participants need to view themselves as members of a global community, requiring a capacity to engage in the experience transformatively (Bennett, 2008).

According to Mezirow (2000) transformative learning is applicable in contextual situations where critical reflection and reasoning are at work. Service-learning as a methodology for transformative learning is underpinned by critical self-reflection. Kitchenam (2008) posits that the theory of self-reflection is critical because 'meaning is individualistic and found inside the learner and teacher rather than prescribed by external influences' (p. 113). Critical reflections and changes in perspectives are formulated by challenging epistemic

assumptions (Lilley, 2013). The level of epistemic cognition is where, according to Mezirow, transformative learning occurs. Kolb (2009) asserts that experiences such as international immersions are important for changing habits.

A further dimension of transformative learning is the personal values of the individual. Individuals' personal values are at the heart of culture. As values change, there is openness to change and self-transcendence (Knafo et al., 2011). Pragmatically, values as a dimension of transformative learning are interrelated with emotions. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) argue that as individuals become emotionally involved in a cross-cultural immersion experience, they may report the experience as transforming, which then gives further meaning to their experience. Enhancing meaning making is further reasoned by Malkki (2010), who states, 'emotionally we automatically orientate towards the comfort zone. We feel uncomfortable emotions when our comfort zone is challenged however, these "edge emotions" motivate us to restore balance to our equilibrium through a meaning making process' (p. 55). According to Taylor (1998), Mezirow (2000) and Cranton (2002), facets of transformational learning include:

- a triggering event (disorienting dilemma) that leads to an awareness of inconsistency among our thoughts, feelings and actions, or a realisation that previous views and approaches no longer seem adequate
- a feeling of disequilibrium
- a recognition and articulation of assumptions and presuppositions that are held largely unconsciously
- a questioning and examining of assumptions and viewpoints, including where they came from, the consequences of holding them and why they are important
- an engagement in reflective and constructive discourse, which is a type of dialogue in which alternative viewpoints are discussed and assessed

- a revision of assumptions and perspectives to make them more discriminating and justifiable
- action arising from revision
- a building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.

Transformative learning can often occur as a result of a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000). Extending Mezirow's learning theory, a detailed case study by Kiely (2005) of students who participated in a service-learning program in Nicaragua identified five categories which describe the experience of transformational learning for students: contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalising, processing, and connection. Contextual border crossing relates to the 'personal, structural, historical, and programmatic elements of the service-learning context form the unique nature and impact of students' service-learning experience, either enhancing or hindering possibilities for transformative learning (p.9). Dissonance is a facet of a disorienting dilemma where students experience incongruence as they participate in a service-learning activity. Kiely (2005) found high intensity dissonance in political, economic, historical or social, accounts for transformational learning as it invites students to 're examine their existing knowledge and assumptions regarding the causes and solutions to ambiguous and ill structured problems' (p.11). Different types of dissonance elicit emotional responses, which Kiely refers to as personalising. Processing entails, 'rational, reflective and importantly, dialogic ways in which students explored and re-evaluated their assumptions or engaged with others to understand the origins of and solutions to social problems' (p.13). Finally, connecting resides in the affective domain, which focuses on the development of relationships with community members. For both Kiely (2005) and Mezirow (2000), reflective practices are essential for transformative learning to occur. Disorienting, high dissonance activities can therefore be viewed as reflexive components of critical thought and transformation as part of immersion programs. For preservice teachers, participation in the



immersion coupled with a reflexive stance on their own cognition should lead to ‘a deepened understanding of oneself, one’s responsibility, and one’s capacity to act in the world’ (Taylor, 2000, p. 157).

### **2.3 Participants’ Motivations and Expectations**

Researchers agree that the motivations to participate in immersion programs include enhancing employability through international experiences (Clarke et al., 2009) and acquiring or increasing intercultural competence (Braskamp et al., 2009), global perspectives (Pedersen, 2009), intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006). The literature cites three main factors as hindering students’ participation in overseas experiences: financial cost, commitments (e.g., family, work and sports) and space within the academic curriculum (Bretag & van der Veen, 2013). In a similar vein, Forsey et al. (2012) found that the most common reasons for students not participating in an overseas experience were ‘cost’ and ‘leaving family and friends’ (pp. 131–132). Jones et al.’s (2016) research on the reasons why students in Australia chose not to participate in overseas programs found that 36 of the 109 tertiary students surveyed cited financial constraints as the main obstacle. A 2009 Australian study also found cost to be the single greatest impediment to participation (Buisson & Jensen, 2009). This financial obstacle raises questions of equity and social justice, suggesting that those who participate in immersion programs are often those who are the most privileged (Jones et al., 2016). Beyond financial restrictions, Trilokekar and Rasmi (2011) suggest that curriculum restrictions and real or perceived inadequate supports are also reasons for lack of participation.

Motivations to participate or volunteer in such programs are multifaceted, often residing in highly complex, varied and, at times, contradictory theories, meaning that consensus on a single model on motivation has been elusive (Hadsell & Cwik, 1987; Martin, 1994; Parnell, 1990; Smith, 1981; Winniford et al., 1997). Two main constructs have emerged from the literature on volunteer motivation: egoism and altruism. Theories that emphasise

egoism assert that the motives for participation are self-serving, while theories that emphasise altruism suggest that volunteers do so out of a desire to help others (Martin, 1994). Baston (1994) suggests that even if both motives are present, it is the ultimate or end-goal of the behaviour that determines whether the motivation was egoistic or altruistic.

Since the early 1990s, altruism has received increased attention in the literature (Allen & Rushton, 1983; Batson, 1991; Batson & Coke, 1981; Hunt, 1990; Martin, 1994; Wakefield, 1993). In the decade prior, Smith (1981) examined three different perspectives summarising the relationship between altruism and volunteering: the individual level, the group level and the societal level; the individual being a single person, the group level being the program or institution and the societal level being a nation-state. Smith (1981) then went on to define altruism as:

an aspect of human motivation that is present to the degree that the individual derives intrinsic satisfaction or psychic rewards for attempting to optimize the intrinsic satisfaction of one or more other persons without the conscious expectation of participating in an exchange relationship, whereby those others would be obligated to make similar or related satisfaction optimization efforts in return. (p. 23)

Winniford et al. (1995) found that many college students who volunteered were motivated to do so for altruistic rather than egoistic reasons. Anderson and Moore (1978) found that being motivated by the need to help others and the desire to be useful consistently outweighed other reasons to volunteer.

Other studies have sought to conceptualise aspects of egoism and altruism in volunteering in terms of a social exchange. Regarding volunteering, social exchange theory contends that all interactions are based on an exchange of costs—what one gives (altruism) is what one receives (egoism) (Phillips, 1982). A further construct related to social exchange is the notion of social obligation, defined as the goal of repaying something back to society. A study of college students by Fitch (1987) classified motivations for volunteering as egoistic,

altruistic or social obligation. Egoistic reasons included the sense of satisfaction in helping others, altruistic reasons included being concerned about others less fortunate, and social obligation included both the desire to give back because they were fortunate and the hope that if needed, others would do the same for them.

Embedded within social exchange is the expectation that if one gives, one will receive. Expectancy theory is often applied to work motivation and asserts that individuals will be motivated to the extent to which they believe their behaviour will lead to the outcomes they personally desire (Hey & Miskel, 1991; Miller & Grush, 1988; Steers & Porter, 1983). Three factors that affect behaviour are the need for achievement and the resultant sense of pride in the accomplishment, the need for affiliation with others and the need for influence or impact on others. Mounter (1985) contends that all individuals are motivated by these needs. The degree of motivation is influenced by both the intensity of the needs and the degree of satisfaction anticipated. For volunteers, the rewards would be composed of many psychological gains (Anderson & Moore, 1987). Beyond motivations and expectations, Shye (2009) sought to classify the causes for volunteering and of giving in general into three classes: demographic antecedents, which include the personal resources required to volunteer; motivations, which are more specific and necessary for individuals to want volunteer; and circumstances, the opportunities available that facilitate and prompt volunteering to take place. In attempting to better facilitate volunteer programs, institutions may be better served by an understanding of demographic antecedents and the motivations and expectations of students.

## **2.4 Benefits of Participating in Immersion Programs**

The benefits of participating in immersion programs are well documented in the literature. International programs have been shown to ‘enhance intellectual growth, personal development and global mindedness’ (Walters et al., 2009, p. 4). For students, such programs have long been linked to academic success (Astin et al., 2000), personal efficacy and identity

(Eyler et al., 2001), cognition (Root & Batchelder, 1994), moral development (Cram, 1998) and leadership (Astin et al., 2000; Eyler et al., 2000; Lavery, 2008, 2009). Advocates would also support the notion that such programs enrich individuals' sense of community and belongingness to something greater than themselves (Lisman, 1998), and further enhances a respect for, and tolerance of, diversity, thus allowing the students to develop a greater awareness of societal issues and a greater moral and ethical sense (Coles, 1993). Specifically for preservice teachers, Roose (2001) contends that international placements allow new teachers the opportunity to recognise the importance of culture; its connection to community; and the relationships among and between language, culture, and practice. Butin (2003) further posits that for students, the experience of engaging with those different from themselves will allow them to come to better understand, respect and engage with the cultural plurality of diverse societies. For the majority of preservice teachers, these societies will exist in the classrooms in which they will ultimately teach. 'As such, a cultural perspective privileges the affective, ethical, and formative aspect of an immersion program and is concerned with linking these experiential components to local, national and international issues' (Butin, 2003, p. 1681). This cultural perspective acknowledges that the outcomes of immersion programs are embedded within the process itself.

The literature suggests that courses that incorporate immersion experiences provide a number of benefits, including deeper understanding of course content and the opportunity for students to apply course materials to new situations, while developing a better understanding of complex world problems. For teacher educators, the process of international immersion programs can be used to foster ownership of, sensitivity to, and participation in community-building activities that transform approaches to learning (Swick, 2001). Transforming approaches to learning can also lead to teacher educators having an increased understanding of students; a better sense of student learning; and deeper connections between themselves, the students and the institution.

Despite the evidence of the benefits to participants, Messer and Wolter (2007) argue that the value of such programs is exaggerated, noting that participation in such programs is often linked to socio-economic status.

## **2.5 Culture**

Culture is part of a social system; a system being shared by members of a group or society. Such membership can be viewed as multicultural as people are simultaneously members of different cultural groups (Avruch, 1998). Through the process of socialisation, culture is learned from and by the people one interacts with and is taught through the explanations individuals receive for the events that occur around them (Lustig & Koester, 2006). Ferraro (1998) postulates that culture as a learning process can lead to greater understanding and to a greater tolerance for cultural differences, both of which are requisites for intercultural competence. Given that culture can be learned, it stands to reason that culture is subject to gradual change. Cultural artefacts, attitudes or ideas and behaviours can all undergo additions, modifications or deletions (Ferraro, 1998). Given the complex and diverse nature of such a system, it is difficult for any group to be characterised as a single culture (Avruch, 1998).

Beyond the social construct, culture is also an individual, psychological construct:

To some extent, culture exists in each and every one of us individually as much as it exists as a global, social construct. Individual differences in culture can be observed among people in the degree to which they adopt and engage in the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that by consensus constitute their culture. (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 8).

Individual differences within culture support the notion of culture being a fuzzy concept, given that:

group members are unlikely to share identical sets of attitudes, beliefs and so on, but rather show ‘family resemblances’, with the result that there is no absolute set of features that can distinguish definitively one cultural group from another. (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 9)

Having no absolute set of features, culture thus becomes a descriptive concept (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 9).

For the purposes of this research, culture will be defined as a:

fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behavior and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour. (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 3)

From this definition, a key characteristic of culture is values. Most notably, the way that values relate when attempting to rationalise one’s behaviour. Such a rationalisation of behaviour is often unconscious and thus ‘it is imperative to delve into the underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious, but which actually determine how group members perceive, think and feel’ (Spencer-Oatey, 2010, p. 3).

### **2.5.1 Culture and Identity**

The ancient Greek aphorism ‘γνῶθι σεαυτόν’ was inscribed in the pronaos of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The phrase, expounded by Socrates, translates to ‘know thyself’. As Socrates taught, the unexamined life is not worth living, to know thyself is the beginning of all wisdom. An examined life would naturally explore perceptions of identity and culture. The examination of identity would, according to Hofstede (2001), require that an individual respond to the question, ‘Where do I belong?’ Identity as belonging or positioning is surmised by Urietta (2018):

The term *Identity* was initially used as a descriptive naming of how one was positioned by others and/or positioned oneself; however, it has evolved to engage more nuanced

explorations of subject formation over life experience. *Identity is now defined as a self-concept, or self-perception, that is both existential and categorical, both individual and socio cultural, and that shifts and develops over time.* (p. 4)

Recent research and practice have made clear the notion that one's identity cannot be reduced to a single element but is related to people's individual and collective positioning (Dervin, 2012). Social and cultural perspectives allow for critical thinking on identity to be viewed in more nuanced and complex ways. Davies and Harre (1990) suggested positioning theory which included both a reflexive positioning of self and through interaction the positioning of others. 'Positioning's are more broadly understood today as those socially and culturally constructed labels or identities offered to, or imposed on, people' (Urietta, 2018, p. 10).

Holland et al. (1998) proposed socio-cultural practice theory of identity and self which suggests that cultural construction and experiential involvement are necessary elements for identity analyses. Holland et al. (2001) further state that in cultural worlds, positioning can be accepted, rejected or negotiated, but it is the individual who makes the choice of how to respond. In making the choice:

Attention is focused on identities forming in process or activity, primarily organized activity and around figured (cultural) worlds. Identity is always a process of figuring or becoming, while more enduring aspects of self (history-in-person) remain important to ongoing and future identity constructions ... Critical 'moments' during the interaction process are therefore important ... to recognize agency in practice. (Urietta, 2018, p. 15)

Critical moments or experiences rely on experiential learning; they are not simply observed but experienced and, in doing so, have the potential to develop one's ability to see situations from the perspective of different cultures (Salo-Lee & Winter-Tarvainen, 1995). Such a perspective allows the learner the opportunity to analyse the situation, promoting cultural awareness.

Through a social and cultural lens, identity is concerned with how individuals come to understand themselves and how they ‘come to “see” who they are, through the social and cultural “worlds” that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds’ (Urietta, 2018, p. 17). This identity is relational:

It is always within representation that we recognize ourselves ... identity is always related to what one is not – the Other ... identity is only conceivable in and through difference ... That one is not what the Other is, is critical in defining who one is. (Sarup, 1996, p. 47)

Descriptive relativism is a lived experience, viewing the cultural other as being in a different place, doing different things and behaving in different ways; the message, therefore, is that through the Other, one can come to understand self (Kapuscinski, 2008). Representations of identity allow individuals to grasp sociality and the world while also assisting to interact with other people (Gillespie, 2006). These representations emerge from the interrelations between the ‘self, other and the object world’ (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p. 11). These interrelationships create a critical need for individuals to have an awareness of their own culture, attitudes, values and beliefs to prevent projecting (consciously or subconsciously) a distorted view of the world which can lead to an unintentional blindness and potential insensitivity to the values important to members of other cultures (Bjerke, 2014).

Shared representations being co-constructed represent what ‘reality is intersubjectively agreed to be’ (Howarth, 2006, p. 8). Holland et al. (1998) describe this tension of identity between the self and Other as identities being both internal and external processes and, for the most part, unfinished products that are always in constant flux.

Bayart (2005) suggests that the terms ‘cultural’ and ‘identity’ combined make the concept of cultural identity a contented one, as the two words are polysemic, slippery and illusory as analytical categories. Dervin (2012) posits that in attempting to deal with cultural identity, we are faced with the immensely challenging concept of culture, which many scholars



have unsatisfactorily attempted to define. Bhatia (2007) conceptualises culture as related to power relationships and composed of conflicting representations. Wikan (2002) suggests that any definition would depend on the researcher's point of view and, as an object of power, provides some people with the right to define or decide what it is and what it counts for. Wikan (2002) also contends that culture is often used as the agent to explain intercultural encounters without having any autonomous or material existence. Research on intercultural competence and education reorientates an understanding of identity, from questions that seek to address what a person's cultural identity to questions of how we construct cultural identity (Dervin, 2012). Dervin (2010) posits that intercultural studies should give greater attention to interculturality without culture. Despite sounding paradoxical, interculturality would seek to examine how culture is used in discourse and in actions to explain or justify one's own actions and thoughts (Dervin, 2010), rather than culture being used as a 'catchall explanation for everything' (Philipps, 2010, p. 65). Intercultural experiences do not, therefore, reside in individuals but are always intersubjective, being embedded within a complex, multifaceted experiential web in which individual experiences can never be disentangled from the experiences of others (Cooper, 2005).

### **2.5.2 Cultural Immersion and Cultural Identity**

The term 'cultural immersion' has different meanings and interpretations (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Some immersion programs recommend homestays, while others view cultural immersion as being physically present, without time limit, in a country or host culture to study (Rodriguez, 2000). Riberio (2005) defines a cultural immersion experience as one where individuals are removed from a familiar culture and environment. This definition immerses participants in a different cultural context, places them in homestay accommodation and allows them opportunities to work in a teaching capacity at schools. Cultural experiences as immersions occur within the context of a variety of socio-cultural platforms and, according to Robinson (1999), have the significant potential of shaping one's identities, describing notions

of identity as ‘multiple, textured, and converging’ (p. 98). Taylor (1999) defines cultural identity ‘as one’s understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values, and behaviours that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives’ (p. 232). Cultural affiliations influence how people perceive themselves and their self-identity and how they perceive others and other ways of being (Barrett et al., 2013), all of which shape the way the world is viewed and inform experiences. Smolcic and Katunich (2017) suggest that immersion experiences, aimed at developing intercultural competence, fall into one of four categories: standalone courses, where the course integrates an interaction with a culturally different group; international study tours focused on learning about the host country’s history and culture; overseas student teaching, where students complete part of their placement training overseas; and cultural immersion programs. The authors further suggest that research is being undertaken in each of these categories to document how these kinds of activities assist preservice teachers with the capacity to work effectively with the culturally and linguistically diverse student populations that increasingly characterise schools. The present study falls into the fourth category, cultural immersion programs. In Smolcic and Kanunich’s (2017) review of the literature on immersion programs, this category was the largest. Further reflected in the current study, ‘These programs attempt to immerse program participants in a different cultural context, participants often live in a homestay situation and have some type of teaching or assisting teacher role in schools and classrooms’ (Smolcic & Kanunich, 2017, p. 51). Analysis of research on cultural immersion programs finds that they are undertaken in a vast array of settings and configurations across the globe and reflect a burgeoning interest in cultural immersions as a pedagogical tool to develop intercultural competence (Smolcic & Kanunich, 2017). Research suggests that the integration of cultural immersion programs into teacher education programs is growing with a great number of case studies and site-specific qualitative work (Kearney et al., 2014; Cavanaugh & Corbett, 2014; Keengwe, 2010). Qualitative studies are designed to achieve one of three

objectives: demonstrate the critical elements of the experience for those interested in program development, highlight the experiences of program participants regarding the impact on their personal and professional development as teachers, and garner the support of the university administration to develop and maintain immersion experiences as cohesive and integral components within teacher preparation programs (Smolcic & Kanunich, 2017, p. 51). The development and maintenance of immersion programs within initial teacher education can be challenging, as they reside outside of tertiary classroom and require additional resources and expertise, including building contacts within immersion communities, second language proficiency and academics relying on their own intercultural competence (Smolcic & Kanunich, 2017).

Cultural immersions engage individuals in meaningful, direct cross-cultural interactions, increasing the likelihood of developing cultural understanding and empathy, thus providing both affective and consciousness-raising learning experiences (Sue & Sue, 2008). Learning resulting from cultural immersion has been shown to challenge participants' biases and stereotypes, to encourage participants' self-reflections, and to help participants to confront prejudice and racism (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Pope-Davis et al., 1997). In the immersion program examined in the present study, participants were accommodated in community homestays and were physically present in a foreign culture for three weeks. During this time, participants interact with members of the host culture through talking; reflecting; questioning; and participating in meals, music, dances, and religious activities. Such programs, carefully planned to immerse participants in the 'other' culture, have the advantage of 'learning-by-doing, virtually twenty-four hours a day' (Hopkins, 1999, p. 36). Cultural immersions are also opportunities for participants to demonstrate a willingness and ability to work within culturally diverse societies (De Ricco & Sciarra, 2005). A review by Sleeter (2008) suggested that immersions of a shorter duration offer the potential for teachers to challenge deficit mindsets and foster positive orientations towards cultural difference. Within teacher education, short-

term immersion programs are viewed as a potential way of developing preservice teachers as interculturally capable to respond to increasing student diversity in classrooms (Santoro, 2014). Additionally, international research has indicated positive outcomes from short-term immersions that incorporate socio-cultural, pedagogical and language-learning experiences for preservice teachers (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006). More recent research suggests that while short-term overseas programs are a favoured form of cultural education, there is limited research on short-term overseas programs conducted in Australia (Wang, 2019).

Students who participate in a cultural immersion may experience difficulties such as not having conveniences such as potable water, witnessing extreme poverty, having language difficulties, experiencing inadequate transportation infrastructure, and feeling overwhelmed by different customs and traditions (Riberio, 2005). Nakata (2007b) captures this complexity and conceptualises it as operating at the ‘cultural interface’, an interface embodied by points of intersecting trajectories. Nakata explains the cultural interface as follows:

It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation. It is a space for many shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses ... All these elements cohere together at the interface in the everyday. (2007b, p. 199)

Nakata’s description of the cultural interface would reflect what Mezirow (2000) would refer as a disorienting dilemma and Kiely (2005) as high dissonance, Prior research by Furnham and Bochner (2001) utilised the term ‘culture learning’, where the goal of the participant is to learn the salient characteristics of the new setting. Through learning, they are better equipped to make meaning of how to conduct themselves in a socially acceptable way. Such learning stems from an emphasis being placed on ‘differing cultural values’, with the notion that ‘bothersome’

values, such as gender roles, conceptions of family, food and immense poverty disturb many participants Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Ward et al. (2001).

Difficulties typically experienced during cultural immersions can in part be minimised through preparation. Traux (2002) found that preparation can reduce the incidence of uncertainty, but as with any experience in a socio-cultural setting, there will always be individual variations as to how individuals respond and adapt. These variations, according to Traux (2008), could depend on ‘emotional stability, sociability, need for cognition, need for structure, and tolerance of ambiguity, and expectations’ (p. 2). Programs that immerse participants for extended periods of time in unfamiliar cultural situations, especially ones that do not align with the participants’ cultural norms, are likely to see participants cross cultural borders—intangible entities that are essential in the allocation of societal power and privilege (Anzaldua, 2001). Ryan and Twibell (2002) assert that educational preparation, knowledge of culture, personal characteristics and professional experiences are all variables that affect how well individuals adapt to different cultural environments. However, research by Ward et al. (2001) suggest that socially inept individuals struggle to express attitudes, feelings, and emotions, nor are they able to adopt the proper proximal posture, meaning they are generally unfamiliar with the rules of social behaviour. When planned carefully, cultural programs help participants to naturally and freely cross cultural borders, developing intercultural communication skills, cultural empathy, flexibility, and non-judgemental perspectives (Gacel-Avila, 2005).

Of salient interest, Young (2014) argues that it is often more challenging for participants to readjust to their home culture upon returning from an international or cross-cultural experience than it is for them to adjust to a new culture in a foreign community.

Young (2014) suggests that upon returning, participants are excited to reengage with all the things they missed while away but there emerges a disdain for the reality of the life they have returned to and, in some cases, participants lack the motivation to do the things they

previously enjoyed. Rather than participants picking up where they left off, many experience feelings of frustration and misunderstanding (Young, 2014). Feelings of frustration could be compounded by family and friends who do not anticipate that returning participants will have trouble readjusting: ‘The support system that students encountered when they first arrived overseas, people who are willing and ready to help them settle into their new community, is not accessible back home’ (Kohls, 1984, p. 78). Young (2014) posits that participants themselves recognise that they have changed but feel that people around them do not understand them, nor do they have the time to listen to their experiences, and, for some, they lack the ability to adequately express what they experienced abroad. The cultural dissonances (Kiely, 2005) participants encountered while abroad are now encountered again in their home culture. Young (2014) suggests that this kind of return experience is dependent on how long a person has been away. Some may adjust quickly, others may go through months of feeling disconnected and some may start to experience frustration and misunderstanding months after returning home.

## **2.6 Intercultural Competence**

Theoretical understandings of intercultural competence have grown from a diverse range of disciplines including anthropology, psychology, education, and communication (Smolcic & Katunich, 2016). A review by Chen (2014) found that various theoretical models used the following terms: ‘Intercultural competence’, ‘intercultural communicative competence’, ‘cross-cultural competence’, ‘cultural competence’, ‘interculturality’ and ‘global competence’. Fantini (2009) found the following terms to be in use: ‘multiculturalism’, ‘cross-cultural adaptation’, ‘intercultural sensitivity’, ‘global competence’ and ‘global citizenship’. While the terms ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘intercultural’ appear to be used interchangeably in the literature, the term ‘intercultural’ concerned the interaction between people from significantly different cultures, while ‘cross-cultural’ referred to comparisons between cultures (Fantini, 2009). Dervin (2015) argued that any use of these terms in the discourse of intercultural

competence is faulty, and the way in which they are used in relation to intercultural competence tends to contaminate the way in which scholars and practitioners seek to define the concept.

Martin (2015) concludes that most models include the following triumvirate: affect, behaviour and cognition. These aspects included attitudes towards cultural difference, skills for interactions and a conceptual knowledge of culture and cultures. Recently, critical orientations towards intercultural competence have been espoused, suggesting that culture should be viewed as enacted negotiations of multiple and contested group identifications and representations (Collier, 2015). These call for attention to be given to power relations, contextual factors and benefits accrued for diverse interests (Collier, 2014; Dervin, 2016; Martin, 2015).

In attempting to consolidate a definition, the consensus is that intercultural competence refers to a person's ability to function effectively across cultures (Whaley & Davis, 2007). Johnson et al. (2006, p. 530) define this ability to function as 'an individual's effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills and personal attributes to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad'. Any such ability requires individuals to identify and challenge their own cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs. As previously mentioned, it is critical for individuals to have an awareness of their own culture, attitudes, values and beliefs to prevent them projecting (consciously or subconsciously) a distorted view of the world which can lead to an unintentional blindness and potential insensitivity to the values important to members of other cultures (Bjerke, 2014). According to Yunkaporta (2009), it would be futile to enter the cultural host without 'first engaging in intense personal reflection to centre themselves in their own personal metaphors and cultural worldviews, so they can bring their highest knowledge to the table and leave their fears, limiting beliefs and issues at the door' (p. 187). Put another way, 'It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another's eyes, or at

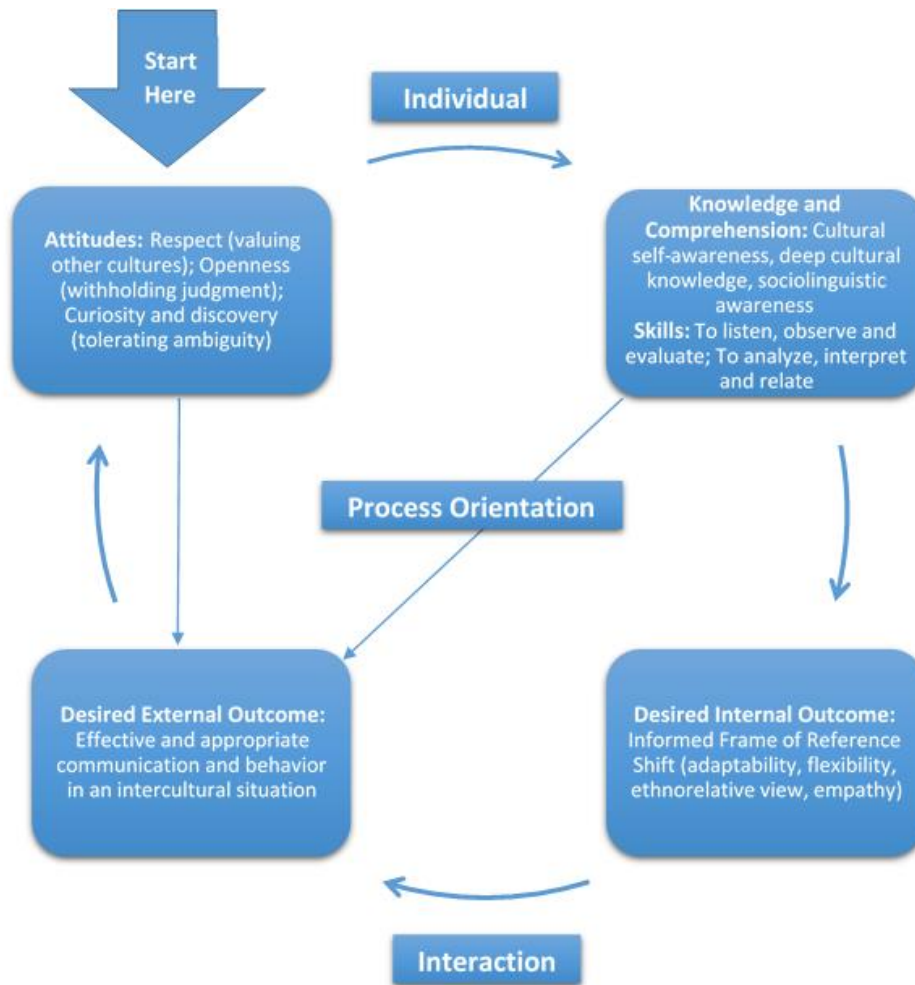
the very least to recognise that others may view the world through a different cultural lens' (Walker et al., 2014, p. 200).

As a process, intercultural competence can be described as a cumulative, progressive, and non-sequential process that requires the development of critical thinking and critical self-reflection skills (Perso, 2012; Ranzin et al., 2004; Universities Australia, 2010; Wells, 2000). Deardorff (2006) undertook the first study to document consensus from leading experts in the United States on aspects of intercultural competence, focusing in part on how, as a concept, intercultural competence could be assessed. Deardorff's (2006, 2009) findings were used as the basis for the development of her process model of intercultural competence (see Figure 2.3). The model includes the following elements: Attitudes; Knowledge and Comprehension; Desired Internal Outcomes & Desired External Outcomes. The process commences at the individual level with attitudes, which are the starting point for the development of intercultural competence. Attitudes include respect, curiosity towards other cultures and openness. Knowledge and comprehension include cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness. It is in this component that an individual also recognises their own preconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices. Skills are required to build knowledge and comprehension and include an ability to listen, observe, evaluate, and interpret so as to relate to the culture of others. From the level of the individual, the model moves to an interactional level. Intercultural interactions lead to informed internal shifts and include the ability to be adaptable, flexible, and empathetic. External outcomes are the manifestation of behaviours that allow an individual to both effectively and appropriately communicate in intercultural situations. Deardorff's (2006) model is illustrative of a simultaneous interactional process that is recursive at all stages, in that it feeds back on itself but also anticipates several specific, sequential, causal paths (Barrett et al., 2013).



**Figure 2.2**

*Deardorff's (2006) Process Model for Intercultural Competence*



*Note.* From Deardorff (2006).

This model reflects the consensual aspects of intercultural competence agreed upon by leading intercultural experts (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Deardorff (2006) posits that the development of intercultural competence begins at the level of the individual. It is at this level that attitudes required for intercultural competence are highlighted (including respect, openness, and curiosity). Additionally, there is the requirement for cultural knowledge and understanding, along with the requisite skills for effective communication and relationship building. These lead to internal shifts in personal frames of reference, which ideally lead to external outcomes or actions indicative of intercultural competence. In this model, Deardorff

(2006) defined the external outcome of intercultural competence as being effective and appropriate behaviour and communication in intercultural situations. Thus, the degree of intercultural competence will depend on the level of acquired attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills (Barrett et al., 2013).

Interestingly, experts in the field only agreed on one aspect of Deardorff's study: empathy, the ability to see from another's perspective (Deardorff, 2009). This requires cultural knowledge, a deep contextual understanding of culture that goes beyond the superficial knowledge of greetings, food, etc. to include understanding of the cultural, political, historical and social contexts.

Perhaps agreement is difficult to reach given the diversity of models that exist in the literature—30 intercultural competence models and over 300 related constructs (Johnson et al., 2006; Paige, 2004; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Models of intercultural competence include Cross's (1988) cross-cultural continuum, Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, and King and Baxter Magolda's (2005) intercultural maturity model. Developmental in nature, all these models outline stages of growth. Given the diversity of models, any instruments used to measure intercultural competence need to be able to demonstrate construct validity and ability to measure equivalence across cultures (Schaffer & Riordan, 2003; Van de Vijver & Leung, 2009).

Leung et al. (2014) suggest that the literature concerning intercultural competence can be distilled into the following three content domains: intercultural traits, intercultural attitudes and worldviews, and intercultural capabilities. Intercultural traits, in a similar vein to personality traits, are the personal characteristics that determine a steady pattern of cross-situational behaviours (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Funder, 2007). Examples of intercultural traits include tolerance of ambiguity (Bird et al., 2010; Deardorff, 2006), open-mindedness and flexibility (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001), quest for adventure (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011), patience (Kealey, 1996) and emotional resilience (Kelley & Myers, 1995). Intercultural

attitudes and worldviews concentrate on how individuals perceive other cultures through their own cultural lens. In this vein, individuals who are highly interculturally competent have a sophisticated and deeper level understanding of cultural similarities and differences that goes beyond a superficial, simplistic, and ethnocentric view of differences and similarities. Intercultural capabilities emphasise the actions required to be effective in intercultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003). These include meta-cognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003) and cultural tuning-in of holistic concern, collaboration and learning (Leung & Cheng, 2014).

It would be plausible to suggest that all people to some degree have these traits. Intercultural knowledge, which includes worldviews, concentrates on how individuals perceive other cultures. This requires cultural knowledge, a deep contextual understanding of culture (Deardorff, 2006). Interculturally competent actions result from this level of deep understanding, which, according to Deardorff (2006), result from an informed frame of reference; a frame that would include what Bennett (2004) describes as an ethnorelative view of the world. Ethnorelativism, requires an individual to assume that all groups are equal and valid and does not judge others by the standards of one's own culture (Bennett, 1998).

### **2.6.1 Intercultural Competence in Education**

There is a growing demand to educate interculturally competent teachers, resulting in the need to analyse programs that are settings for intercultural learning and the development of intercultural competences (Posti-Ahokas et al., 2020). An individual's intercultural competence is never complete but can always be enriched from continuing experience of different kinds of intercultural encounters (Barrett et al., 2014; Bok, 2009). In educational contexts, intercultural competence is often defined within theoretical models using terms such as 'intercultural communicative competence' and 'cultural intelligence' (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). For the purposes of the present study, the term 'intercultural competence' is applied, defined as the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures

based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006). Interacting effectively to develop meaningful relationships with people through travel and through immersion programs to build intercultural competence are seen as ways to supplement intellectual knowledge with experiential learning (Mio et al., 2006; Sue & Sue, 2008). Without the two operating together, any attempt at 'Cultural awareness and knowledge acquired primarily through cognitive learning may remain at an intellectual level and limit students' abilities to develop cultural competencies' (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010, p. 166). Intercultural competence as an interpersonal skill is defined by Mio et al. (2006) as one that is 'developed through education, training, experience, and practice' (p. 284). Multiple training formats and sequential experiences that serve to build on current levels of development are viewed as critical in the ongoing process of developing cultural competence (Sevig & Etkorn, 2001; Tomlinson-Clarke & Ota Wang, 1999).

Given the increasing focus within tertiary education on internationalisation, intercultural competence manifests itself differently in different disciplines. Deardorff (2006) would suggest that academic departments need to engage in collaboration and reflection around the type of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes required by students in their relevant disciplines. This method of integrating intercultural competence into course or unit design is one way of building student's capacity but does not necessarily result in students being more interculturally competent. Beyond integration into courses and learning outcomes, the pedagogy of engagement, as mentioned previously, would highlight the importance of learning that results through transformational experiences. Deardorff (2006, 2011) suggests that intercultural learning is transformational learning requiring a range of experiences, including service-learning in local and international contexts and coursework. Within teacher education, there is an increasing interrogation as to quality practice in the area of intercultural competence; the interrogation reflects research evidence suggesting that there is a positive connection between teacher education, teachers' professional competency and student learning

outcomes (Moloney & Turunen, 2020). Teacher educators are also suggested to be a key element in enabling future teachers' professional competences to engage with the diversity in the profession (Moloney & Turunen, 2020). Teacher educators have a responsibility to provide preservice teachers 'with new and alternative perspectives on what it means to meet people across today's multifaceted borders – be they national and/or social' (Dervin, 2020, p. 58). Thus, teacher education is viewed as a good place to bridge the gap between understandings of the self and others, which in turn affects the quality of education in schools (Dervin, 2020).

The need for more globally minded graduates has seen a burgeoning of literature around intercultural competence as institutions train students to function more effectively in an integrated world system (Jooste & Heleta, 2017; Gaubard et al., 1994). The websites of many Australian universities include a global perspective and sense of citizenship as leading attributes (Donleavy, 2012). At the University of Notre Dame Australia, the need for globally minded graduates is embedded within the student outcome of internationalisation, described as, 'a capacity for international and global perspectives based on an understanding and appreciation of social and cultural diversity and individual human rights' (<https://www.notredame.edu.au/>). Other graduate attributes include critical and reflective thinking, ethical responsibility, and a commitment to active citizenship. These attributes reflect the University's commitment to ensuring graduates are prepared to engage with diversity and equity.

Specifically, for preservice teachers, Kissock and Richardson (2010) note that 'educators must move beyond their comfort zone to see their world from a different perspective, discover alternative solutions to problems they face and create new approaches or integrate appropriate ideas into their setting' (p. 92). Evidence from researchers and practitioners suggests that teachers should live and/or study in diverse and unfamiliar environments as a means of enhancing their social, cultural, and emotional capacities to maximise the learning potential of their students (Walters et al., 2009). According to

Sutherland (2011), ‘international experience is perceived to be beneficial in providing student teachers with global perspectives and increasing confidence and independence in their teaching and learning. It also enhances intercultural understanding and empathy for other cultures’ (p. 151). Experiences such as these make a valuable contribution, cognitively and affectively, to preservice teachers’ personal and professional selves (Buchanan, 2004; Harbon & Smyth, 2016).

Preservice teacher graduates will increasingly be required to work across cultures; thus, a focus of many teacher education programs is ensuring they become inclusive educators. Ocha (2010) suggests that teacher preparation programs should be reimagined to encompass various knowledge, skills and pedagogies to effectively meet the demands of diverse classrooms and contexts. Therefore, one of the challenges facing teacher educators is how to prepare and inspire teachers to work in today’s linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms (Castro, 2010). The research suggests that preparing culturally responsive teachers is, at the very least, a daunting task (Gay, 2000; Lucas et al., 2008; Morrison et al., 2008). A distinction is drawn at this juncture between culturally responsive pedagogy and intercultural competence, the latter being the focus of this research. So, how do teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to respond to cultural diversity? In Australia, it could be argued that many preservice teachers belong to the dominant, white, hegemonic, English-speaking culture and, thus, may have little or no knowledge or understanding of diversity or the problems associated with it (McCormack & O’Flaherty, 2010; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Developing intercultural competence in preservice teachers is critical given that in Australia, current educational discourse often presents culturally diverse students through a deficit lens (Alford, 2014). Deficit discourses are often unchallenged by the predominantly white, Anglo-Celtic preservice teachers who ‘frequently describe themselves as “only Australian” and see non-Anglo Australians as the ones who have an ethnicity’ (Mills, 2008, p. 270).

For preservice teachers in Australia, the need for intercultural competence is further heightened considering the Australian Curriculum for schools. One of seven general capabilities embedded within the Australian Curriculum is intercultural understanding, described as:

understanding that combines personal, interpersonal, and social knowledge and skills. It involves students in learning to value and view critically their own cultural perspectives and practices and those of others through their interactions with people ... it develops students' abilities to communicate and empathize with others and to analyse intercultural experiences critically. Cultural immersion programs afford institutions the means for graduates to develop personal and professional attributes, including intercultural competence (<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>).

The role of initial teacher education programs is critical in raising awareness of the importance of globalisation and its impact on future generations. The literature suggests that teacher training programs in Western countries typically fail to adequately prepare teachers to critically 're-examine their own position of privilege and cultural superiority' or question the construction of their own identity within their own lives (Mangram & Watson, 2011, p. 97).

### **2.6.2 Intercultural Competence through Immersion Programs**

Core outcomes of a cultural immersion include participants' development of knowledge of the culture, awareness of cultural ways of being, and the similarities and differences between cultural groups (Smolicic & Katunich, 2017). However, embedding intercultural competence into immersion programs is not without contention. Much of the literature is written from a white hegemonic standpoint that privileges the perspective of the institution and focuses more on students' learning and, as previously noted, less on the impact and benefit for host communities. Giving attention to the critical issues of immersion programs is essential if we are to progress beyond cultural awareness, which educates people about peoples, cultures and

histories (Downing & Kowal, 2011; Fredericks, 2006) but fails to assist students to develop a full range of cultural competence skills.

Immersion programs by nature involve students in relationships with ‘the other’. Such an intercultural encounter is defined as:

an encounter with another person (or group of people) who is perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself ... in an intercultural interaction, one does not respond to the other person on the basis of their own individual characteristics – instead one responds to them on the basis of their affiliation to another culture. (Barrett et al., 2014 p. 7).

Buchanan (2015) posits that as many preservice teachers are from dominant cultural groups, they may have never encountered the experience of being the cultural ‘other’. Boyle-Baise (1998) measured the perceptions of preservice teachers undertaking community placement. Initially, the participants’ experiences were shaped by stereotypes, colour blindness or views of cultural deficiency. Further, it was noted that was at the end of the immersion, student reflections demonstrated understandings that were still ‘reflective of dominant position perspectives’ (Boyle-Baise, 1998, p. 58). Assumptions that participating in immersion programs will lead to positive intercultural outcomes are unwarranted (Dockrill et al., 2015; Vande Berg et al., 2012). An example of this is highlighted by Lavery et al. (2014), where one preservice teacher noted in their initial reflection that the community ‘needed to be cleaned up and cared for’ (p. 11). Such a deficit perception illustrates the need for greater integration of cultural competence content and skills into any preparation for such programs. Negative stereotypes can be confirmed if participants are not supported with a means of critically reflecting on the challenging experiences of their cultural immersion (Scoffham & Barnes, 2009; Tang & Choi, 2004). Any critical analysis of intercultural experiences requires a move away from focusing solely on the cultural aspects of intercultural competence towards a critically reflexive practice. Such practice allows individuals to embrace their subjective



understandings of reality as the basis for thinking more critically about the effects of assumptions, values and actions on others (Dervin, 2012). Further surmised in the literature is that experiences abroad, including immersions, may not lead to developing higher levels of intercultural competence, especially if participants do not engage in critical reflection and meaning making (Jackson, 2018). Research suggests that international experiences may reinforce ethnocentrism rather than assist cultural relativism (Cushner, 2004; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Cushner & Chang, 2015; Hunter, 2008). For preservice teachers, Madrid Akpovo (2019) indicates that without critical reflection, teaching experiences abroad can be more harmful than good, with experiences acting to reinforce stereotypes.

Critical reflexivity offers opportunities for individuals to consider their own beliefs and attitudes in a new light, and so gain insight into themselves and others. Engaging in critical reflection should lead to conceptual and behavioural transformation (Bennett, 2008). Such transformation is realised in the way a person interacts with the world; such interactions result from changes in perspectives around previously held assumptions (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning making can be further facilitated through intercultural mentors who can assist participants in making sense of their experiences (Schwieter et al., 2018). All aim to cultivate ‘values and dispositions such as curiosity, care, empathy, reciprocity, respect and responsibility, open-mindedness and critical awareness, and supports new and positive intercultural behaviours’ (Australiancurriculum.edu.au., 2015). Ideally, for preservice teachers, participation in the immersion coupled with a reflexive stance on their own cognition should lead to, ‘a deepened understanding of oneself, one’s responsibility, and one’s capacity to act in the world’ (Taylor, 2000, p. 157). The literature acknowledges the importance of reflection in the professional development of teachers (Ryan & Ryan, 2013), and is important to support preservice teachers in effectively processing their experiences while abroad (Vatalaro et al., 2015).

Cultural immersions offer a unique pedagogy that incorporates service, learning, international education and opportunities for intercultural learning. Through cultural

immersion, students are given an opportunity to address their own ethnocentric views of the world as they engage in a culturally different environment (Bringle, Hatcher et al., 2011).

## **2.7 Summary**

Globalisation and the resultant need for institutions to address the internationalisation of graduates has been the catalyst for a rise in the number and scope of various mobility programs. Cultural immersion experiences within higher education will continue to expand as institutions seek to ensure graduates have the requisite skills, knowledge, and understandings to relate to an increasingly globalised world. Global mindedness, underpinned by civic thinking, response to need and a call to social action, has only increased in higher education as universities seek to internationalise and produce more globally minded and civically engaged students (Yarbrough, 2016). Immersion programs afford institutions a mechanism to provide opportunities to students to foster graduate attributes, dispositions, skills, and cultural competencies that will allow them to become effective agents of personal and professional change.

Australia's cultural diversity requires teachers to have both a deep understanding of this and the ability to respond in culturally appropriate ways effectively and appropriately (i.e., culturally competent). According to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009), being culturally competent involves being aware of one's worldview, having a positive attitude towards cultural difference, and developing knowledge of cultural practices across cultures. Cultural competence is recognised in both the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014) and the Australian Curriculum for schools. Yet, despite the importance of cultural competence for effective teachers, the research indicates that preservice teachers in their final year of study feel ill-prepared to teach culturally diverse students (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2011). Boyd et al. (2019) posit that a lack of cultural knowledge, a lack of confidence in teaching in

culturally diverse classrooms, and an inability to authentically link teaching to culture are key challenges facing preservice teachers. For teacher education providers, the present study recognises intercultural competency as a key capability for effective teachers, while acknowledging that it is currently under-researched (Clinton et al., 2018). Further, it is recognised that teacher training in Western countries generally fails to adequately prepare teachers to critically ‘re-examine their own positions of privilege and cultural superiority’ (Mangram & Watson, 2011, p. 97) or question how their own identity has been constructed. One concern posed by Ochoa (2010) is that while international experiences are helpful and necessary to begin the process of exposure to another language and culture, and to gain empathy and understanding of the complexities of cultures, the question remains as to how helpful short-term experiences are for transforming teacher dispositions towards cross-cultural challenges, value orientations, language learning and sensitivity to another culture or society (p. 109). To this end, despite McCormack and O’Flaherty’s (2010) suggesting that only a few teacher education providers worldwide provide a global perspective of education, institutions are embracing a ‘scholarship of engagement’ (Boyer, 1990; Shulman & Sherin, 2004), observed as experiential education, service-learning, undergraduate and community-based research. Butin (2006) suggests that this scholarship of engagement links theory and practice, cognitive and affective learning, and institutions with communities. This paradigm breaches the seeming divide between academia and the lived experience of everyday life. As such, it promotes critical inquiry and reflective practice across complex local, national and international issues. Immersion experiences provide opportunities to holistically engage participants in learning, emotionally, physically, socially, cognitively and culturally (Trede et al., 2013). Such experiences provide opportunities that challenge cultural assumptions, beliefs and values, leading participants to becoming more interculturally competent (Boyd et al., 2019).

At the core of both immersion programs and the development of intercultural competence is the individual. While institutions continue to grapple with the complexities of how to embed immersions and intercultural competence into various programs, given the political, pedagogical, and institutional limits and pressures incumbent on institutions, the nexus between the who and how becomes critical. Here, Deardorff's (2006) process model for intercultural competence is used to analyse the perceived impact of a short-term immersion program on the development of intercultural competence in Australian pre-service teachers. The twenty-first-century graduate is required to be better able to respond to the social inequities in an everchanging world; thus, how an individual understands themselves, the way they respond to an experience and their ability to think critically will all affect their ability to be globally minded individuals and interculturally competent.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the study's methodology and research design. The research examined preservice teachers' experiences in a short-term cultural immersion program and how this immersion is perceived to have impacted the development of intercultural competence in these individuals. The chapter is presented in three sections. Section 3.1 explains the research paradigm and chosen methodology, that being a mini-ethnographic case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Section 3.2 details the research process, including the phases of the research, data collection methods, data analysis and reporting. Section 3.3 discusses the research issues and considerations.

### 3.1 Research Paradigm and Methodology

A qualitative research paradigm was used to conduct the study, as shown in Table 3.1. The study utilised an interpretivist epistemology, a subjectivist ontology, constitutive of an inductive approach.

**Table 3.1**

*Research Paradigm*

Epistemology	Research strategy	Ontology	Reasoning	Axiology
Interpretivism	Qualitative	Subjective	Inductive	Biased

Qualitative research involves interpretive and realistic practices in their natural contexts, 'to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Crotty (1998) suggests three underlying assumptions of qualitative research. First, human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Second, humans engage with their world, making sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives, understanding that we are all born into a world of

meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Third, the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community.

For the study, participants engaged with the host community and immersed themselves in experiences that included living with host families, teaching at Aberdare Ranges Primary School and Miti Mingi Village, and visiting the Giotto dump slum and New Canaan Village. Through these experiences, participants generated meanings drawn from their own cultural assumptions and worldviews. By immersing in and interacting with the host community, participants had opportunities to either generate new personal and cultural perspectives or consolidate existing ones.

According to Morrison (2002), features that define qualitative research include the study being conducted in a natural setting or context and conclusions drawn from rich sources of data. These features assume that research participants' behaviours are greatly influenced by the context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), and that the natural setting allows understanding of the possible causes of phenomena and, importantly, any effects as experienced by the participants (Briggs et al., 2012). Rich qualitative data assumes that all perspectives are valid, aimed in assisting the understanding of what is being investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Thus, researchers who conduct qualitative research are interested in how people interpret experiences, the meanings they assign to them and, ultimately, how they construct their worlds (Merriam, 2009).

In addition to the above features of qualitative research, Creswell (2009) identifies the characteristics of qualitative research to also include researcher collecting information; using multiple forms of data collection; and, through an inductive process, identifying themes and resulting generalisations. Data in the present study were collected via pre- and post-immersion questionnaires, participants' application forms, participants' reflective journals, pre- and post-

immersion semi-structured focus group interviews, and the researcher's fieldnotes. Utilising an inductive process to analyse the data allows for the identification of codes, categories and themes from which to generate findings. Mason (2002) eloquently describes the totality of qualitative research in making meaning of our social world:

It [qualitative research] allows for an engagement with and exploration of the aspects of the social world which are of interest and excitement, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate. All this can be done qualitatively using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multidimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them. Instead of editing these elements out in search of the general picture or the average, qualitative research factors them directly into its analyses and explanations. This means it has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts. (p. 1)

Contextualising the description by Mason (2002), the present study is situated within an interpretive social constructivist paradigm; the study relates to understanding reality as derived from the intersubjective meanings conveyed by the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Zimmer, 2006). The study is focused on the social world of the immersion experience. This experience, viewed through an ontological lens, acknowledges that the intersubjective meanings derived from participants are all socially constructed, in and through interactions; thus, all constructions will be subjective (Bryman, 2012). As social construction, the reality of the phenomenon relies on the experiences of the participants, meaning that all constructions are considered to be relevant and valid (Mertens, 2005). Additionally, for the context of the study, construction also includes the researcher, who, in presenting the findings, presents a specific version of the reality experienced by the participants

(Bryman, 2012). As one way to ensure the credibility of the findings and mitigate researcher bias, the study will use verbatim quotations from the data to illustrate and support any interpretations (Sandelowski, 1986). As all meanings are socially constructed, they will be ‘in a constant state of revision’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). The revision of meanings occurred throughout the immersion as participants and the researcher continually attempted to make sense of the experiences that occurred both in situ and through interactions with the cultural other. Epistemologically, for the researcher, the subjective meanings of any social interaction are understood through interpretivism (Creswell, 2007). Interpretivism is predicated on a respect for the differences between people and objects (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As this immersion experience occurs in the social world, it required a research logic that reflected the uniqueness of individuals, resulting in attempts that sought to empathetically understand human behaviour (Bryman, 2015). Part of the research logic for this study included my positioning within the study, as both a faculty academic and participant. Although, as a researcher, I sought to be objective and accurately report the lived experiences of participants, I acknowledge that my own understandings and inherent predispositions, along with my choice of data collection methods, are all contextualised through the influence of my personal and professional experiences. As such, the findings will all ‘exist within and are the products of the same contextual web’ (Zimmer, 2006, p. 315).

In summary, qualitative research seeks to explore the ways in which people make sense of their world (Fusch et al., 2017). The study’s theoretical approach adopts a social constructivist view and, through this view, knowledge and understanding evolves from the lived experiences of the participants, in and through their interactions with others (Bryman, 2012). Essentially, this study seeks to ‘develop a complex picture ... reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges’ (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). The aim of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of experiences within an immersion program to understand what impact



these experiences have on the development of intercultural competence. This sought to answer the study's main research question: In what ways can a short-term cultural immersion program impact the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers?

The methodology used within qualitative research is, therefore, the one that best addresses the research problem (Denzin, 2009). The method chosen for this study was a mini-ethnographic case study. This design has the benefit of an ethnographic approach bounded within case study protocol (Fusch et al., 2017). Utilising this method enables the research question to be answered and allows for study completion within a reasonable timeframe and budget (Fusch et al., 2017). By blending ethnography and case study, researchers are able to use the best from each design, which can also serve to mitigate the limitations of each (Fusch et al., 2017). Sections 3.1.1–3.1.3 will detail each research method used in this study.

### **3.1.1 Ethnography**

Ethnography, as a qualitative approach, uses non-numerical methods as it presents a constructivist worldview, focusing on establishing meaning and insight from the perspective of research participants (Fusch et al., 2017). Ethnographic research allows representation of participants' views as both creators and executants of their own meanings, and the ways in which they go about doing these tells the researcher what is meaningful for and in the research, adding richness and depth to the experience of conducting research (Hannabuss, 2000). Constructivist researchers rely on participants' feedback to extrapolate inductive interpretations, acknowledging that the social world is made up of multiple realities, all of which are relevant and valid (Bisman & Highfield, 2012).

Ethnography sits within the field of social and cultural anthropology. In anthropology, which as an inexact science has no formal rules, the ethnographer, 'becomes the participant/observer in the studied culture, looking out from the participants' eyes to study and better understand humans and human activity' (Fusch et al., 2017, p. 924). According to Dibley (2011), being both a researcher and participant in this study requires engaging in the world of

the participants and the world of my own perspectives. As a participant, I am embedded in the immersion with the other participants. Despite being a researcher, this shared experience does not place me in a position of authority over the research participants; rather, I am merely attempting to be credible in telling their stories (Reed-Danahay, 2002). The study acknowledges that my own cultural and experiential background, including my values and perspectives, can affect the interpretation of the study (Bernard, 2012). As a researcher, attempts to mitigate any bias are through the study's multiple data collection methods and use of data triangulation (Denzin, 2012). Ethnographers will often check their observations or understandings against interview responses to determine accuracy (Bryman, 2012). By using data from pre- and post-immersion questionnaire responses and following these up with pre- and post-immersion semi-structured focus group interviews, my interpretations as a researcher can be validated by the participants. Researcher bias notwithstanding, one of the strengths of ethnographic research is the involvement of the researcher in the setting, making deeper insight possible (Pellatt, 2003). Thus, ethnographers look for patterns, describe local relationships (formal and informal), understandings and meanings (tacit and explicit), and try to make sense of a place and a case in relation to the entire social setting and all social relationships (Parthasarathy, 2008).

Key distinctions in ethnography inform the researcher's approach, including open versus closed settings, overt versus covert ethnography, and active versus passive observation. During this study, access to various contexts in the host country was facilitated by the NGO STC. As STC was responsible for the establishment of the Aberdare Ranges Primary School and Miti Mingi Village, access to these contexts was open. Local employees of STC in Kenya facilitated homestay accommodation and visits to the Giotto dump slum and New Canaan Village. As ethnographer, my involvement was overt as my role as a researcher was fully known to the study participants (Bryman, 2012). The role assumed was that of a partially participating observer. I participated in experiences with the group, though observation did not

form the main source of data; instead, interviews and documents played a dominant role (Bryman, 2010).

There is contention within the literature as to when it is appropriate to refer to qualitative research as ethnography. Emerson (1987) and Wolcott (1990) suggest that the hallmark of ethnography is the degree of immersion in the field. Emerson (1990) further argues that ethnographers do not spend sufficient time in the field. As the present study is a detailed examination of a short-term immersion experience, rather than a detailed systematic and long-term study of a culture or peoples, it can be thought of as a mini-ethnography (White, 2009), or micro-ethnography (Wolcott, 1990). The literature suggests that the substantial time and financial costs of a traditional ethnography are the reasons why mini-ethnographies (which can be conducted for one week to one year) came into being (Storesund & McMurray, 2009). The aim of a mini-ethnography is for a researcher to understand the cultural values, norms and roles as conveyed by the participants (White, 2009)—in the case of the present study, these related to the immersion experiences in Kenya. As a mini-ethnography, this setting allows the study to be ‘conducted in a natural environment rather than in an artificially contrived setting’ (Willis, 2007, p. 237). Further, as mini-ethnography, the study does not aim to describe everything that goes on within a single event, as to do so is unobtainable (Emerson, 1983). The study aims to discover the multitude of ways in which the participants perceive, understand and behave within a particular time and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Participants’ experiences and their multiple perspectives allow for an inductive process, whereby attempts will be made to explore, discover, develop and uncover themes, patterns and causal relationships that emerge from the participants in the field (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002).

### **3.1.2 Case Study**

Case study methodology can be viewed as ‘a qualitative research design as well as a product of the inquiry’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 73), including the choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2000). Stake (2005) defines case study as ‘interest in the individual case, not by the

methods of inquiry used' (p. 443). Additionally, case study is a research strategy that examines phenomena in certain settings (Gall et al., 2007) and allows for 'in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system' (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). It focuses on the characteristics and nuances within a context, used to explore in detail the interaction of subjects (Stake, 1995). According to Merriam (1998), this range of definitions suggests, that 'there is little consensus on what constitutes a case study or how this type of research is done' (p. 26).

In qualitative research methodology, however, case study is articulated as a significant qualitative strategy or tradition along with phenomenology, ethnography, biography, and grounded theory (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit case study as a strategy of inquiry enabling numerous explorations of phenomenon, and offer the following definition:

It [case study] is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Explorations of phenomenon are undertaken in a large variety of settings, which further validates case study methodology (Creswell, 2008). In the present study, case study was chosen as both a useful and powerful form of qualitative research by which to examine cultural competence in an international immersion. Researchers (e.g., Gall et al., 2007) have determined the following three main features of case study: study of a particular event or circumstance, an in-depth study of the case and phenomenon in its real-world context and seeking to explore the event or circumstance in its natural setting. According to Orth (2015):

the first feature relates to understanding of a particular event or circumstance. The second suggests a deep study of all relevant details of a person, place, or event. The third ... seeks to explore an event, person or circumstance in its naturalistic setting. (p. 90)

For the present study, positioned in the field of education within a global context, qualitative case study is a highly valuable method of exploration and discovery.

Stake (2005) differentiates between three types of case study: instrumental, intrinsic, and collective. Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that Stake (1995) used the term 'intrinsic' to suggest that:

researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach, when the intent is to better understand the case. It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest. (p. 548)

Further, Stake (1995) suggests that while case study was concerned with in-depth exploration of a phenomena, its purpose was not the overt pursuit of generalisation. The present study might be described as intrinsic as the researcher's interest in the case is genuine, with the intent to better understand the case through in-depth exploration. However, this study can be extended to include instrumental case study (Stake, 2003). While the study involves preservice teachers, the focus is not on them as individuals but on the collective insights they provide, which attempt to deepen our understanding of the cultural immersion experience and the impact it may have on the development of intercultural competence. Through instrumental case study, the possibility exists for generalisations to be made, which may lead to improved practices within the higher education sector. These generalisations are not derived explicitly from the participants' experiences but from the understanding of these experiences as part of an immersion program and the impact of these experiences on the development of intercultural competence. In this study, intrinsic and instrumental case study are viewed as being

complementary—the intrinsic desire by the researcher to better understand the breadth and depth of an immersion experience leads to the possibility that generalisations can be made as to the development of intercultural competence, which may inform and improve practices in tertiary education.

There is a paradigmatic issue between ethnography and case study that must be reconciled for this study. In their work on paradigm positions, Guba and Lincoln (2005) posit case study to be at the post-positivism end of the qualitative research continuum, while ethnography spans the constructivism and participatory ends of the paradigm. The approach in a post-positivism case study is one that ‘seeks to exclude or ignore the influence of the researcher as somehow tainting the “data” or “evidence”, while ethnography is more inclusive of the researcher and considers the researcher to be formative in the process’ (White et al., 2009, p. 21). This understanding of post-positivism case study raises a concern in regard to researcher values and is at odds with my positioning within the study. However, the issue of case study being post positivism can be mitigated. Willis (2007) suggests that case study can be viewed as an approach often used by both critical and interpretive researchers. He suggests that case studies are about ‘real people and real situations ... rely on inductive reasoning ... (and) illuminate the readers’ understanding of the phenomenon under study’ (p. 239). Further, Willis (2007) outlines the following three features of case study methodology that support its use as a method for this study: 1) it allows the researcher to gather detailed data in an authentic setting; 2) it is holistic, supporting the notion that knowledge about people and behaviour is best understood as lived experiences in social contexts; and 3) it is able to be conducted without predetermined hypotheses (p. 240). The present study sits within these features; some of the data is collected during the immersion, knowledge is constructed through the experiences of the participants in a social context and being inductive, and there is no predetermined hypothesis. Willis (2007) would contend that there are more similarities between case study and ethnography than dissimilarities: ‘Used within an interpretivist

framework, researchers do not seek universals in their case studies, instead they seek a full, rich understanding (verstehen) of the context they are studying' (p. 240). Schwant and Gates (2018) contend that given the variety of interpretations as to what case study is, other than being a methodology to do with an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon, 'it is a fool's errand to pursue what is (or should be) truly called case study' (pp. 343–344).

In reconciling the paradigmatic issue, qualitative case study design evolved out of ethnographic design (Fusch et al., 2017). The philosophical background for mini-ethnographic case study is a qualitative, constructivist paradigm where reality is socially constructed and can best be understood by exploring the tacit, or experience-based, knowledge of individuals (Armstrong et al., 2019). Contemporary views of case design are similar to traditional case study in that they both have specific boundaries; however, within contemporary case study there is scope for individual design, which includes direct observation, focus groups, journaling and interviews (Amerson, 2011). Thus, case studies provide a humanistic, holistic understanding of complex situations and, as such, are valuable research tools (Brown, 2008). The mini-ethnographic case study in this thesis utilises data collection methods from both designs, including application forms, questionnaires, interviews, journals and fieldnotes. In essence, ethnographic case studies employ ethnographic methods and are focused on either building understandings of cultural groups or examining other socio-cultural phenomena (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). In this study, the examination focuses on the socio-cultural experiences of participants in a cultural immersion program.

### **3.1.3 Mini-Ethnographic Case Study**

As a mini-ethnographic case study (Fusch et al., 2017), this research adopts a blended design of ethnography and case study. The benefit of this design is its ability to obtain rich data, allowing the ethnographic study to be bound within case study design (Fusch et al., 2017). While typical ethnography studies have the researcher in the field for years, adopting a

blended design allows for a limited time in the field and a study timeframe that is more pragmatic and achievable for novice researchers (Fusch et al., 2017).

In utilising a mini-ethnographic case, the study is bound by time and context. Given that research using a case study design is bound in time and context, one advantage of a mini-ethnography is that the shorter time means data saturation is reached sooner (Fusch, 2013).

A prevalent issue in both ethnography and case study design is researcher bias and subjectivity. Mitigation of bias and subjectivity is the same for ethnography as for case study (2017). First, acknowledging that researchers bring their personal background, experiences, and values, which demonstrate that subjectivity and relationships exist between insider/outsider and researcher/participant; some view this as a strength, while others see it as a weakness (Draper & Swift, 2011). Relationships are present in all social research, both intentionally and unintentionally (Fields & Kafai, 2009). Fusch et al. (2017, p. 927) provide a summation of limitation and mitigation of researcher bias and subjectivity:

A researcher's cultural and experiential background will contain biases, values and ideologies which can affect the interpretation of the study (Bernard, 2012). It then becomes imperative that interpretation of the cultural phenomena represent that of participants and not of the researcher (Holloway, Brown & Shipway, 2010). Hearing and understanding the perspective of others may be one of the most difficult dilemmas that face the researcher (Fields & Kafai, 2009). The better a researcher can recognize his/her personal view of the world and to discern the presence of personal lenses, the better one is able to hear and interpret the behaviour and reflections of others (Fields & Kafai, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

As stated, what becomes imperative is ensuring that any interpretation is reflective of participants and not the researcher. Using data triangulation and appropriate data collection methods, one is able to mitigate researcher bias (Fusch et al., 2017). In addressing what constitutes appropriate data collection methods, researchers of ethnographic design study assert



that there is no universally accepted design for collecting data and that the researcher has a central role to play in data collection (Draper & Swift, 2011; Fields & Kafai, 2009). All the data collected in the present study is denoted as unstructured, in that data was not coded at the point of data collection using a closed set of analytical categories (Reeves et al., 2008). The study adopted data triangulation (Denzin, 1978), correlating data from multiple data collection methods (Denzin, 2012). Data from application forms and pre-immersion questionnaire responses were triangulated with the pre-immersion semi-structured focus group interviews. Data from journals and post-immersion questionnaire responses were triangulated with post-immersion semi-structured focus group interviews and the researcher's observations and fieldnotes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The study attempted to 'secure an in-depth understanding' through multiple data collection methods and the process of triangulation as triangulation adds 'rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5).

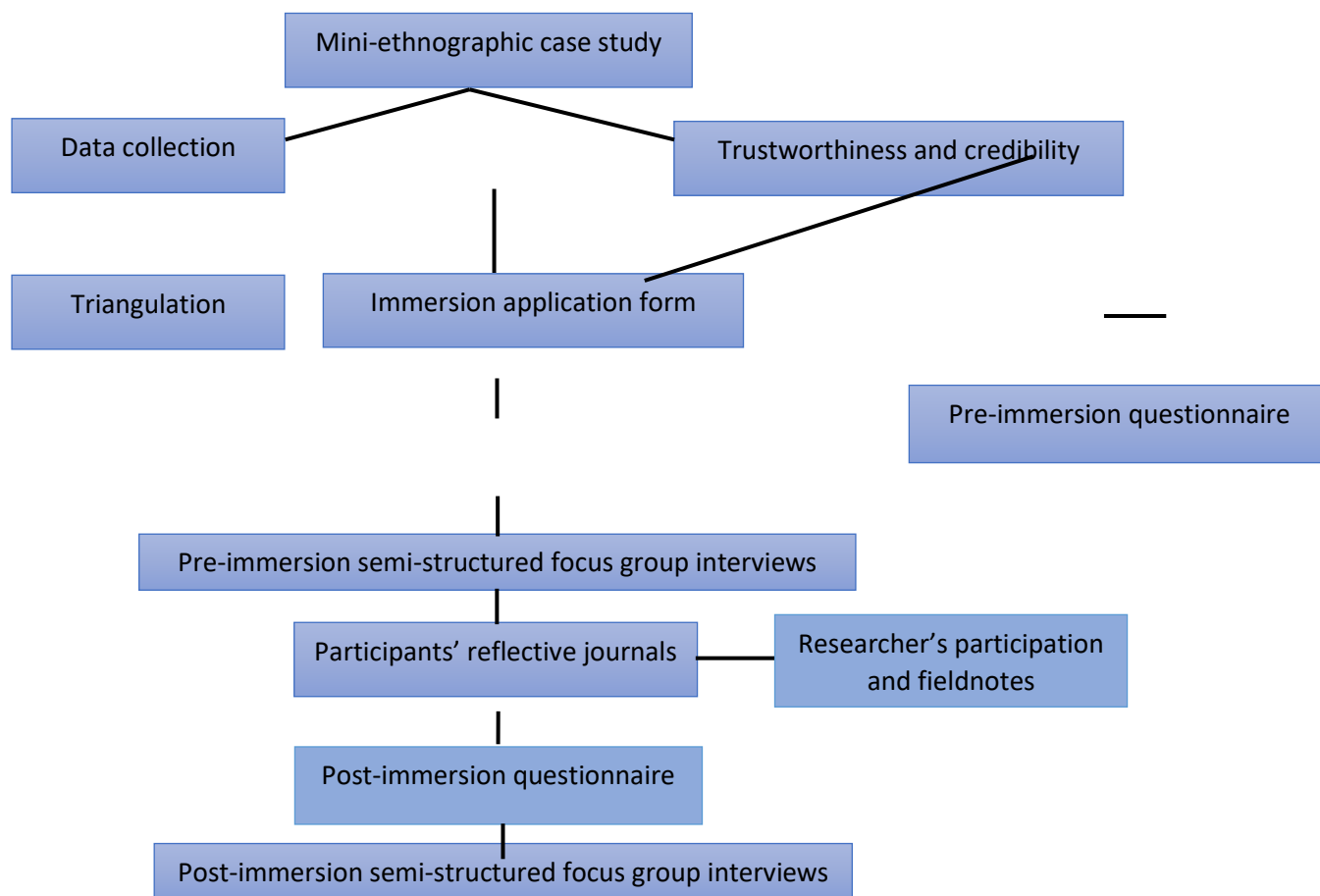
The objective of the current study was twofold. First, to examine the perceptions and experiences of participants in a cultural immersion program, and second, to better understand these experiences in relation to their impact on the development of intercultural competence. A mini-ethnographic case study design allowed examination of a field of interest and competition of the study within a reasonable timeframe and budget (Parthasarathy, 2008). The design facilitates a deepened understanding of people's behaviour, worldviews, and perspectives of life, being contingent on the circumstances and environment in which they find themselves. Part of the study aimed to identify and understand the multitude of ways in which the research participants perceived, understood, and behaved within a particular time and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). The next section details the research design process.

### 3.2 Research Process

A mini-ethnographic case study research design was adopted to study preservice teachers as participants in a short-term cultural immersion program and the impact of the experience on the development of their intercultural competence. The research process, as determined by the research design and research methodology, is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1**

*Research Process*



The research design required a reflexive stance to be taken at every step of the of the process to ensure that any knowledge construction reached is acknowledged and reflected on in light of the positioning of the researcher as a participant. Although seeking to be objective and accurately report the lived experiences of participants, there is an acknowledgement that the researcher's understandings, inherent predispositions and the choice of data collection methods

to present the study will be biased and subjective. To mitigate the bias, data triangulation was employed. For qualitative researchers to enhance dependability and credibility, Denzin (1978) developed four types of triangulation: data, methodological, investigator and theory triangulation. This study utilises within-method triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018) as data is triangulated from multiple data collection methods (participants' application forms, pre- and post-immersion questionnaires, pre- and post-immersion semi-structured focus group interviews, and researcher observation and fieldnotes) to secure an in-depth understanding of the immersion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Further, rich, in-depth data supports a direct link between triangulation and data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, ensuring any researcher interpretations were validated through the use of verbatim evidence.

### **3.2.1 Participants**

In February 2016, all students enrolled at the School of Education at the University of Notre Dame Australia were sent an email inviting them to participate in the cultural immersion program to Kenya in November to December 2016. As a co-curricular immersion conducted at the conclusion of the academic year, it was open to all students and participation was voluntary. Thirty-four preservice teachers (education students) responded to indicate their interest in participating. These students were then emailed an application form, to be completed and returned either via email or hard copy. All 34 students returned their forms and all were subsequently emailed a participant information sheet and a consent form to participate in the research study. The research study was approved by the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee. Of the 34 students who applied to participate in the immersion, a subset of 20 consented to be involved in the research study (59% of all immersion participants). This subset percentage is considered to be a homogenous representation of the entire participating group of 34 students; they are all studying an undergraduate teaching degree at the same Catholic tertiary institution, all self-funded the cost

of their participation in the immersion program, and all have the same citizenship status (Australian citizen). The self-funded nature of participation in the immersion contributed to self-selection bias. As the immersion was co-curricular, participants with the necessary financial resources and interested in cultural immersion were more to likely apply. Mitigating this bias is the focus of the study, which is not on the participants but on their immersion expectations, perspectives and experiences. Unique to qualitative research is the concept of a ‘few participants’ (Fusch et al., 2017), essentially being participants, including study participants, who have a requisite level of knowledge, skills and understanding for the researcher to answer the research question (Abrams, 2010). Further, the homogeneity of the subset addresses some of the concerns about sample size, allowing for a smaller sample (Byrman, 2012). The demographic characteristics of the subset of research participants (n = 20) are provided in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2**

*Demographic Information of Participants*

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Year of study
PS1	F	21	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS2	F	19	2 <sup>nd</sup> year
PS3	F	24	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS4	F	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS5	F	21	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS6	F	22	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS7	F	21	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS8	F	22	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS9	F	27	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS10	M	26	4 <sup>th</sup> year

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Year of study
PS11	F	23	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS12	F	24	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS13	F	22	2 <sup>nd</sup> year
PS14	F	20	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS15	F	22	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS16	M	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS17	F	20	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS18	F	21	4 <sup>th</sup> year
PS19	F	24	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
PS20	F	21	4 <sup>th</sup> year

The study followed the following data schedule:

- Pre-immersion phase
  - immersion application form
  - pre-immersion questionnaire
  - semi-structured focus group interviews (two weeks prior to immersion experience)
- During immersion phase
  - researcher's observation and fieldnotes (four entries during immersion experience)
  - participants' reflective journals
- Post-immersion phase
  - post-immersion questionnaire
  - semi-structured focus group interviews (eight weeks after immersion).

The three phases were purposeful, to provide a complete understanding of the entire immersion program from the point of application to eight weeks post returning to Australia. The pre-immersion data seek to examine the research participants' motivations and expectations prior to the experience, the during immersion data seek to capture the lived experiences of all research participants, and the post-immersion data seek to capture the research participants' reflections after the experience. Sections 3.2.2–3.2.6 detail the data approaches used in this study.

### **3.2.2 Documents: Immersion Application Form**

The application form to participate in the immersion program captured participants' demographic data, specific health-related issues, year of study and study program. For the purposes of the study, one section of the application form required participants to provide a written statement in response to the following statement and two questions:

- Introduce yourself and write a little about yourself.
- What is your personal motivation for nominating to join the Kenya trip?
- What do you expect to achieve through your participation?

Demographic data assisted the researcher to contextualise who the study participants were, with data analysis focused on the written statements. Participants' written statements ranged in length from two paragraphs (14 lines) to a full A4 page. These statements were used to analyse participants' motivations and expectations regarding participation in the immersion program. Written statements were used to triangulate data with the pre-immersion questionnaire and semi-structured focus group interviews.

Scott (1990) distinguishes between documents that are personal and those that are official. Whether personal or official, he suggests that any documents adhere to the following four criteria: authentic, credible, representative and have meaning. As each participant submitted an application form containing the written statement, the documents are deemed

both authentic and credible. Each participant submitted the same application form with responses to the same guiding statements, enabling the researcher to make meaning for the study. The application form met the above criteria and assisted in providing initial insight into participants' motivations and expectations regarding participation in the immersion program.

### **3.2.3 Questionnaire**

The use of pre- and post-immersion questionnaires allowed a structured technique to collect one source of primary data (Bell, 1999). After participants consented to be involved in the study, the pre-immersion questionnaire was sent via email to elicit responses to the following questions:

- What expectations do you have of participating in the Kenya immersion?
- What are you most/least looking forward to as part of the Kenya immersion?

The aim of the pre-immersion questionnaire was to capture data to qualify participants' expectations of the immersion experience prior to departure.

The post-immersion questionnaire elicited responses to the following questions:

- Have you been impacted personally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Have you been impacted professionally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Reflecting back on the culture in Kenya, what were some things that stood out for you?
- What have you found most confronting since returning to Australia?

The post-immersion questionnaire was sent via email to all research participants two weeks after returning to Australia. Two weeks was deemed a sufficient period of time for participants to have reconnected with family and friends and reflected on their experiences. The purpose of this questionnaire was for participants to provide critical reflection on the immersion experience, any perceived personal and professional impact, and any challenges they faced upon returning home to Australia.

The design of the pre- and post-immersion questionnaires aimed to elicit detailed responses from participants to provide reliable and relevant data (Beiske, 2002). The questionnaires utilised open-ended questions, permitting a wide range of responses (Beiske, 2002).

### **3.2.4 Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews are used in both mini-ethnography and case study design, though more typically in case study research (Fusch et al., 2017). Focus group interviews are useful for a mini-ethnography study as they can elicit data in a shorter timeframe than individual interviews (Fusch et al., 2017). Focus group interviews are a flexible, unstructured discussion between the members of the group and the facilitator in a convenient location (Brockman et al., 2010; Jayawardana & O'Donnell, 2009; Packer-Muti, 2010).

Typically, 'participants are asked how and what types of questions to elicit their thoughts, perspectives, and opinions' (Fusch et al., 2017, p. 931). This study included two focus groups, each consisting of five members, and each interview was held in a predetermined room at the University of Notre Dame Australia. Each of the 10 participants voluntarily agreed to attend one of the two focus groups interviews. Interviews were scheduled according to the availability of participants.

Regarding focus group size, Peek and Fothergill (2009), confirm that focus group interviews between three and five participants run more smoothly as smaller groups allow all participants an opportunity to speak and there is less chance for one person to dominate, thus creating greater opportunity for a diversity of opinions to be expressed. One of the limitations of focus group interviews is that participants may pressure others to conform to a group consensus (Fusch et al., 2017). The pre-existing relationship between the focus group participants and the researcher mitigated this and allowed for natural, open and honest discussion (Kitzinger, 1994). Each interview was audio-recorded and the recording digitally transcribed (Appendix F). There was no set time limit for the interviews and each lasted for



approximately 40–45 minutes. Guiding, open-ended questions were posed during each of the interviews:

- Pre-immersion interviews:
  - Why did you decide to take part in the immersion to Kenya?
  - What are your expectations of the immersion?
  - What are you most looking forward to and why?
  - What are you least looking forward to and why?
  
- Post-immersion interviews:
  - How was the immersion experience, did it meet expectations?
  - What stood out for you the most and why?
  - What challenged you the most during the immersion?
  - What challenged you after returning home to Australia?
  - In what ways has the immersion impacted you personally?
  - In what ways has the immersion impacted you professionally?

The pre-immersion interview questions enabled a fuller understanding of participants' motivations to participate and expectations prior to the immersion. The post-immersion interview questions enabled better understanding of participants' experiences during the immersion, the perceived impact of the immersion on them (personally and professionally) and the challenges they faced after they returned home.

The order and exact wording of the questions were left to my discretion as interviewer during the interviews (Bryman, 2001; Hessler, 1992). The interviews aimed to provide a 'rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impressions of people in their own words' (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 140). The interviews were method with which to triangulate data and answer the main research question (Minichiello et al., 1995). Removing all

bias in the interviews would have been impossible given the nature of humans; mitigation of bias through triangulation was undertaken (Amerosn, 2011; Chenail, 2011).

### **3.2.5 Reflective Journals**

Reflective journaling is not linked to timeframes and allows the researcher to reflect on data gathered in a short period of time, making it a useful data collection method for a mini-ethnographic case study (Fusch et al., 2017). All 34 immersion program participants were issued with a diary (regardless of whether they were participating in the study), which they took with them to Kenya. For each journal entry, research participants were asked to include the date, a factual log of the event(s) that occurred and a personal reflection that included their thoughts and feelings (Denscombe, 1998). The number and length of entries was left to the discretion of each participant, allowing participant autonomy as to what they wanted to write about and when they chose to write (Meth, 2003). Such autonomy may be perceived as a limitation (Meth, 2003). However, as the journals constituted one of multiple data collection methods, they provided the participants with scope as to what they wrote about and reflected on, thereby providing additional data which was triangulated with the data from the other methods (Meth, 2003).

At the end of the immersion, participants were asked to submit their diaries to the researcher. Participant journals varied in two ways: the number of entries made and the experiences recorded. Recorded experiences included homestay experiences, teaching at Aberdare Ranges Primary School, visits to New Canaan Village and time spent at Miti Mingi Village. Experiences that had a profound effect on participants elicited longer and more critical entries, most evident with the experience of the Giotto dump slum.

### **3.2.6 Fieldnotes**

Fieldnotes are useful for a mini-ethnography case study as they can be collected over a short period of time (Fusch et al., 2017). Fieldnotes allowed the researcher as a participant to remember and record activities and events (Burgess, 1991). Research has identified four types

of notes used by ethnographers in the field: observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and personal notes (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). Interestingly, Walford (2009) suggests that there is no singular note-taking strategy in ethnographic research.

In this study, the researcher's fieldnotes were a combination of observations and personal entries. As both a researcher and participant, observation notes were written for each of the following critical experiences: Aberdare Ranges Primary School, Giotto dump slum and New Canaan Village. Each of these experiences resulted in recorded observations, capturing what was observed and heard. Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) identify personal notes to include feelings and thoughts about the study, which can also comprise a reflective journal. Sangasubana (2011) suggests that personal notes help identify personal bias that may affect the researcher's interpretation of the data.

Attempts were made to have each of the three fieldnotes written up as soon as practically possible after each experience. Each fieldnote was entered directly into Microsoft Word documents on the researcher's laptop. The primary role of these fieldnotes was to provide a method to triangulate data from participants' journals, post-immersion questionnaire responses and post-immersion focus group interviews.

### **3.2.7 Data Analysis**

Qualitative research approaches are diverse and complex (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Given this, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that data analysis is the most difficult and critical aspect of qualitative research; the researcher, by adopting a reflexive stance, is able to gain a deep understanding of the topic of study (Basit, 2003). 'Coding is the process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way' (Creswell, 2015, p. 156). Rather than being a technical exercise, it is a dynamic, intuitive and imaginative process of inductive reasoning, reflection and theorising (Merriam, 2009). Raw data fails to assist the researcher to understand the socio-cultural process being studied, or the way the participants view it, unless the data are

systematically analysed to illuminate the current situation (Merriam, 2009). The researcher draws on actual experience with the context, participants and documents to interpret the data (Bogdan & Bilkin, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). To begin the process of data analysis (Creswell, 2007) requires data to be organised or managed. The data for the present study was organised into computer folders/files (except for three hardcopy diaries), with one folder for each of the three study phases (each containing sub-folders for each data collection method).

The study sought to elicit and deepen an understanding of preservice teachers' knowledge, perceptions and experiences of a cultural immersion program and the subsequent impact of the immersion on the development of their intercultural competence. In considering the various qualitative practices for data analysis, reflexive thematic analysis was employed in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis is suited to datasets related to personal experiences and perceptions—thus, it was the most suitable form of analysis for this study.

This method was used to systematically identify, organise and interpret patterns of meaning across a qualitative dataset (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2014). According to Braun and Clark (2006), patterns are identified through a process of six key steps: data familiarisation, generating and developing initial codes, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the report.

These six steps are recursive in nature, allowing for continual revisiting and reflexivity on the part of the researcher, facilitating engagement with and interrogation of the data. As most qualitative researchers analyse their own data (Basit, 2003), the decision was made to personally complete the task of coding and analysing the data. As the majority of the database was captured electronically, coding and data extracts were done through cut and paste (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982) into Microsoft Word documents. While performing analysis in this manner was time consuming, the reading and re-readings of datasets to assign codes and develop

themes allowed for substantial engagement by the researcher with the overall study (Yardley, 2000). The processes undertaken for each step of the analysis are outlined below.

As a mini-ethnographic case study, it was important to gain a sense of the entire database (pre-, during and post immersion). Data familiarisation was achieved through reading and re-reading each of the datasets contained in computer folders. The pre-immersion folder contained application forms, pre-immersion questionnaire responses and two pre-immersion focus group interview transcriptions. The during immersion folder contained individual participants' journal entries and three researcher fieldnotes. The post-immersion folder contained post-immersion questionnaire responses and two post-immersion focus group interview transcriptions. For each re-reading of the dataset, the researcher jotted down notes, ideas and key phrases relevant to the research aim.

Coding is significant for analysis as it begins to make sense of the data to establish a framework of thematic ideas (Gibbs, 2007). Codes are succinct labels that identify key features of the data relevant to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and in qualitative inquiry, this is most often a word or short phrase (Saldana, 2015). To generate and develop initial codes within each dataset, words and or phrases repeated in the set were recorded. Once this was complete, words, word synonyms and phrases were grouped and entered into a Microsoft Word document and assigned an initial code. Once codes were assigned, each dataset was re-read, and assigned codes were carefully reconsidered as to whether they captured the broader pattern of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data extracts were then assigned to each code to review and ensure the viability of any initial theme—defined as patterns of shared meaning, underpinned by the main idea (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After initial themes were confirmed, they were reviewed against the assigned, collated data extracts to ensure that the story of the dataset was reliable, valid and able to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). If the initial theme accurately reflected the story of the dataset and assisted in answering the overall research question, it was then

assigned as the theme. Assigned themes for each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowed for description and interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998; Gavin, 2008). The structure of the analytic narrative is further described in the next section.

### **3.2.8 Reporting**

The final phase of reflexive thematic analysis involves interlacing the analytic narrative with data extracts and contextualising the analysis with existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When writing up an interpretivist research study, researchers are able to draw on two presentation strategies: 1) they can choose to report as separate results and discussion sections, with the results containing the emergent thematic analysis and the latter linking the analysis back to existing literature, or 2) compile both elements into a single results and discussion section (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In considering which style of reporting to adopt, the researcher was cognisant of the reader: ‘If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 120). Reports are typically rich with detail, providing insights into participants’ experiences of the world, and, as such, ‘may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience’ (Stake, 1978, p. 5) and thus more meaningful.

The results and analysis for the study are presented in three sections in Chapter 4, each section constitutive of a journal article. The intent of adopting this reporting style is to convey to the reader a collective sense of the entire immersion journey—from pre-immersion, to during immersion, to post immersion—by reporting and discussing themes and results. In keeping with the format of a journal article, each section has a title, abstract, keywords, introduction, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. The strength of structuring the chapter in this manner is that it allowed for the researcher to also engage in the process of publication during candidature as well as providing evidence to examiners that the thesis is of a publishable standard.

In addition to reporting on the immersion program, the study also examined the impact of the program on the development of intercultural competence. Chapter 5 utilises the analysis undertaken in Chapter 4 to highlight and interpret intersections between the immersion and intercultural competence.

### **3.3 Research Issues and Considerations**

#### **3.3.1 Ethical Considerations**

The research presented in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the guidelines for research ethics as outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2018). Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Notre Dame (Approval Number 016141S).

Ethical considerations in this study are those common to research involving people. Bouma (2000) states the main concerns in research involving human participants are informed consent, individual privacy and confidentiality, and awareness by the researcher of the power dimension of the relationship between the researcher and participants.

All research participants were students in undergraduate education courses at the Sydney campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia. A researcher is required to demonstrate sensitivity to and respect of participants' basic human rights of freedom and privacy (Shotton & Seedhouse, 1998). Informed consent is the foundation for ethical research, and informed consent to be involved in the research was obtained from participating students prior to any data collection (Howe & Moses, 1999). Confidentiality in reporting of the data was attained through assigning each participant a unique identity code ('PS' and a number, for example, PS1 and PS2).

A relationship existed between the researcher and participants, with the researcher being both an academic at the University of Notre Dame Australia and a participant in the immersion program. This relationship is openly acknowledged, and every effort was made to

address the ethics associated with this, notably the power dynamic between myself and the participants. Participants in the immersion program understood that their involvement in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

### **3.3.2 Data Trustworthiness**

To capture the complexity and to make sense of the human experience, qualitative research needs a set of interpretative practices that make the world more discernible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Glense and Peshkin (1992) state that the use of multiple data collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data: ‘the more sources tapped for understandings the more believable the findings’ (p. 24). Qualitative researchers defend the integrity of their work by different means—trustworthiness, credibility, applicability, and consistency—which are evaluative criteria (Leininger, 1994). It is accepted that qualitative research should be ethical, important, intelligibly described, and use appropriate and rigorous methods (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Data trustworthiness in a qualitative study is comprised of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman, 2012). These are discussed below.

#### ***3.3.2.1 Credibility***

Credibility is the criterion for evaluating the internal validity of qualitative research. Rigour in data collection and analysis is maintained through the data selection (those being most constituent of qualitative research), allowing data to be triangulated. Researcher bias becomes a threat to credibility when relying on a single measurement instrument (Amerson, 2011). The application of triangulation to multiple sources of data enhances the credibility of study results (Stavros & Westberg, 2009) and enables data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For triangulation, the researcher analyses the data and then presents the results so that others are able to comprehend the experience of a phenomenon (Denzin, 1989). For this study, triangulation of data occurred in the pre and post phases of the immersion. In the pre phase, application forms were triangulated with questionnaire responses and focus group interviews.



In the post immersion phase, questionnaire responses were triangulated journal entries and focus group interviews. Researcher field notes and observations recorded during the immersion were triangulated with student journals. Credibility can be further demonstrated through the use of verbatim quotations from the data to illustrate and support interpretations (Sandelowski, 1986). The use of verbatim quotations also further assists to mitigate researcher bias (Amerson, 2011). Finally, as this study follows three sequential phases—pre-, during and post immersion— the reviewer should be able to follow the progression of events and understand their logic via adequate description, explanation and justification of the methodology and methods (Kitto et al., 2008).

### ***3.3.2.2 Transferability***

Transferability is represented by the ability of the study's findings to be transferred to other studies (Roe & Just, 2009), regardless of populations, settings, or times (Aastrup & Halldorsson, 2013). The findings of a qualitative study are drawn from various contexts, with significance apportioned to the aspect of the social world being studied (Bryman, 2012). As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), whether these findings 'hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue' (p. 316). Thus, one should leave the transferability of the findings to the reader and future researchers to determine, rather than the original researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Instead, the focus of a qualitative study should be on thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), which, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), provide others with the base for making decisions as to transferability of the findings to other contexts.

### ***3.3.2.3 Dependability***

To address trustworthiness, the criterion of dependability requires the researcher to ensure complete records are kept of all phases of the research process (Bryman, 2012). As previously mentioned, all datasets (except three hardcopy diaries) were electronic and filed in computer folders. Most of the coding and analysis was also done electronically. Researcher

notes, which were jotted down on paper after the second reading of each dataset, remain as hard copies. Essentially dependability requires the researcher to ensure they are ‘being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research’ (Robson, 2002, p. 176). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that research credibility and dependability are closely linked, suggesting that in practice, credibility ensures dependability. One way to achieve dependability is by ensuring the research process is reported in detail, thus enabling future researchers to repeat the study (though not necessarily achieve the same results) (Shenton, 2004).

#### ***3.3.2.4 Confirmability***

While recognising that complete objectivity is impossible for qualitative inquiry (Bryman, 2012), the notion of confirmability relates to researcher objectivity, requiring steps to be taken to ensure the findings are drawn from the experiences, perspectives, and ideas of the participants, rather than the values and biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Data triangulation was used to reduce the effect of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), a further criterion for confirmability is for the researcher to disclose their predispositions, requiring that the research report include the researcher’s beliefs underpinning decisions made, justification for methods selected and associated limitations. This researcher’s predispositions were addressed in Chapter 1, and justifications and limitations are addressed in this chapter.

#### **3.3.3 Strengths and Limitations**

The blended methodology is one of the main strengths of this study. As a mini-ethnographic case study, the design enabled rich data to be obtained within a short timeframe and reasonable budget. Collection of qualitative data was also a strength, with a complete narrative enabled by data collection in pre-, during and post-immersion stages, and multiple data sources allowing for triangulation. All contributed to the study’s trustworthiness.

Limitations or concerns around the ethnographic case study include the researcher being embedded, few participants and transferability of the study results (Fusch et al., 2017).

Traditional ethnography requires that the researcher be embedded in the culture for an extended period of time to collect data (Fusch, 2013). For this study, the researcher being embedded with the participants was explicit (Bryman, 2012) and for a short period of time (Fusch et al., 2017). The relatively ‘few participants’ (Fusch et al., 2017) had a level of knowledge, skills and understanding sufficient to both engage in the cultural immersion and allow the researcher to answer the research question (Abrams, 2010). As previously mentioned, the homogeneity of the subset addresses some of the concerns about sample size, allowing for a smaller sample (Byrman, 2012). Limitations concerning transferability of the findings were addressed in Section 3.3.2.2.

Further limitations related to utilising a methodology such as the one employed are varied. The power imbalance between the researcher and participants is clear. However, the ethnographic aspect of embedding with the participants negates some of the potential for participants feeling disempowered by the process as the experiences were shared. The self-selection bias of the research participants is negated by the focus of the study.

#### **3.3.4 Summary**

This chapter presented the study methodology and data collection methods, situated within a qualitative interpretivist paradigm. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Simons, 2009), the subjectivity and limitations of the methodology and study design were outlined.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the study results and comprises three sections organised as journal articles, corresponding to the pre-, during and post-immersion phases of the research. Such a form of presentation allowed for a more contextualised reporting of the results and for each section to be submitted for peer review. It is acknowledged that parts of Chapters 1–3 will be repeated in this chapter. All citations are listed in this thesis’s reference list. Section 4.1 presents the pre-immersion data, analysis, and findings; Section 4.2 presents the during immersion data, analysis and findings; and Section 4.3 reports the post-immersion data, analysis and findings. Section 4.1 has been submitted and accepted for publication in the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*. Section 4.2 and Section 4.3 will be submitted in 2021, with the necessary changes made to comply with the target journal guidelines.

### **4.1 An Intercultural Immersion: Personal, Professional and Cultural Expectations of Student Participants<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Abstract**

Increasing global migration across geographical, linguistic and cultural borders has more than ever before, resulted in Australian classrooms being more culturally and linguistically diverse. For pre-service teachers it is of critical importance that they, through experiences, develop a global world-view and have the knowledge, skills and understanding to effectively respond to cultural diversity, and in doing so recognise their ability to be agents for social change. As such, pre-service teacher education programs are capitalising on ways to enhance pre-service teachers’ ability to appropriately respond to cultural diversity. Intercultural immersion programs allow opportunities for students to be embedded in the breadth and depth of human

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<sup>2</sup> This co-authored article (by J. Maakrun and S. Kearney) has been accepted for publication in the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*.

experience to better understand themselves and the cultural other. This particular program involved 20 Australian pre-service teachers in a 3-week immersion to Kenya. This article explores the expectations leading into the program as a means to better understand participants' perceptions prior to their departure in order that the entire immersion journey may be fully documented. Analysis of survey responses, semi-structured focus group interviews and written applications, revealed expectations that fell into three categories: personal, professional and cultural.

### **Keywords**

Expectation, intercultural, immersion, personal, professional, cultural, altruism, egoism, relationships.

### **Introduction**

Immersion programs are embedded within the scope, volume and complexity of the variety of activities offered within higher education institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). These kinds of programs, which involve students volunteering, have received increased attention over recent years (Clayton, Bringle & Hatcher, 2012; Mooney & Edwards, 2001). Increased attention is in part the result of these programs affording institutions the mechanism to provide opportunities to students to foster graduate attributes and build dispositions, skills and competencies (Hill, Walkington & France, 2016; Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018). Cultural immersion programs place participants in a cultural context different to their own, often living in a homestay and participating in some form of assistance within the community.

Immersion programs as educational pedagogy can be a powerful vehicle to enhance students' global mindedness and awareness of social issues. Advocates support the notion that it enriches individuals' sense of community and belongingness to something greater than themselves (Lisman, 1998) and further enhances a respect for, and tolerance of, diversity. This allows for a greater awareness of societal issues whilst developing a greater moral and ethical sense (Cole, 1994; Cooper, 2017). Intercultural Immersion programs are those that

intentionally cross a cultural boundary and integrate cultural learning of self and others (Campus Compact, 2002). Thus, international activities where students cross cultural boundaries, allow participants an opportunity to recognize the importance of culture, its connection to community, and the relationships among and between language, culture and practice (Roose, 2001). Butin (2003) suggests that for students, the experience of engaging with the cultural other allows them to better understand, respect and engage with the cultural plurality of diverse societies. This kind of cultural perspective ‘privileges the affective, ethical, and formative aspects of immersions, concerned with linking these experiential components to local, national and international issues’ (Butin, 2003, p. 1681).

Increasing global interconnectedness has allowed increasing engagement with diverse cultures, beliefs and events that transform understandings of the world (Bamber, Lewin & White, 2018). Of the many developmental outcomes of these types of global activities is intercultural competence (Meyer-Lee & Evans, 2007). Intercultural competence requires a level of cultural knowledge, values and dispositions to act in an informed manner and to engage in effective intergroup communication, so as to foster and enable community growth across social, cultural, political, environmental, geographic, and economic boundaries (Whaley & Davis, 2007).

Australian society, like many others in our globalised world, is culturally diverse. One in five Australians has a language background other than English, with there being over 300 separately identified languages. Further, approximately 49% of all Australians were either born overseas or had at least one parent who was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In 2018, over 280 000 students enrolled in New South Wales Government schools identified as having a language other than English, with a total of 239 languages spoken (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2018). Undergraduate teacher education programs within Australia, are being contextualised and transformed as they consolidate a set of national professional teaching standards (Australian Institute for Teaching and School

Leadership, 2011; Darling-Harmond, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). Reflected within these standards is the key tenet of developing greater intercultural competence. It has become critical for teachers to have the requisite pedagogical knowledge and skills to meet the increasing cultural diversity of students (Gay, 2010). A challenge for teacher education providers is to understand how pre-service teacher education programs can be tailored to address cultural diversity that can assist in the preparation of culturally responsive teachers (Siwatu, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers are able to acknowledge, respond to, and utilise teaching pedagogy which ensures equity of educational outcomes is upheld for students from all cultures. Thus, cultural responsiveness requires teachers to learn and teach through the lens of global mindedness, which includes the capacity to teach students how their actions and the actions of others affect people in all parts of the world, thus encouraging students to be agents of change driven by their own critical thinking and actions (Chareka, Leyte & Mills, 2010). As teacher education students will increasingly be working in a globally connected world, one challenge as suggested by Mangram and Watson (2011) is whether they will they be adequately prepared to respond. This challenge is further supported by Miller (2015), who contended that pre-service teacher education in Australia lacks training of competencies and lacks the development of understanding of the cultural and social aspects of diverse classrooms. Research data resulting from interviews conducted with pre-service teachers by Maloney and Saltmarsh (2016) found that more than 50% expressed feeling unprepared to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

The role that teacher educators play is crucial to preparing young teachers to respond to the challenges of diversity, equity and global interconnectedness. McCormack and O'Flaherty (2010) further suggest that internationally only a few pre-service teacher education programs provide a global perspective of education. Maloney and Saltmarsh (2016) would argue that, 'Pre-service teacher education programs must provide a dynamic and individually stimulating educational experience with the development of new strategies to build critical enquiry and to

stimulate individual responsibility for social justice in education' (p. 88). Further, traditional teacher training in Western countries fails to adequately prepare teachers to critically 're-examine their own positions of privilege and cultural superiority' (Mangram & Watson, 2011, p. 97) or further question how their own identity has been constructed.

For pre-service teachers, intercultural immersion programs can allow for the acquisition of new understandings about life, culture, self and others and have the potential to lead to changes in classroom practices (Walters, Garii & Walters, 2009). Given this potential, coupled with the personal and professional outcomes of immersion programs, a detailed consideration of the expectations of students leading into such programs would allow for a holistic understanding of the journey from participants' expectations to their in-country experiences and finally the reflections of the entire immersion experience: prior to, during and post.

Curtis and Ledgerwood (2018) contend that when preparing international educational opportunities for students, educators should have a clear understanding of participants' motivations and expectations. As such, his paper will position participants' expectations of their immersion, prior to departure, through the lens of motivation. Two constructs that often appear in motivation literature, altruism and egoism, can be used to analyse participants' expectations. In electing to participate in an immersion program, expectations, in a similar vein to motivations, is multifaceted and complex (Fitch, 1987; Martin, 1994; Parnell, 1990). Finkelstein, Penner and Brannick postulated that some people want to help others for altruistic reasons, whilst others may be egoistically driven (2005). In simple terms, if placed within a paradigm, egoism asserts that motives, and for the purposes of this article expectations, are self-seeking, whilst altruism maintains that expectations are primarily driven by a desire to help others (Martin, 1994). The sustainability of programs that rely on volunteer participation are highly dependent on appropriately matching the motivational concerns of the participants with contexts that can satisfy the stated outcomes of the intended program (Clary & Snyder, 1999). Underlying motives to volunteer for such programs may initially be motivated by



altruism, but some research suggests that more self-seeking motivations are important for continued participation (Ryan, Kaplan & Grese, 2001). Shye (2009) classified the causes for volunteering, and of giving in general, into three classes: demographic antecedents, which include the personal resources required to volunteer; motivations, which are more specific and necessary for individuals to want volunteer; and circumstances, the opportunities available, which facilitate and prompt volunteering to actually take place.

The notion of helping the other, or the expectation of wanting to help the other, elicits a degree of empathic concern, a concern that when viewed through an affective lens is one that promotes selfless motivation (Batson, 1998). Such involvement is manifested through the contribution of time, energy and resources, with the sole intention of helping others. For Australians, the notion of helping others through donating money or volunteering is perhaps culturally embedded. In 2018, Australia ranked second out of 146 countries in the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) World Giving Index. This index reports on insights into the nature of giving and of global generosity.

Batson (1991) postulated that the ultimate end-goal of volunteering should be used to differentiate whether the motivation (or expectation) is egoistic or altruistic, asserting that even if both types are present it is the ultimate goal that defines whether it is egoistic or altruistic.

As altruism is often cited as a principal motivation to volunteer, research by Gage and Thapa (2012) suggests that many people seek out opportunities to provide service to others as a way to satisfy their own needs. Embedded within social exchange theory, which contends that all interactions are based on an exchange of costs, *altruism* results from what one gives and *egoism* results from what one receives in return (Phillips, 1982). Whilst some researchers disagree that an exchange can be of equal benefit (Eby, 1998; Stoecker & Tyron, 2009), others like, Musick and Wilson (2007) believe that serving others is mutually beneficial for the donor and recipient. Related to the construct of social exchange is social obligation. Social obligation is defined as the goal of repaying something back to society. A study of college students by

Fitch (1987) classified motivations for volunteering into egoistic, altruistic and social obligation. Egoistic reasons included the sense of satisfaction in helping others; altruistic reasons included being concerned about others less fortunate; and social obligation included both the desire to give back, because they were fortunate, and the hope that if needed others would do the same for them. Within both social exchange and social obligation theory is the expectation that if one gives, one will receive. Expectancy theory is often applied to the motivation of work and asserts that individuals will be motivated to the extent to which they believe their behaviour will lead to the outcomes they personally desire (Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Miller & Grush, 1988; Steers & Porter, 1983). Three factors that affect behaviour are: the need for achievement and the resultant sense of pride in the accomplishment; the need for affiliation with others; and the need for influence or impact on others. Mounter (1985) contends that all individuals are motivated by these needs, but that the degree of motivation is influenced by both the intensity of the needs and the degree of expected satisfaction.

### **Methodology**

The research design was situated within an interpretive social constructivist paradigm. The advantages of working within this paradigm is that it allowed for multiple representations of participant perceptions contained within their individual frames of reference and, thus, produced qualitative evidence to describe these adequately. The researcher is positioned within the study as both a faculty academic and participant in the immersion. This positioning was purposeful as it allowed interaction with the participants so as to explore and build a detailed understanding of experiences of cultural competence within an international immersion program. Quantitative researchers may argue that qualitative researchers should remain objective; however, this study would argue that researcher subjectivity is advantageous as it seeks to gain insider knowledge in order to accurately report the lived experiences of participants. The choice of data collection methods to present the findings, are contextualized

and thus all 'exist within and are the products of the same contextual web' (Zimmer, 2006, p. 315).

Limitations of this study include one fundamental distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research and for this study, being that the researcher is 'the main instrument for data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and representation' (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Within research this characteristic is contentious, but as mentioned above, this positioning allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the total immersion experience. Given the relatively small number of participants, a further limitation is the generalisability of these findings.

### **Participants**

This particular study centres on a group of 20 pre-service teacher education students, who in 2016 elected to voluntarily participate in an intercultural immersion program to Kenya. These 20 constitute a subset out of the total number of 34 pre-service teacher education students who had volunteered to participate in the program. These 20 students equated to 59% of all participants. This percentage is considered to be a representation of the entire group in that they are all studying an undergraduate teaching degree at the same Catholic tertiary institution, all self-funded the cost of the immersion program and all share the same citizenship status. The percentage of participants addresses some of the concerns about sample size and for this study allows for a smaller sample to be used (Byrman, 2012). The majority of the participants in the subset were females (90%,  $n = 18$ ), with two males (10%). All participants were aged between 19 and 27 years old and all were primary pre-service teacher education students studying at a private Catholic university in Sydney. Eighteen of the 20 participants were in their final two years of their four-year degree program.

For this group of participants, their socio-economic status was such that they were able to self-fund their participation in the program, a program that was conceived by academics within the institution and faculty in which these students were studying and one which was conducted outside of the parameters of an academic year. In addition, participants raised

additional funds that were used to purchase school-based resources and materials that were donated to the school community in Kenya. The school community, Aberdare Ranges Primary School, was founded in 2011, by the Australian-based, not-for-profit organisation So they Can.

### **Data**

Data collection included personal statements, questionnaire responses and two semi-structured focus group interviews. Personal statements formed one section of the application to participate and sought to elicit information in relation to previous travel experience, volunteer work, personal motivation for nominating to join the immersion and what they hoped to achieve by joining the program. Personal statements ranged in length from 2–3 paragraphs through to 1 page. For the purposes of this article, the following two questions, were included in the questionnaire:

What expectations do you have of participating in the Kenya immersion?

What are you most/least looking forward to as part of the Kenya immersion?

Two months prior to departure, two semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted. A total of 10 participants (50%) elected to participate, each interview hosting 5 participants. These interviews sought to further engage participants in discussion, emanating from questionnaire responses. Interviews were conducted by the researcher, averaged an hour in duration, were audio-recorded and transcribed.

This dataset enabled the researcher to triangulate the data for internal validity and better understand the participants' expectations of the immersion program. Personal statements were submitted by participants 6 months prior to departure; the questionnaire and the semi-structured focus group interviews were completed 3 months and 2 months prior to departure, respectively.

### **Data Analysis**

Reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019) of the data was used to understand the expectations of the participants prior to their departure. The data was read and re-read

before responses for each were coded and then categorised into personal, professional and cultural expectations. Each dataset was analysed separately, before all three were synthesised to determine emerging themes.

Table 4.1 is an extrapolation of findings from participant’s personal statements as contained in their application form, which relate to their expectations for the immersion program. Each code is represented by the individual participant (PS) identifier number. Only codes that had 3 or more participant responses are indicated. Codes with fewer than 3 responses were deemed to be reflective of an individual participant and not of the collective group. Thus, discussion of the findings will be demonstrative of the collective group of participants rather than individual respondents.

**Table 4.1. Participant Expectations – Personal Statement (Application Form)**

Codes	Participant (PS)
Form a different perspective on life	1, 2, 6, 8, 16,17
Being challenged	3,9,6,13,14
Make a positive and or meaningful contribution	3, 7, 11,14
Helping others	3, 4, 7,16
A different cultural experience	5, 6,7,11,13, 15, 17,20
Inform me as a teacher and inform pedagogy	1, 5, 8,14,17,19,20
Making a difference	1, 2, 4, 5, 11, 15, 18, 20
Appreciation and gratitude	7,9,14
Privilege and responsibility	4, 16, 18
Making a positive impact	4, 9,10, 16

Table 4.2 represents findings from participants’ responses to the pre-immersion questionnaire relating to their expectations for the immersion program.

Each code is represented by the individual participant (PS) identifier number. In a similar vein to the application forms, only codes which had 3 or more participant responses are reported.

**Table 4.2. Participant Expectations: Pre-Immersion Questionnaire**

Codes	Participant (PS)
Changing perspective	1,5,11,15,20
Make friends, build relationships	1,10,11,13,15
No expectations	3,12,2, 10
Being challenged outside of comfort zone	3,8,10,13,16,18
To experience a range of emotions	4,6,9
Make a positive and or meaningful contribution	7,8,19
A different cultural experience	8,11,17
Making a difference	2,11,14
Life changing	11,19,20

Findings from two separate focus group interviews, which relate to expectations for the immersion program, are presented in Table 4.3. Each code is represented by the relevant focus group (1 or 2) followed by an individual participant (PS) identifier number.

**Table 4.3. Codes from Two Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews: Group 1 (PS: 7, 8, 10, 15, 18), Group 2 (PS: 1, 6, 9, 12, 13)

Codes	Group:Participant (PS)
Experiencing a cultural immersion	1:8, 1:10;1:18;2:6;
Building connections/relationships	1:15; 1:8;1:18;
Cultural exchange	1:7;1:8; 2:12;
Being challenged	1:8;1:18;2:12; 2:6
Making a difference	1:10
Open mind/no expectations	1:18; 2:6;
Helping others	1:15;1:18;
Personal change	2:6; 2:12;

## Discussion

A synthesis of all three datasets is presented in Table 4.4. Themes were established through identifying word repetitions. Repetitions were one of the most straightforward ways to

establish themes. The table lists the category, followed by the codes and the themes that emerged through data analysis: Through intercultural experiences, one is better able to understand oneself; Teacher pedagogy is informed through cultural immersions; through intercultural experiences one is able to build relationships with others.

**Table 4.4. Pre-Immersion Expectations: Category, Codes and Themes**

<p><b>Personal Expectations:</b></p>	<p>Make a positive or meaningful contribution; Helping others; Making a difference;</p> <p>Form a different perspective on life; Being challenged; A once in a life time experience; Life changing; stepping outside of comfort zone; experience a range of emotions; challenge personal values;</p> <p>Grow as an individual; appreciation and gratitude; privilege and responsibility</p> <p>Making friends and forming relationships</p> <p>Broaden knowledge and understanding</p>	<p><b>Through intercultural experiences, one is better able to understand oneself.</b></p>
<p><b>Professional Expectations:</b></p>	<p>Inform me as a future teacher</p> <p>Enhance my skills</p> <p>Change my view of teaching</p>	<p><b>Teacher pedagogy is informed through cultural immersions.</b></p>
<p><b>Cultural Expectations:</b></p>	<p>A different cultural experience; Unique experience; once in a life time experience; experiencing a cultural immersion;</p> <p>Reciprocal benefit; cultural exchange;</p> <p>Building connections/relationships</p>	<p><b>Through intercultural experiences, one is able to build relationships with others.</b></p>

**Personal Expectations: Through Intercultural Experiences, One is Better Able to Understand Oneself**

Personal expectations were those that were determined, through the analysis, to be self-serving, identified by participants in statements using personal pronouns, such as ‘I’ or ‘Students’. Other signifiers of expectations deemed to be personal were phrases that included: ‘expect’, ‘would like’, ‘want to’, or used the sentence preface ‘my/an expectation is...’ While

it is expected that students would identify their personal expectations when asked about what they expected from the immersion, it is interesting to note how many did not use these terms and statements, denoting that they were thinking of something besides, or greater than, themselves when considering the question. However, it is important to explore what students reported to better understand the nature of the variances of expectations had before embarking on this experience.

An expectation that participants were joining the immersion to ‘make a difference’ was a dominant thread that emerged from the data. Making a difference was perceived as a meaningful contribution; one that would be of benefit to others, as it sought to solve problems. As evident in the data, this was half of the social exchange, in that students also benefit, even if only in feeling good about making a difference. One student put it this way: ‘Students want to help the people in need – they see a problem, and want to help be a part of making a difference’ (PS6). Another student said, ‘I think people choose to participate in programs to ultimately assist communities in need. Students are able to contribute to society in a multitude of meaningful ways whilst, also interacting and working with other like-minded people’ (PS1). These responses, reminiscent of others, illustrate that many participants feel strongly about the desire to serve, but also that they want to be a part of something which is greater than what they could accomplish alone. Participant responses were all centred on altruistic reasons.

Flanagan et al. (2015) found that service in communities, whether mandated by an institution or freely chosen, served to bolster connections and bridge social capital. This bridging of social capital is illustrated in the comments above, when PS1 mentions working with like-minded people. This concept was also picked up by other participants. One comment that exemplifies this more than others’ follows:

I have expectations to build relationships with the people that I work with, and these friendships will last beyond the time we have in Kenya. As we all share similar



interests and passions, I believe strong connections can be made in such a new situation that we are immersed in together. (PS5)

Also emerging from the data was an expectation that social capital would be further fostered once the participants were in country. While there was a strong expectation regarding this among the group, some participants realised that this concept stretched further than the group of volunteer students, denoting a more sophisticated view of building social capital beyond the immediate group: ‘I am looking forward to meeting the local community and connecting with the students. I am really looking forward to immersing into their culture and staying with other students with local families’ (PS10). By recognising that social capital extends beyond the immediate group, this articulation recognises that social capital and intercultural competence are integral components of living and interacting effectively in diverse environments (Lucero, 2017).

Bolstering connections and building capital can in part be attributed to the notion of social obligation. Social obligation is a means to enriching participants’ individual sense of community and belongingness to something that is greater than themselves (Lisman, 1998). Social obligation was expressed through a desire or a responsibility to serve. As this immersion was promoted as a service-learning immersion, it was very common to see the term ‘service’ in many responses. It is difficult to say whether participants would have seen their immersion as service if it was not promoted as such, but either way, it provides insight into participants’ expectations. What is more important is that students’ expectations are aligned with the aims of the program. One student noted:

I think that service-learning programs are attractive as they provide an experience that is truly unique and different from the everyday, privileged, Western world that we live in. I believe that as fortunate humans, we hold an innate responsibility to help those in need. (PS3)

Another student put it this way: 'I am aware that we live an extremely privileged life with an abundance of opportunities and potential. With this potential is a responsibility to strive to help; I wish to help' (PS16). The idea of privilege and giving were prominent in many responses. Embedded in these statements, and in social obligation theory itself, is an almost guilt-like quality, perhaps exacerbated by the nature of a Catholic, educational environment. Although the religious affiliation of the participants was not part of this research, the nature of Catholic educational principles at a Catholic university are embedded in every aspect of the social and academic experience, and therefore, could be expected to be exemplified in the responses and actions of participants.

The connection between social obligation and having an awareness of others' circumstances also came through strongly in the data. Again, we see the desire or need to help those who are perceived to be less fortunate, and from a position of privilege, the yearning to serve. One student who mentioned this also mentioned a feeling of regret if she did not apply:

You always hear about those less fortunate, and I feel like this is the perfect opportunity for me to actually put words into actions and do something that would benefit someone else. To be in a position to be able to do something for someone else, especially something as life changing as the Kenya Trip, would be an amazing experience and I know I would regret it if I didn't apply. (PS19)

Although situated in a power imbalance, the above comments allude to the concept of empathy, the sense is that empathy, or at the very least sympathy, played a part in participants' motivation to participate. Empathy, defined as a seeking to understand other people's perspectives (Gallese, 2003; Preston & de Waal, 2002), was common in responses, especially when coupled with relationship building. It was recognised that through relationships with others empathy can be enhanced. One student put it this way:

‘without the relationship or understanding then empathising is so much harder. If you just go in there and try and run the show ... if you don’t try and empathise with them or see where they are coming from, then it’s much harder to have a relationship’ (PS8).

Relationships allow opportunities to build mutual understanding; an understanding that acknowledges that making a difference, although usually positively construed, can also be negative: ‘It’s seeking to understand, were not just coming in and doing your own thing but listening and talking and needing to understand what is actually needed’ (PS20).

Another thread that regularly appeared in participant comments was challenge. Participants viewed the immersion as a challenge; it was going to require of them to step outside of their comfort zones, their own lived experiences or their known reality. Embedded within those comments that mentioned challenge was an expectation that the experience would lead to personal transformation. One student said,

‘to be pushed to come out of your shell and put yourself into unusual and challenging situations. To have an experience that will develop confidence and wisdom which you can use to continue to develop your own understandings and beliefs’ (PS17).

It can be seen in this comment that participants are recognising the limits of their own lived experience and are seeking a means to build dispositions that they may not be able to build in their own environments. It also requires them to reflect on their own value system, as another student noted, ‘my expectation is that the Kenya immersion will change and challenge my values and perspectives on things such as my quality of life and my appreciation for things that I take for granted’ (PS6). Embedded within each of these comments and responses is a desire to learn, a recognition of oneself in one’s own context and the limitations of that context to develop deep understandings of the other, specifically the cultural other. The following quote embraced a deeper, more holistic expectation of the challenge:

I am expecting to be pushed outside of my comfort zone. Have my own beliefs and skills challenged, develop a better understanding of myself as a teacher and others

around me. This Kenya immersion is going to be an eye-opening experience and I look forward to being stretched emotionally, physically and spiritually. (PS10)

Recognition of self and desire and willingness to learn is the last of the common threads within the personal expectation theme. As mentioned previously, when discussing service, one needs to remain cognisant of how the trip was promoted to students, as a service-learning immersion; therefore, one expects to see the terms ‘service’ and ‘learning’ appearing in responses. However, not all comments that illustrated a willingness to learn used those terms, which helps validate the statements as true representations of students’ expectations. One student noted, ‘I chose to participate in the program with a curiosity and willingness to deepen my understanding of the world, to see how people from such different backgrounds and experiences live, and to deepen my empathy for others’ (PS4). In this comment we see a desire to learn and develop skills, which illustrates an understanding of oneself and one’s strengths and areas of development. Curiosity also plays a role in the statement above, which is often a precursor for learning. In another statement, curiosity and lack of understanding and experience was noted as a major reason for participating:

One of the primary reasons I chose to participate in this program is because I realise that, in our Western society in particular, we can be completely separated from the hardships of people who struggle to feed their families on the other side of the world. I want to see firsthand the conditions in which people survive with next to nothing. I don’t want to choose to be blind. (PS4)

This statement is illustrative of the desire to learn, to choose not ‘to be blind’ to the world around us. While learning was the last thread of this theme, there was another aspect of student comments worth noting: those that chose not to have expectations prior to the immersion; those that wanted to go in with an open mind and allow the experience to happen, without any preconceived notions of what they might gain from it:

I believe it is hard to imagine what to expect. You can have some ideas about what you think it is going to be like, and for me I have thoughts about what I imagine my Kenyan experience to be, but I also think in reality it will be nothing like what I imagine. I don't think you can know what to expect that's why I believe you have to be as open minded as possible to all situations as it is nothing what I have experienced before. (PS12)

While many students noted that they did not have specific expectations or that they did not want to have them, these same students also noted particular aspects of the threads already mentioned, such as challenge:

To be honest, I have tried to avoid making any expectations of the trip. This includes expectations of how I will react to the experience. I guess the only expectation I have is that I will be confronted and challenged in a way I have never been before. (PS3)

The personal expectations of participants for the immersion were diverse, however, commonalities were exemplified in their comments and reflected social obligation theory. From a desire to give back, to be challenged, to build relationships and learn from those relationships, participants articulated both a desire to make a difference and a responsibility to do so. The desire to make a difference accompanied by the responsibility to do so, is congruent with altruistic motives. For many, they were about to embark on an experience that was going to challenge their own sense of self and other and they expected to change as a result of that challenge. Their articulation of what that challenge could represent and how it might change them, included aspects of their own cultural selves, which included their values and beliefs. Additionally, they expected it to challenge their own positions of privilege and what that actually meant in the wider world. Embedded within all these ideas though, is a desire to learn: that they would go to Kenya; they would build social capital through relationship with each other and with members of the host community; and that they as an inherent disposition, would allow themselves an opportunity to build empathy.

## **Professional Expectations: Teacher Pedagogy is Informed through Cultural Immersions**

Professional expectations were deemed to be any statements that included the terms ‘teach’, ‘teacher’, ‘education’, ‘learning’, ‘theory’, ‘practice’, ‘children’ and ‘Aberdare Ranges Primary School’. Whilst the term ‘pedagogy’ was not specifically used by participants, their responses are indicative of aspects of teacher training that one in the profession would expect to be reflected on as part of teaching practice. Through a pedagogy lens, this immersion was partly centred on the educational philosophy of experiential learning (Gyles & Eyler, 1994; Stanton, Giles & Cruz, 1999). Participants were placed in classrooms in Kenya, which provided an opportunity, through experience, to improve their pedagogy and to reflect on their own teaching practice.

As pre-service teachers, the philosophy of experiential learning is one that is understood as leading to positive outcomes. The articulation of which was summed by as:

I believe students will benefit in terms of development, growth and achievement. It engages you in active learning, allowing you to achieve learning goals. It translates theory into practice and ideas into actions. In helping those who are in need you are enhancing your skills in teaching and widening your perceptions. (PS9)

The above comment demonstrates an understanding of another aspect of pedagogy, that of skill development. The immersion provided an opportunity to enhance or develop teaching skills. The development of requisite skills is a central tenet to teacher training programs. Logically, the mentioning of skills was common throughout participant responses:

The idea of being thrown into the deep end, needing to be confident and flexible and resilient are skills and experiences that I feel I need to experience and further develop to be a competent teacher. I feel by going, I will further develop these skills. (PS6)

The idea of being ‘thrown into the deep end’ in order to be able to develop skills towards becoming a competent teacher is reminiscent of the personal expectation that participants were going to be challenged. From a professional perspective, participants, who

were all conversant in English, were now in an environment where Kiswahili was the native language and the language of classroom instruction. Interestingly, rather than perceiving this as a deficit, participants viewed this as a positive challenge: ‘I want to be immersed in an environment where language barriers are a challenge so I can learn strategies to overcome these barriers which I can use later with EAL/D [English as an additional language or dialect] students in my classroom’ (PS16). This participant, views language as cultural awareness, this awareness being one aspect of intercultural competence.

There were a number of threads in professional expectations that were similar to those for personal expectations. As a professional expectation, participants, through experiential learning, were in a position to develop empathy. The development of empathy as a professional expectation was one that was bounded in and by the practice of teaching:

I thought being a part of this project will give me an opportunity to put myself in other people’s shoes, look at teaching from a different perspective and get a real, hands on experience that will possibly change the way I view teaching and life. (PS1)

The comment above, reminiscent of others, was the expectation that the immersion was going to be transformational. The idea of changing one’s view of teaching or of life is grounded in the theory of transformative learning. Transformative learning theory focuses on how individuals learn to negotiate confronting or unfamiliar situations in order to evaluate their own or others’ purposes; critically evaluate their own and others’ values; and/or understand the complexity of social structures through the values of tolerance, social justice and equity (Mezirow, 2000). Immersion experiences as transformational learning place participants in situations or circumstances that lead to changes in perspective:

I expect that these experiences will help me grow into the well-rounded, honest teacher that I aspire to be who is able to share an experience like this with students to teach them about abundance, displacement, what it means to be grateful and the importance of school and education. (PS9)

Another thread in both personal and professional expectations was that of participants' notions of privilege. However, rather than being a sense of privilege, which is centred on a power imbalance, this privilege was one that was linked to their professional responsibility. Essentially, with privilege comes responsibility, one that could be used to both inform and empower others:

Kenya will most definitely give me the opportunity to continue my eagerness and enthusiasm to become the best teacher that I can be, and enhance my educational skills with real-life experiences. In my teaching career, my philosophy will always be to encourage an appreciation and value, for the world around us. Being part of the Kenya Immersion will give me this value to pass on to students in their daily lives. (PS17)

As pre-service teachers, participants acknowledged the potential of experiential learning to allow them to connect theory to practice. A practice that would be enhanced by being placed in an environment that was perceived as one that was going to professionally challenge them. Such a challenge was viewed positively, being one that would present an opportunity to develop their pedagogy, ultimately allowing them to be more culturally and appropriately responsive to diversity. Further, participants acknowledged that the immersion would allow for empathy to be developed; an empathy that would facilitate a deeper understanding of both teaching and, more broadly, the notion of education as a driver for social change.

### **Cultural Expectations: Through Intercultural Experiences, One is Able to Build**

#### **Relationships with Others**

Cultural expectations were deemed to be any statements that included the following terms: 'culture', 'Africa', 'Kenya' and 'homestays'.

Cultural expectation has been intentionally placed last. The rationale for this being that many of the key threads that emerged from both the personal and professional expectations were synthesised in participants' cultural expectations of the immersion. Participants'



expectations that personal and professional perspectives would change, by connecting knowledge and developing empathy was expressed as a desire in wanting to, or expecting to, experience a culturally different way of life. One student said, ‘I think having the opportunity to immerse yourself in a community within a culture completely different to your own is such an exciting opportunity to pass up if you are open to learning and experiencing other communities and cultures’ (PS9). The openness to learning and the desire to experience different cultures and communities would allow for personal and professional growth, thus, ‘It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another’s eyes, or at the very least to recognise that others may view the world through a different cultural lens’ (Walker, Schultz & Sonn, 2014, p. 200).

A significant component of the immersion program that would ideally enhance the experience of a different way of life, was that all participants were placed with local families in homestay accommodation, an opportunity that was relished by participants:

I am most looking forward to being part of the culture. Really immersing into their culture. I am so happy that we are staying with families in the village, as I really think that if we weren’t doing that, it wouldn’t make such a difference. (PS12)

Learning about the culture of the ‘other’ by being immersed in homestay accommodation and the desire to view the world through a different cultural lens, whilst building cultural knowledge, was reflected by the following comment: ‘I honestly love to experience different cultures. I believe that interacting with people around the world teaches you how to live in different ways and see the world through their eyes, through their values and spirituality’ (PS8).

Homestays enable an understanding of culture, one which is enhanced through the formation of relationships. These relationships being the centre of human interaction. This understanding was exemplified in one student’s comment:

‘I am most looking forward to meeting the family I will be staying with and the children at the school, I’m really excited to spend time with them, get to know them and form a relationship and learn more about their culture and community’ (PS4).

In further attempting to understand the cultural other, there emerged a dichotomy between participant’s own perceived culture and that of the cultural other; one that viewed others through the lens of difference. This difference is viewed through the thread of privilege, a privilege that both represents a power imbalance as well one that allows for personal and professional change:

I am most looking forward to observing and being connected to a vastly different world. I feel that it is going to have an immense effect on my engrained western values and expectations. I am also looking forward to teaching ESL [English as a Second Language] students and making strong connections with children and the families I stay with. I can’t wait to learn about Kenyan customs and way of life and this immersive experience will allow me to do that. (PS19)

The degree of impact that the immersion would have on participants ‘Western values’ would, as Yunkaporta (2009) suggests, require participants to leave behind their own limiting beliefs before they engage with the cultural other. One student’s comment reflected this: ‘The idea of escaping the normal “Western” way of living and experience things and the lifestyle of others, I want to be able to connect with others from a very different background on an honest and human level’ (PS10). These themes are not mutually exclusive. As can be seen in many of the participant statements above, these three themes work in conjunction with each other to illustrate the varying expectations of students before this immersion. One student articulated all three themes explicitly in her comment:

You always hear about those less fortunate, and I feel like this is the perfect opportunity for me to actually put words into actions and do something that would benefit someone else. I look at my life and realise I have been given so many wonderful opportunities to

get to where I am, and sometimes we don't even realise how fortunate we are and how we can take these things for granted. I have been given many opportunities that have allowed me to reach my goal in life to become a teacher, I feel that it would be such a rewarding experience to extend what I've learnt and use my teachings to help those less fortunate. I am not only hoping to make a difference in these children's lives. I think it would be something I would like to share with a school I'm working with in Australia.

(PS11)

Cultural expectations centred on the idea that the immersion would allow an opportunity to experience a different way of life. To be immersed in a culture by staying with local families allowed relationships to be built, empathy to be developed, cultural knowledge to be enhanced, and provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on themselves as cultural beings.

### **Conclusion**

International immersion experiences are often aimed at developing global awareness, developing shared understandings and collaboratively responding to social issues. Through the lived experience of being immersed in a culture and way of living that at times is very different to their own, participants who volunteer for such programs have an opportunity to learn more about themselves personally, professionally and culturally. Expectations of participants on this particular immersion were largely centred on seeking to understand themselves (egoistic) through participation in an altruistic experience, through connecting with each other and with members of the host community. Such a connection would allow for personal transformation and professional learning to take place.

The altruistic need to make a difference to the lives of others was a strong expectation for participating in the immersion program. Participants most looked forward to engaging with the 'cultural other' as to better understand themselves as cultural beings but also to further respect and engage with the cultural plurality of a globalised world. This engagement was

fostered through homestay accommodation and working with children and the community at Aberdare Ranges Primary School. The expectation of engaging with others required participants to step outside of their own comfort zones. This stepping out was viewed by many to be a challenge, a challenge centred on the perceived difference between themselves and the culture and community to which they were travelling.

The expectations of the experience mirrored closely the goals of the program. The program is designed to enhance pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding of the cultural plurality of our globalised world. A plurality that will become evident as they engage with student diversity in the classrooms where they will ultimately teach. Classrooms which will further require them to demonstrate the requisite skills and dispositions reflective of intercultural competence.

The implications of this research include a better understanding of internationalisation programs in higher education and greater clarity as to the effect of international immersion programs on participants' personal and professional dispositions in their perspectives towards education, notably, the education of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Lastly, there is the potential for longitudinal research as to the impact on participants' practice as full members of the teaching profession.

## **4.2 Critical Experiences in an Intercultural Immersion Program in Kenya**

### **Abstract**

The degree to which international immersion programs affect participants can be influenced by and attributed to the types of experiences participants encounter in the host country or community. Critical experiences allow participants an opportunity to both immerse themselves within the breadth and depth of human experience and foster connections with members of the host community. Further, critical experiences can heighten emotions, disrupt values discourse, and foster new relationships. This program involved 20 Australian preservice teachers in a

three-week immersion to Kenya. This article will explore a range of key experiences these students encountered and the effects these experiences had on participants' values, emotions, and relationships. Analysis of participants' journals resulted in identification of the following three themes: through critical experiences, emotions are heightened, and values are questioned; relationships build community and foster positive connections; and relationships and understanding are at the core of teaching.

### **Keywords**

Critical experiences, cultural plunge, culture shock, cultural identity, values, relationships, emotions, Kenya.

### **Introduction**

A cultural immersion experience is defined as one where individuals are removed from a familiar culture and environment (Riberio, 2005). In this study, preservice teachers who elected to participate in a cultural immersion program in Kenya were removed from their familiar environment in Australia and experienced difficulties in the host country, such as not having conveniences such as potable water, witnessing extreme poverty, communicating in a foreign language, experiencing an inadequate transportation infrastructure, and feeling overwhelmed by different customs and traditions. Nakata (2007) captures this complexity and conceptualises it as entering the 'cultural interface', an interface embodied by points of intersecting trajectories. Nakata explains the cultural interface as follows:

It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation ... All these elements cohere together at the interface in the everyday. (2007, p. 199)

Immersion, as intercultural experiences, occur within the context of a variety of socio-cultural platforms which, according to Robinson (1999), have significant potential to shape

one's identity. Robinson (1999) situates notions of identity as 'multiple, textured, and converging' (p. 98). Conversely, Taylor (1999) defines a multiple and textured cultural identity as 'one's understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values, and behaviours that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives' (p. 232). All these factors influence the way we see the world and inform our experiences. Thus, cultural immersions engage individuals in meaningful, direct, cross-cultural interactions, increasing the likelihood of developing cultural understanding and empathy, providing both affective and consciousness-raising learning experiences (Sue & Sue, 2008). Learning resulting from cultural immersion has been shown to challenge participants' biases and stereotypes, encourage participants' self-reflections and help participants confront prejudice and racism (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Pope-Davis et al., 1997). Cultural immersions are also opportunities for participants to demonstrate a willingness and ability to work within culturally diverse societies (De Ricco & Sciarra, 2005).

Exposing participants to a culture that is markedly different to their own in its language, ethnicity, socio-economic status and physical exceptionality is referred to by Houser (2008) as taking a cultural plunge. Elements of taking a cultural plunge (Houser, 2008) were used to detail participants' critical experiences in Kenya. Houser's approach consists of three phases: the initial experience (or plunge), a written piece that describes the experiences and reflects on personal insights, and a small or whole group discussion.

Young (2014) argues that it is often more challenging for participants to readjust to their home culture upon returning from an international or cross-cultural experience than it is for them to adjust to a new culture in a foreign community.

Difficulties typically experienced during cultural immersions can in part be minimised through preparation. Traux (2002) found that preparation can reduce the incidence of uncertainty, but as with any experience in a socio-cultural setting, there will always be individual variations as to how individuals respond and adapt. These variations, according to

Traux (2008), could depend on ‘emotional stability, sociability, need for cognition, need for structure, and tolerance of ambiguity, and expectations’ (p. 2). Ryan and Twibell (2002) assert that educational preparation, knowledge of culture, personal characteristics and professional experiences are all variables that affect how well individuals adapt to different cultural environments. In the present study, an aspect of the immersion program that assisted in mediating critical experiences (described in detail below) was the involvement of three Kenyan nationals. Since 2011, the organising academics of the immersion program have built a strong relationship with Kenyan nationals employed by the NGO STC. During formal and informal discussions, Nic, Gibson and Mary became mediators, providing participants with a broader cultural contextualisation for various critical experiences. These cultural mediators supported participants to internally process the scope of feelings and emotions they were experiencing. Such mediation also assisted participants in their attempts to deepen their understanding of their own cultural values.

### **Method**

This research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, adopting a mini-ethnographic case study approach. An advantage of this paradigm is that it allows for multiple representations of various experiences in Kenya, resulting in qualitative evidence. As a researcher, within this approach, I am positioned as both a faculty academic and participant. Participants were required to keep either a written or digital journal documenting their various experiences in Kenya. Participants decided which experiences they wrote about, with the only requirements being that all entries include the date, a factual log of the event(s) that occurred and a personal reflection that included their thoughts and feelings. Participants’ journals were triangulated using researcher fieldnotes and video recordings taken during small group discussions. Researcher fieldnotes were handwritten at various times throughout the immersion, including directly after a critical experience at a time that did not cause undue impact to either the researcher or participants. Audio-recorded discussions occurred on three

occasions: at Aberdare Ranges Primary School, after the visit to the Giotto dump slum and during the initial visit to New Canaan Village. These three recordings were transcribed and used to triangulate journals and researcher fieldnotes. Journals, fieldnotes and recorded discussions were all coded. Coding was achieved through word repetitions. The data was then analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis. Individual themes were established through identifying word repetitions in combination with the context of the journal data entry in which they were contained.

### **Participants**

This study centred on a group of 20 undergraduate students who, in 2016, elected to voluntarily participate in an intercultural immersion program to Kenya. The majority were female (90%, n = 18), with two males (10%). All participants were aged between 19 and 27 years old and were primary preservice teacher education students studying at a private Catholic university in Sydney, Australia. Eighteen of the participants were in the final two years of their four-year degree program. All participants engaged in a series of two full-day workshops prior to departure. The first workshop covered cultural awareness including language, gestures, dress and the political history of the region. The second workshop finalised all the logistical aspects of the immersion, along with preparation and resourcing of the activities to be undertaken at Aberdare Ranges Primary School and Miti Mingi Village.

### **Critical Experiences**

The following critical experiences were written about by participants. First, to assist the reader in understanding participants' experiences, factual information will be presented for each of the locations where the critical experiences took place. These will be followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from data analysis. This immersion program was conducted at the end of the academic year. Unlike many international programmes offered to tertiary students where involvement is linked to courses of study and academic credit, this immersion program operated outside of this paradigm. Participants gave up their own time



during university breaks and self-funded their participation in the program. Similarly, the academics who implemented, coordinated, and evaluated the program did so outside of their general workloads. Although no credit was awarded for participation, there is a nexus between the courses of study undertaken by the participants as part of their education degree and the immersion. This nexus lies in the fact that as preservice teachers, all participants would be working in classrooms in Kenya during the immersion.

### **Aberdare Ranges Primary School**

Following the internecine violence surrounding the 2007 Kenyan general elections, thousands were displaced. Cassandra Treadwell (Executive Director of the NGO STC), as an answer to the needs of the approximately 1,000 families in the Pipeline IDP Camp, started a school outside the city of Nakuru, the Aberdare Ranges Primary School. Opened in 2010 in partnership with the Kenyan Government, the school is now at its capacity of 1,080 children from Preschool through to Standard 8 (14 years of age). Participants in the immersion spent two weeks at the school, delivering a combination of creative and practical arts and sporting activities. The decision to deliver these programs was primarily in response to the Kenyan Government requirement that no schools could offer academic teaching programs outside of the academic school year. (To do so would place the school at risk of being financially penalised.) Participants were placed into groups of three or four and assigned to a class for the two-week duration, working with children aged 4–14 years old. Being outside of the Kenyan academic year, children attended voluntarily. Approximately 400–500 children attended each day. Each day commenced at 8:30 am and finished at 12 pm, when all the children and participants were provided a hot meal for lunch. Lunch was eaten with hands and generally consisted of rice or ugali (a maize porridge), with either beans, kale or, occasionally, goat meat. During lunch time, participants could choose to assist in the school kitchen, serve meals or wash up plates. At the end of each school day, participants could choose how to spend their afternoon. Many would walk with children back to New Canaan Village or Miti Mingi Village,

spend time interacting with the community, then make their way back to their homestay accommodation. For safety reasons, all participants were required to be back at their homestay before sunset each day.

### **Giotto Dump Slum**

Giotto dump slum is located in Nakuru, Kenya, about three kilometres west of the central business district. Approximately 140 families live in the Giotto dump slum, with approximately 70% of the population being children. Facilitated by two of the assisting Kenyan nationals (Nick and Gibson) and in consultation with community leaders, a visit to the dumpsite was organised for all participants. In accordance with the customary practice (common across many countries) of bringing a gift of some description when visiting (as a sign of respect), for the visit to the dump slum, each participant voluntarily contributed 1,000 Kenyan shillings (~AUD10), which was then used to buy bulk amounts of staple items including oil, flour, salt, rice and soap. Given the large percentage of children living at the dump site, sweets were also purchased. Upon arrival, participants were welcomed by Lucy (the community leader), and the purchased items were handed out by the participants. After the official welcome, participants spent approximately two hours walking around the dump slum. For some participants, this included entering the dwellings (upon invitation) of some of the families, while others spent their time playing with children. At the conclusion of the visit, a group debrief and discussion was held for all participants in a large communal room at Miti Mingi Village. The debrief and discussion was mediated by the three assisting Kenyan nationals and lasted for approximately 2.5 hours.

### **Miti Mingi Village**

In Kiswahili, 'miti mingi' means 'many trees'. Miti Mingi Village, also started by STC, is home to 120 orphaned or vulnerable children. Each of these children come from backgrounds where, for different reasons, they were unable to remain with their family or in their community. The village is located approximately 800 metres from Aberdare Ranges

Primary School. All of the children at the village also attend Aberdare Ranges Primary School; therefore, after eating lunch at the school, participants could choose to walk with the children back to the village. The village infrastructure consisted of 15 family units, each housing eight children who are cared for by a dedicated mother. These mothers are employees who have left their own biological families to care for the children. The village has been intentionally designed this way so that the children live in family groups and can develop and grow as a family unit. Regarding the immersion program, there was no set structure or planned activities at the village, and so participants had the opportunity to spend time with and engage with the children in any capacity they chose. For many, this included facilitating art and craft activities or playing games.

### **New Canaan Village**

Outside the city of Nakuru, Kenya, lies the recently named New Canaan Village, previously the Pipeline IDP Camp, home to approximately 1,000 families—IDPs fleeing from the internecine violence stemming from the 2007 Kenyan general elections. The village lies approximately one kilometre east of Aberdare Ranges Primary School, and many of the children who attend the school also live in the village. Initially, shelter in the village consisted almost solely of tents supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. As of June 2017, all these tents have been replaced by rudimentary buildings. Costing approximately AUD900, these rudimentary buildings consist of corrugated iron sheets supported by a wooden frame. Many are now connected to electricity. As is customary, the participants were first officially welcomed by the village elders, Moses and Joseph, before they were able to walk through and, if invited, visit families' homes.

### **Homestays**

All immersion participants were placed into groups of four to eight students and allocated to homestay families. Homestay accommodation was for a two-week period and all homestays were facilitated through STC. The aim of the homestay was twofold. First, it

financially supported local families and the community as participants paid to stay with families. Second, it provided the participants an opportunity to immerse themselves with a local family and for cultural understanding through the formation of relationships. Homestay families provided participants with breakfast and dinner (lunch being provided at school). Each family had different characteristics ranging from single-parent households to nuclear families.

### Data Analysis

Table 4.5 summarises the data for each of the critical experiences, relevant codes and participant identification number (i.e., participants with a journal entry/entries that referred to the experience and matched the code).

**Table 4.5**

*During Immersion: Critical Experiences, Codes and Participant Identifier Numbers*

Critical experience	Code	Participant identifier number
Aberdare	Community/connection/relationships	3, 4, 6, 13, 15, 16
Ranges Primary School	Language/interaction/understanding/communication	1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20
	Food	1, 2, 15, 18
Giotto dump slum	Overwhelmed/guilty/angry/sad/disbelief	1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18
	Perspective/privilege/happiness/gratitude/connection	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
New Canaan	Guilt/perspective	1, 2, 4, 5, 11, 15
Village	Community/happiness/generosity	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14
	/connection	
	Emotions/anger/frustration/confusion	1, 2, 15, 16, 18, 19
Miti Mingi	Challenge	2

Critical experience	Code	Participant identifier number
Village	Surprise, connection	15, 18
Homestays	Appreciation/welcomed/connection	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13,15, 16, 18, 20

*Note.* Listed participants are those with a journal entry/entries that referred to the respective experience and matched the respective code.

Table 4.6 presents a synthesis of the critical experiences. Categories were determined as follows:

- any data where participants articulated their own feelings or responses to experiences through use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ were categorised as ‘Personal Reflections’
- any data specifically about any encounters with the cultural other were categorised as ‘Cultural Encounters’
- any data about experiences in the classroom were categorised as ‘Professional Reflections’.

Themes were established through identifying word repetitions. Word repetitions were then analysed within the context of each data extraction group, resulting in the final theme for each category.

**Table 4.6**

*During Immersion: Categories, Codes and Themes*

Categories	Codes	Themes
Personal Reflections	Challenging, emotional, appreciation, shock, gratitude/appreciation, guilt, responsibility,	Through critical experiences, emotions are

Categories	Codes	Themes
	empathy, change, confused, wealth, poverty, shift in perspective, happiness	heightened and values are questioned
Cultural Encounters	Relationships, conversations, food, family, community, connection, happiness, material possessions, belongingness	Relationships build community and foster positive connections
Professional Reflections	Language, interaction, understanding, activities, connections, communication, peers	Relationships and understanding are at the core of teaching

### Discussion

The discussion of the results is presented according to the three themes identified from data analysis: through critical experiences, emotions are heightened and values are questioned; relationships build community and foster positive connections; and relationships and understanding are at the core of teaching. All critical experiences, with the exception of Miti Mingi Village, elicited participant responses of between 50% and 90%. While the visit to Miti Mingi Village was viewed as a critical experience as it immersed participants with children who were orphaned or vulnerable, many participants did not seek to actively reflect on their experiences in the village. This is likely due to the fact that all of the children at the village also attended Aberdare Ranges Primary School, and so participants had already engaged with and shared time with these children.

#### **Through Critical Experiences, Emotions are Heightened and Values are Questioned**

The visit to the Giotto dump slum elicited detailed journal entries from participants. In entering this particular cultural interface, students were confronted with the complexity of human experience. Differences in culturally perceived values became starkly obvious. The extent of the poverty witnessed by participants, including cultural values around food, wealth

and access to opportunities, was evidently quite bothersome for participants. The bothersome nature was evidenced in their journal writing and through non-verbal gestures. Participants travelled to Giotto dump slum in one of three mini vans (matatu). Researcher fieldnotes captured both the approach of one of the vans and participants' reactions:

Our van is filled with flour and salt, bags of which are under the seats and in the aisle. The students are all happily engaged in conversation. We are now nearing the dump site, it's the stench that I notice first, the conversations in the van have now become silent and the students are intently looking out of their windows. The van is pulling up into the dumpsite, the scene is confronting, children, adolescents and adults can be seen picking through large mounds of rubbish and waste. The van has come to a stop, one of the students has tears in her eyes. In silence each one steps off the van, they seem to be uncertain as to where to go or what to do, as we walk the ground is spongy underfoot, the students have all gathered near each other, waiting for someone to tell them what to do. (researcher fieldnotes)

Kiely (2005) would describe the above situation as high-intensity dissonance. The sense of uncertainty reflected the incongruence between participants' own frame of reference and what they were now witnessing. Corroborating researcher fieldnotes, this sense of uncertainty was described in the following participant journal entry:

Waking up, I knew this was going to be a hard day. I didn't know what to expect or what I was going to be faced with. When I first stepped out of the matatu, I felt extremely uncomfortable, I didn't know what to feel, where to look or even if we should have even been there. (PS1)

This participant, like others, was grappling with their own inner feelings. In grappling with their feelings, participants personalised (Kiely, 2005) their emotions and feelings through both verbal and written expression. Participants used emotive language in describing their struggle to reconcile the abject poverty they witnessed with their own lived reality:

I saw this young girl running along the ground that was soft underfoot and there was broken glass everywhere. I didn't know what to think, I was sad, I was angry. How could I express my emotion at seeing that? (PS5)

The dissonances here include environmental, social, physical, and economic factors (Kiely, 2005). In attempting to process the dissonances of this experience, similar to the one above, participant journal entries included the use of questions, for example, 'You just look around and see that people are living in such terrible conditions and you question how that is possible? How is anyone able to live on a dump site?' (PS11). These journal entries mirrored the dissonances of others, reflecting on the dichotomy between perceived privilege and extreme poverty. Participants were being challenged in their understanding of the level of privilege that often comes through having access to economic resources. Perhaps the use of questions allowed for an internal dialogue to ensue to reconcile their feelings. One participant noted:

It was so hard; I couldn't help but compare what I had to the little that they had. Why is this the case? What could we do? These people don't deserve this, we're all humans, and it's just the circumstances we happened to be born into. We were just born in a better place. (PS17)

The notion of circumstances was a common thread among participants. Such circumstances allowed participants to reflect on economic and social frames of reference:

Being immersed into the community made me really question different things that happen back in Australia; we are such a materialistic, wasteful society. I couldn't help but feel guilty about where I was born and the opportunities, I have access too because it doesn't seem fair that not everyone has those same opportunities. (PS20)

This participant, like others, attempted to reconcile the gap between the value placed on the material possessions and opportunities they had access to, compared to the abject poverty they were encountering:



I know for certain that I am one of the lucky ones who was born into privilege. I didn't choose this and I feel guilty, maybe I need to be more mindful about what I do and more grateful for what I have. (PS5)

What emerged through participants' journals was a shifting in personal frames of reference. The terms 'guilt' and 'gratitude' were used by 80% of participants to articulate both their internal feelings and shifts in their perspectives. For example:

It was really challenging, really hard. I think a challenging part was that the fact that we have so much and sometimes we are not grateful for it and we don't appreciate the things that we have, but these people are living on a dump site. I was overwhelmed with guilt of how I'd lived my life and how I hadn't valued the things that I had and I didn't appreciate those things. It just really shook my perspective. (PS11)

Such frames are grounded in an awareness of the disparity that exists between their lives and the lives of others. Many participants, when writing about this disparity, used the terms 'guilt' or 'guilty'. For many, guilt was experienced as emotional distress—most apparently manifested as crying. As a feeling, guilt was disrupting participants' positive sense of self. Their sense of self, as it connected to how they had lived their lives and what they had taken for granted, was contributing to them feeling and expressing guilt. Perhaps to counterbalance this disruption to their sense of self, participants juxtaposed the idea of guilt or shame with the need for expressing gratitude:

After our visit to the dump, I think, sadly, in our world today gratitude is something that's truly missing. It's about being grateful for what I have, rather than being guilty, but also knowing that I'm in a position of privilege and I am able to do something about it. (PS4)

Another participant wrote: 'I'm fortunate enough to have the luxury of my most basic needs of food, shelter and safety being secure, and that not everyone is so lucky. That is something that I should not allow myself to take for granted' (PS17).

Perhaps driven by the underlying ethos of the Catholic institution at which they were studying, an inherent altruistic disposition of those seeking to become teachers, or a desire to make a difference, participant responses alluded to the need to do something, to take social action:

It's very easy to be sad and to wallow in what I have experienced, but my mindset needs to be, how do I step up? It's about social justice and I have a responsibility through my fortunate position to show the children I teach (in Australia) that there is another side to our world that needs to be understood. (PS6)

In a similar vein, another noted, 'We have to remember that everything is relative, its remembering that we are studying to be teachers, it's then what we do with what we have that's key' (PS11). To bring about change is constitutive of social action. Any such action includes the ability to connect with the other so as to empathise and try to understand other people. Participants clearly demonstrated both feelings of empathy and awareness of this link: 'It's about developing empathy; it's about putting yourself in a situation where you can make a change' (PS5).

The dissonances experienced during the dump slum visit placed participants in a situation that caused them to reflect deeply on social change. This situation was, for many, further heightened through the power of human connection. Researcher fieldnotes recall that as participants walked through the dump slum, many were holding the hands of some of the young children who lived there. As the participants and children walked hand in hand, many were singing simple songs: 'We began singing and dancing in the middle of the dumpsite. Music and dance brought so much light to such an emotional experience' (PS14). The simple act of holding a child's hand and walking with them, perhaps amplified by the fact that they were studying to become teachers, served to intensify both the experience and their response to it:

As we drove to the rubbish dump, I could smell the rubbish ... I felt queasy and I felt like I wasn't ready to witness what I was about to see. We drove into the rubbish dump and it didn't hit me 'til I got out of the van and a boy came up to me and held my hand. I couldn't understand how people could live there. All I wanted to do was adopt the little boy and bring him home. No one deserves to live like that. (PS18)

A group discussion occurred directly after the visit to the dump slum, held in a large room back at Miti Mingi Village. The discussion was structured to provide participants with an opportunity to process their thoughts, allow them to express their emotions and give them some time to quietly reflect on this visit: 'We had a meeting in one of the classrooms. We talked about how we were feeling and we talked about how we are not more privileged than the community, but that they are privileged in a way we aren't' (PS1). Interestingly, while clearly confronted by the experience of the dump slum, participants began to take a more philosophical view. This view—perhaps in part mediated by the experiences and cultural contextualising provided by Kenyan nationals, perhaps in part resulting from the intensity of the experience—led to a shifting in participants' frames of reference. The feelings of guilt or shame were now replaced with attempts by participants to find a sense of hope; something within this intense experience that they could feel positive about:

Today we visited the community living on the dump site and I was in disbelief. It was such a shock to see vultures and wild pigs living amongst the piles of rubbish which a Kenyan community call home. I decided to open my eyes to the amazing things about this community; their level of happiness. With the amount of material possessions and luxuries we have in Australia, it is almost inconceivable that we do not attain any true happiness. (PS2)

Others also attempted to reconcile both an economic and social dissonance by referring to the notion of happiness. Throughout participants' journals were common threads of attempting to grapple with their understanding of happiness. Both the visit to the dump slum

and to New Canaan Village left participants wrestling with the idea of how those who have so little be perceived as being so happy:

You see everyone so happy yet living in such poor conditions. I then reflected on my own life. I was getting upset because they were so happy and there was so much love and we just don't have that back home. (PS10)

After the visit to New Canaan Village, reflections included the factors that lead to happiness, as captured in the following:

I have really started to question my own happiness. You walk through the camp and you can just feel the happiness, it really highlights how materialistic we are. It doesn't matter what physical items we have it is the connections that you make that essentially make you. (PS12)

Perhaps these views reflect a naïve understanding of happiness, confusing it as being a lasting trait, rather than a fleeting, changeable state? What did become clear from journal entries was that whatever participants' frame of reference was, happiness was not something found in material possessions. The above quotation reflects an understanding that happiness, rather than being found in material possessions, is attained through human connection. The idea of human connection and the value of relationships as a measure of happiness was also articulated by PS3:

I've contemplated and thought about people having the bare minimum. I struggle with what the bare minimum is, what is the bare minimum, when we have so much? I feel that they have so much, that we don't have. Their sense of community and independence and their sense of connection is something we miss back home. (PS3)

The visits to both the Giotto dump slum and New Canaan Village caused participants to grapple with economic and social dissonance. This dissonance was predominantly articulated through an expression of feelings. Feelings that initially centred on notions of guilt and shame. Written reflections and the opportunity to verbally express and process their thoughts and

emotions allowed for a more philosophical perspective to emerge. This perspective was enhanced through a cultural contextualisation provided by three Kenyan nationals and centred on the concepts of gratitude and happiness. The following quotation, captured in the researcher's fieldnotes, articulates in very real terms this change in perspective:

We all need to be students of life. We need to ensure everyone knows they have the right to be happy. When you start smiling, others smile; when you are peaceful, others are peaceful and this is how you change the world. (researcher fieldnotes)

### **Relationships Build Community and Foster Positive Connections**

The placement of participants with homestay families was another key facet of this immersion program and was reflected upon in journal entries. The benefits of staying with local families included the opportunity for participants to build cultural understanding and form relationships with members of their host family. Whether through the sharing of stories over meals or by spending time with the family on the weekends, homestay accommodation fostered the development of relationships:

We stayed in the houses throughout our time there and I think without that it wouldn't have been the same trip because you did get to know the community that you were staying in. The family that you stayed with gave you their personal stories and just walking through the town to get home you got to see different things, meet different people. Everyone was so welcoming and they are so accepting and happy and willing to share their stories. (PS6)

The experience of being warmly welcomed into their homestay family and, by its association, into the community, highlighted for many participants the degree of connection they were able to make with members of the local community:

We lived quite close to the camp where my homestay was, we actually backed on to the camp. Every morning and afternoon we would walk passed local children, children who didn't even attend the school, families every morning waved, say 'jambo' or 'hello',

just stopping to have a conversation, even just stopping on the side of the road to buy bananas and fruit from one of the local ladies, it was just taking any opportunity you could to get to know people and see what their story was and how they were connected to each other. (PS15)

The sense of community connection participants experienced within the community was again highlighted during their visit to New Canaan Village. Here, participants were introduced to and welcomed by the village elder, Joseph. After the official welcome, participants were able to spend time walking through the village, many being invited to visit the homes of children who were in their classes at Aberdare Ranges Primary School. As with the dump slum, participants reflected on the contrast in values between what they were seeing and experiencing compared to their lives back home:

I was a bit taken aback by the welcoming nature of people. It didn't really change whether they were in town or at the rubbish dump or at the village, they are just good natured people and you could see that shining through. Just real people, no egos, no nothing, they were just living, it was pretty good to meet such people. (PS10)

Beyond community connections, at the familial level, participants noticed the depth of the connection that existed between people: 'I think one thing that has really stuck out for me has been the sense of community and belonging with the people here' (PS7). In noticing this connection, participants made comparisons with their own cultural frame of reference:

The local community was really special. I was in the car with my host dad and we were driving down the road and another car was coming the other way and they both just stopped and then our host dad got out of the car and then they just started talking to each other in the middle of the road. It was a really big communal sense of people taking care of each other. I feel like in Sydney I sometimes try and avoid people just so you can avoid a conversation, so the communal sense was really fascinating, especially after everything they have been through. In times, when you just lose everything, like

houses, all material possessions just having each other is the most essential, crucial thing you could have. (PS13)

Such a cultural juxtaposition, reflective of Western cultural values that tend to support individualism over collectivism, was articulated by PS19: ‘Sometimes in our society we can feel as individuals fighting our own battles. But here, they come together as a community and help each other and there is a sense of belonging within a community beyond their immediate family members’.

Beyond human connectedness, food is also an important part of cultural identity. Often the sharing and exchange of stories, the building of connections, was done over a meal. Beyond building connections, values around food were also reflected on, not in the cultural dishes being served, but how participants viewed food as part of their personal identity:

Normally, I am a fussy eater but when you are put into another country where food is so scarce you just enjoy it and eat it and when you are given a meal that is prepared for you, you just eat it and enjoy it, you appreciate the food more. (PS1)

Such an appreciation for food was also encountered at Aberdare Ranges Primary School. An important aspect of the school day was the communal lunch served to all the children, school staff and participants. Cooked in the school kitchen, lunch was typically a large serving of rice or ugali (a maize porridge) with either kale, beans or, occasionally, goat meat. Children, and the participants, would typically use their hands to eat lunch. Lunch was provided by the school as a way to ensure that all children had at least one meal per day. Participants were able to reflect on the importance of food, on their own values and perspectives in their home culture:

I was extremely shocked at the portion sizes much like the plate I was served at dinner last night. Despite the mountain of ‘chakula’ (food), students in ECD (Early childhood) were able to fit it all in their stomachs in no time at all. I was so surprised and wondered how they were eating so much, until I was told that in some cases, this meal

was their only one for the whole day and that is why the portions are always large. This information shocked me and I was upset and a bit frustrated because I had not even thought about the lives that each child may be living when they return home. It made me think about all of the lifestyles each child would have and how different it would be from the children back in Australia. (PS2)

Perhaps the understanding that for many of the children, this was their only meal for the day led participants to articulate an appreciation of the value of food and the need to ensure that they themselves were not seen to be wasting it by leaving any on their plates:

It got to lunch time and I helped in the kitchen. It's so amazing to see the big drums full of beans and rice. I've never seen that much rice in my life. We ran out of food and some of the kitchen staff didn't get to eat but they made sure we all ate. I found that extremely selfless. I didn't know what these people had at home but it probably wasn't as substantial as what they got at school. I made sure that everything that was on my plate was eaten. I wasn't going to let any food be thrown out. (PS18)

Participants' reflections on human connectedness were framed through an articulation of experiences with both their host family and with members of the broader community. Through their experiences, participants discerned a degree of belonging and connection that members of their host family or local community had with each other. This connection was contrasted with the perceived absence of one in their own home culture. Their reflection on food was part of a broader perspective and discourse around privilege. In participants' home culture, access to food is generally assured; however, when placed in a context where access to food is scarce, participants articulated a greater appreciation for it.

### **Relationships and Understanding are at the Core of Teaching**

During their time at Aberdare Ranges Primary School, participants were able to experience and practice aspects of their teaching pedagogy, previously only espoused in courses as part of their degree program. They were now able to apply their pedagogy in a



cultural context that would typically not be in place back in Australia. Key aspects of pedagogy, which participants reflected on, were the building of relationships with the children at the school and the importance of language to aid understanding when engaging the children in activities: ‘When interacting with the children, I’ve noticed how important non-verbal communication can be when English is an Additional Language (EAL). Just a smile is such a strong connection and way of communication’ (PS11). Another participant further typified the importance of non-verbal communication as an aspect of pedagogy:

I’d had the preschool/kindergarten age for the time that we were there teaching, and we developed really quickly a bond with the kids, they knew us and they saw us every morning and we got to know them very quickly because we did a lot of hands on, play based learning with them, interacting with them, talking with them. It was hard at first to build a connection because they didn’t speak any English compared to some of the other children because they were a lot younger, but we picked up really quickly how to communicate with them. (PS5)

A key aspect of fostering effective relationships and communication was to ensure that a degree of understanding existed between the participants and the children as to what was required for participation or the activity at hand:

The children had a lot of trouble understanding us if we were using English, so we would take them outside and used actions which they were then able to copy. With sharing stories, we used a lot of actions to tell the story, which the children really liked. (PS14)

For others, connection and understanding came using music, which some researchers suggest is able to cross both language and cultural barriers (Mehr et al., 2019): ‘Whenever I was in doubt, I’d play music and suddenly I’d have all of their attention and then they would all be able to follow me’ (PS19).

Experiencing such success in classrooms, where the language of instruction is not English, enhanced participants' confidence in being able to respond to this challenge in their own teaching practice. As one participant wrote, 'One challenge from this trip was the language barrier and being able to make it through lessons where the kids new zero English, was such an achievement and gives me confidence when teaching' (PS13). Such increases in professional efficacy, as well as broader aspects of professional knowledge, were fostered through this immersion experience. Such an experience is constitutive of the opportunities for broader learning available to students who participate in cultural immersion programs (Sutherland, 2011). Another participant noted, 'Professionally, working with students who don't understand English, is not a daunting one. I feel I have a greater understanding of how to teach, make things easier, explain things or show things to them as part of the lesson' (PS20).

Being placed in classroom environments where participants were not able to draw solely on the use of the English language to facilitate learning led to increases in both professional knowledge and professional efficacy. Participants discerned that professional knowledge was centred on the kinds of strategies that were able to foster a degree of understanding between them and the children. The element that grounded participants' knowledge and efficacy was the formation and building of relationships. The ability to form relationships with the children at the school was vital to the participants' overall experience.

### **Conclusion**

The structuring of this immersion program to include a range of critical experiences both influenced and heightened the range of dissonances participants encountered. Dissonances included social, historical and environmental (Kiely, 2005). Fundamental to all these experiences was connecting participants to members of the local community. Through these connections, participants grappled with the lived experiences of others. Experiencing others living in abject or relative poverty, juxtaposed with their own perceived privilege, led to dissonances that were both visceral and emotional (Kiely, 2005). Journaling and group

discussion allowed participants the opportunity to process the range of emotions they experienced. Group discussions were greatly enhanced when mediated by three Kenyan nationals. The cultural contextualising provided by these nationals during discussions contributed towards participants shifting their own personal frames of reference. The critical experiences described above embodied encounters with Ubuntu, the foundation of which includes notions of connection, relationships, and community. For the cultural other, Ubuntu, from the Zulu, is a nebulous concept of common humanity, at times translated as ‘human kindness’, but its meaning is much more encompassing, embodying the ideas of connection, community, and mutual caring for all: ‘Ubuntu ... speaks of the very essence of being human. ... “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.” We belong in a bundle of life. We say, “A person is a person through other persons.”’ (Tutu, 1999). The term ‘Ubuntu’ thus came to symbolise this three-week intercultural immersion to Kenya by 20 preservice teachers from a private university in Australia. Ubuntu lies at the nexus between immersion programs and critical intercultural experiences where participants develop not only an awareness of self but an equally important understanding of others.

### **4.3 So, What Changes? Insights after an International Immersion Program**

#### **Abstract**

Immersion programs are conduits for transformational learning. Through immersion programs, holistic learning processes allow for experiences to be felt, perceived, engaged with, and reflected upon, often during attempts to navigate challenging situations. Thus, participants are provided with an invaluable opportunity to evaluate their own perspectives and values; build an understanding of the complexity of social structures; and develop values of tolerance, social justice and equity (Mezirow, 2000). This cultural immersion program involved 20 Australian preservice teachers in a three-week immersion in Kenya. This article explores the effects that immersion had on the participants up to two months after their arrival back in Australia.

Analysis of participants' responses in a post-immersion questionnaire and two semi-structured focus group interviews revealed the following four themes: immersion programs foster personal transformation, immersion programs strengthen teacher dispositions and affirm the value of education, understanding of the 'cultural other' is strengthened through community engagement, and reconciling personal transformation in home culture is challenging.

### **Keywords**

Transformation, personal, professional, cultural identity, values, relationships, community, education.

### **Introduction**

The outcomes of international cultural immersion programs are well documented in the research literature. Such programs have been found to increase participants' sense of personal efficacy, awareness of the world, awareness of personal value and levels of engagement (Meaney et al., 2012; Moely & Ilustre, 2014). Additionally, they enrich individuals' sense of community and belongingness (Bringle, Studer et al., 2011) and enhance respect for, and tolerance of, diversity, allowing a greater awareness of societal issues alongside developing a greater moral and ethical sense (Moely et al., 2002). Roose (2001) contends that international programs allow an opportunity to recognise the importance of culture; its connection to community; and the relationships among and between language, culture, and practice. Further, such programs have the ability to be both personally and professionally transformative (Kearney et al., 2014).

As experiential learning, participation in immersion programs is linked to perspective transformation (Strange & Gibson, 2017) and development of intercultural competence for global leaders (Ng et al., 2009). Such experiences allow 'Participating individuals to acquire a new understanding about life, culture, self and others' (Walters et al., 2009, p. 152). Ideally, such experiences push participants to undergo personal transformation that makes them more aware of others' cultural realities (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001).

In many cases, these opportunities can even question the very cultural identity of those who experience them (Dolby, 2004). However, while the benefits of immersion programs are evident, not all participants are transformed as a result (Jones et al., 2015). Such experiences provide an opportunity to transform, not a guarantee of transformation (Fullerton, 2010). This follows the work of Kiely (2004), who suggests that evidence to substantiate both the understanding and meaning of transformation is severely lacking. Kiely's perspective is further supported by Nickols et al. (2013), who assert that while the culmination of the experience has the potential to be transformative, the process by which transformation occurs lacks exploration in the research literature.

Perhaps, in a rapidly globalising world, the ultimate outcome of such programs should be 'growth of tolerance, acceptance of self and others, and independence' (Willard-Holt, 2001, p. 506). Such outcomes require changes to occur at the personal level. It is at this level that one's perspectives around identity, culture and behaviour change. This kind of personal change is labelled by Mezirow (2000) as perspective transformation. According to Mezirow (2000), perspective transformation is posited as a non-sequential process, applicable in contextual situations where critical reflection and reasoning are at work. Millican et al. (2011) describe how students participating in a service-learning opportunity experienced perspective transformation and shifts of their worldview when their learning was influenced by transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory focuses on how individuals learn to negotiate confronting or unfamiliar situations to evaluate their own or others' purposes; critically evaluate their own and others' values; and understand the complexity of social structures through the values of tolerance, social justice and equity (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow describes 10 phases in the transformative learning process:

a disorienting dilemma; self-examination; a critical assessment of assumptions; recognition of a connection between one's discontent and the process of transformation; exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning a course of

action; acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; provisionally trying of new roles; building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (2009, p. 19)

Any transformation by participants would be the result of a series of adjustments. These include adjustments to both cognition and behaviour. Interestingly, Young (2014) posits that it is often more challenging for participants to readjust to their home culture upon return from an international or cross-cultural experience than it is for them to adjust to a new culture in a foreign community.

Immersion experiences as transformational learning accommodate the situations and circumstances that lead to changes in perspective. Four of Mezirow's phases are pertinent to this article's analysis of the immersion program: a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, a critical assessment of assumptions and viewpoints, and the connection between one's discontent and the process of transformation. These phases connect directly to the participants' lived experiences in Kenya and their experiences upon their return home to Australia.

### **Method**

As a mini-ethnographic case study, this research study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm. One advantage of working within this paradigm is multiple representations of participant experiences, contained within their own individual frames of reference. By adopting this approach, qualitative evidence was produced that was able to adequately describe the effects of the immersion experience on participants. The researcher was positioned within the study as both a faculty academic and participant. This positioning was purposeful to aid in constructing a detailed understanding of the potential transformations of participants in the immersion program. Although seeking to be objective and report accurately, this researcher acknowledges that their own understandings, inherent predispositions and choice of data collection methods to present the findings are all

contextualised and ‘exist within and are the products of the same contextual web’ (Zimmer, 2006, p. 315).

Data collection was conducted two months after participants returned home to Australia. (With data collection having also occurred during the pre-immersion and during immersion phases of the research study.) This allowed participants time to re-enter their home culture and process the entire immersion experience. In this final phase of the research study, data were collected via a questionnaire and two semi-structured focus group interviews. The questionnaire sought written responses to the following:

- Have you been impacted personally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Have you been impacted professionally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Reflecting back on the culture in Kenya, what are some things that stood out for you?
- What have you found most confronting since returning to Australia?

Both datasets were coded. Coding was achieved through word repetitions. Analysis of the data employed Braun and Clarke’s (2019) reflexive thematic analysis. This type of analysis was used to understand the impact of the immersion program on participants. The data were read and re-read before responses were coded and then categorised as ‘personal’, ‘professional’, ‘Kenyan culture’ and ‘return to Australia’. Each dataset was analysed separately before being collectively synthesised to determine emerging themes.

### **Participants**

This study centred on a group of 20 undergraduate students who, in 2016, elected to voluntarily participate in an intercultural immersion program to Kenya. The majority were female (90%,  $n = 18$ ), with two males (10%). All participants were aged between 19 and 27 years old and were primary preservice teacher education students studying at a private Catholic university in Sydney, Australia. Eighteen of the participants were in the final two years of their

four-year degree program. Participants travelled to Kenya for the immersion program at the end of November 2016 and returned to Australia in mid-December 2016.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis will be presented in two parts: participant responses to the questionnaire and analysis of the semi-structured focus group interviews. Findings from the post-immersion questionnaire are summarised in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7**

*Post-Immersion: Questionnaire Codes and Participant Identifier Numbers*

Category	Code	Participant identifier number
Personal	Appreciation: Gratitude	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15
	Opportunities	1, 15, 16, 19
	Perspective: Privilege	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
	Responsibility	1, 14, 17
Professional	Focused	5
	Communication: Relationships: Connections	2, 3, 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20
	Education is important	1, 5, 6, 7, 14, 18, 20
	Flexible: Spontaneous: Improvise	2, 4, 14, 15
Kenyan culture	Community: Homestay	2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 19
	Food	2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13
Return to Australia	Selfishness: Waste	2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20
	Consumerism	1, 3, 6, 8, 14, 17, 18
	Technology: Social media	1, 3, 18



Category	Code	Participant identifier number
	Sharing the experience	2, 4, 9, 10, 11,12, 15, 18, 19, 20

*Note.* Listed participants are those with a questionnaire response(s) that matched the respective category and code.

Findings from the two separate semi-structured focus group interviews are presented in Table 4.8. Each code is represented by the relevant focus group (1 or 2) followed by an individual participant identifier number.

**Table 4.8**

*Post-Immersion: Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Categories, Codes, Participant Groups and Participant Identifier Numbers*

Focus group interviews: Group 1 (PS: 7, 8, 10, 15, 18), Group 2 (PS: 1, 6, 9, 12, 13)

Category	Code	Group:Participant (PS)
Personal	Connections	1:10, 1:15, 2:1
	Appreciation	2:6, 2:1
	Perspective	2:6, 2:12
Professional	Build competence: Confidence	2:1, 1:7, 1:8
	Relationships: Connections	2:6, 2:9
	Spontaneity: Flexibility	1:10, 1:15
Kenyan culture	Relationships: Community	2:1, 1:10, 2:13, 1:15, 1:8, 2:6
	Diet/Food	1:18, 2:1, 2:12, 2:13
Return to Australia	Privilege: Responsibility	2:1, 2:12, 1:10
	Waste	2:1, 2:6, 1:18, 1:10
	Perspective: Choice	1:8, 1:18, 1:15, 2:13, 2:9
	Sharing the experience	1:7, 1:18, 2:13, 2:12, 2:1

*Note.* Listed participants are those with an interview response(s) that matched the respective category and code.

A synthesis of the two datasets is presented in Table 4.9. Themes were established through identifying word repetitions. Word repetitions are one of the most straightforward ways to establish themes. Table 4.9 lists the categories, codes and themes that emerged during data analysis. Four themes were identified: immersion programs foster personal transformation, immersion programs strengthen teacher dispositions and affirm the value of education, understanding of the ‘cultural other’ is strengthened through community engagement, and reconciling personal transformation in home culture is challenging.

**Table 4.9**

*Post-Immersion Reflections: Categories, Codes and Themes*

Category	Code	Theme
Personal	Appreciation: Gratitude	Immersion programs foster personal transformation
	Opportunities	
	Perspective: Privilege	
	Responsibility	
	Connections	
	Confidence	
Professional	Focused	Immersion programs strengthen teacher dispositions and affirm the value of education
	Communication: Relationships	
	Education is important: Impact	
	Flexible: Spontaneous	
	Build competence: Confidence	
	Spontaneity: Flexibility	
Kenyan Culture	Community: Relationships	Understanding of the ‘cultural other’ is

Category	Code	Theme
	Homestay	strengthened through community
	Diet/Food	engagement
Return to Australia	Sharing the experience	Reconciling personal transformation in home culture is challenging
	Selfishness: Waste	
	Consumerism	
	Privilege: Responsibility	
	Perspective: Choice	

## Discussion

### Immersion Programs Foster Personal Transformation

For Taylor (1998), experience is at the core of transformative learning—it is the experience of a disorienting dilemma that prompts the process of critical reflection discourse, resulting in a transformed perspective. Experiential learning has the ability to be transformational. Such transformation to either behaviour or cognition comes through the actual lived experience. As one participant framed it, ‘You can watch or read something, but you don’t take the same things from the experience, unless you’re actually immersed in it’ (PS19).

All except one of the participants affirmed that they had been personally affected by the immersion. Though an outlier, the one participant (PS4) who did not recognise any personal affect or impact would reflect research by Jones et al. (2015), who assert that not all participants are affected by such programs. This participant indicated that they were not personally affected by the program:

There was no personal effect from the program as I anticipated ... I think that this experience confirmed my prior feelings to the world and our society, while also opening my eyes to issues and their possible solutions which are more complex and greyer than black and white. A few personal goals that I have set myself as a result of

this trip are to be more mindful and, in the moment, and to exercise gratitude more deeply and more often. (PS4)

For this participant, the idea or concept of any impact was reliant on preconceived assumptions and, as such, these assumptions did not result in any perceived effects. It could be contended that this participant's view is egocentric in nature, given that the viewpoint fails to even recognise the potential for change to have occurred. While the participant contended that they did not experience any personal effect, their above statement suggests otherwise. The notion of opening one's eyes to social issues and the subsequent setting of personal goals are constitutive of personal change, being that such change is both cognitive and behavioural in nature. Perhaps one way to curb the influence of egocentric thought is to suspend any thoughts or assumption being made in the first instance. PS19 articulated that they had no assumptions prior to the immersion and that personal change ensued:

To be truthful, I intentionally had no assumptions about the trip ... What I didn't expect was the intrinsic change within myself, it's hard to explain, but in thinking we were going over to help children, resulted in a much greater impact on me. (PS19)

Interestingly, this participant did not seem to recognise that thinking they were going over to help children was in itself an assumption. It is acknowledged that an understanding of one's self is the critical first step if one is to authentically try to engage with and understand the cultural other. PS19's contradictory stance may be the result of a lack of any real personal introspection or understanding of self. Although all participants attended a series of pre-immersion workshops, perhaps, in the preparation, there needed to be workshops on a better understanding of self.

Being immersed in the experience, which placed participants in a socio-cultural environment that was different to their own, resulted in reflections that included the use of the terms 'gratitude' and 'appreciation' (n = 9). PS15 summed up their understanding and perspective of gratitude as follows:

I think it has taught me appreciation and how grateful I am, the privileges I have and what I can do with that ... I didn't choose where I was born, just as the children we met didn't choose to be born in Kenya. What I can choose is what I am going to do with my life and appreciate the endless opportunities I have in life. I'm going to start appreciating every opportunity I have and not take anything for granted. (PS15)

An appreciation of the opportunities afforded to this participant may just be a statement of self-awareness. Whether it leads to any behavioural changes, at this juncture, cannot be guaranteed. What this participant, like others, articulated, was an appreciation for what their socio-cultural context provides them: provisions not available to members in the host culture. For example, PS18 noted, 'Being grateful for what I have—I think no matter how many times someone tells you to be grateful for something it won't change you. But when you encounter these things for you self, firsthand, that's what changes you'.

Participants underwent two critical experiences during their immersion—visiting the Giotto dump slum and New Canaan Village. These allowed participants to witness absolute poverty and the related insecurity of meeting life's essentials, including food, health and housing. In addition to these experiences, one participant reflected on the impact that living with a host family had on them and their level of gratitude:

To experience another way of life, to live with the families and experience part of their day to day changed my perspective on my own life. The people in Kenya deal with a certain level of 'real' stress daily, like water supply, food, clothing, paying for essentials and so on, things that as an Australian, I take for granted. This experience has allowed me to be truly grateful for everything I have. (PS7)

Reflection on the lived experience for this and other participants was facilitated through a comparison of the lived reality of the host culture with that of their own home culture. Such a comparison led to participants articulating the impact on themselves through use of the terms 'perspective' and/or 'privilege' (n = 11). These terms were often used in conjunction with each

other as participants' perspectives led to them critically reflecting on their notions of privilege. Such a shift in perspective could, as Jones (2014) surmised, be the result of an understanding of their own socio-cultural privilege. The privilege of a relatively higher standard of living and access to material goods and resources was highlighted through the immersion experience:

I think the trip has impacted my entire life. Since returning from the trip I am so much more grateful for the things I have and the way I live. I have always been grateful for what I have, but seeing and comparing it to how people live in Kenya has put it so much more into perspective for me. (PS5)

Such introspection around one's life circumstances afforded the participants an opportunity to reflect on their own socio-cultural background. This included an understanding and articulation of their own privilege:

During this time, I gained a lot of perspective and came to the realisation that I was born into an extremely fortunate situation. Upon realising this, I can't help but ponder and imagine the power I have living in Australia, receiving an education and being able to work and earn money. (PS3)

Of interest here is the association of an articulation of privilege to include the notion of power. One conjecture could be that having access to opportunities such as education and employment are not only privileges but also invoke a certain degree of power. This researcher would (subjectively) like to believe that any understanding of power is one applied to bring about social equity.

PS12 viewed their privilege through an understanding of not knowing your privilege until something is taken away from you:

I have most definitely been personally impacted by this program in so many ways. It has engrained in me to appreciate the things I have in my life, no matter how small they may be. It isn't until something is taken away that you are able to understand how much

of an impact it has on the privileged life we lead with its comfort and conveniences.

(PS12)

Reflection on their own privilege enabled the participants to acknowledge the opportunities afforded to them but also the responsibility associated with such opportunities, for example:

The biggest thing for me was seeing how other people live and react to situations they have encountered throughout their life. Personally, I have attained a greater appreciation for what I have, where I live, the opportunities I have been given whether I have decided to take them or not. We are extremely lucky people and I feel like with what I have been given I can in numerous ways help people who aren't as fortunate.

(PS1)

Another participant noted:

I've come to realise just how much privilege I have in my life. Even with such simple things as a flushing toilet and running water. As a teacher I know I have a responsibility to ensure that all the children I teach are aware of the inequality that exists in our world.

(PS17)

This participant, like others, acknowledged their privileged circumstances but also recognised that with such privilege comes a degree of responsibility. Beyond the immersion experience, such a responsibility was perhaps born out of the fact that all participants were studying to become teachers (a profession essentially altruistic in nature), or were students at a Catholic university and had an awareness of social justice, or simply had experienced a lived reality that was quite different to their own reality (i.e., through the cultural immersion program).

Beyond participants reflecting on their perspectives of the actual lived experience, the dissonance surrounding the immersion program extended to include broader social issues. The following participant response reflects intercultural competence in noting that by understanding

oneself, one is better equipped to understand the other. The response also sums up the totality of the collective cognitive and behavioural impact:

Most definitely! This program challenged me to reflect upon myself and opened me up to how ignorant we can be and how much we take our first world ‘simplicities’ and ‘conveniences’ for granted. Travelling to Africa allowed me to view issues such as pollution, access to clean water, living standards, health care, etc., in a different light. Just by being born in Australia we are granted privileged lives. We are given a multitude of opportunities through education. In becoming aware of our privilege, we must also acknowledge our responsibility. We have so much more than we need so how are we going to utilise these blessings to make a difference in our world? (PS17)

It is evident that through this immersion experience there was personal transformation for the majority of (if not in all) participants. Such a perspective transformation resulted in a change of the ‘very form by which we are making our meanings’ (Kegan, 2000, p. 53). For the majority of participants, personal transformation was articulated through the cognition of a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude. Appreciation and gratitude for the opportunities they have been afforded, resulting from the relatively higher standard of living that they all enjoy. Further, there was an understanding and articulation of their own socio-cultural privilege and the accompanying notion of responsibility.

### **Immersion Programs Strengthen Teacher Dispositions and Affirm the Value of Education**

Immersion programs as an enacted component of experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) provide for holistic development—holistic in that the experience of the participants is felt, perceived, engaged with and reflected upon. All four learning processes are non-linear and interact interdependently with each other (Kennedy-Reid, 2020).

As preservice teachers, the participants reflected on how the immersion program had affected them professionally. All participants responded in the affirmative, with responses



ranging from the impact on their professional dispositions to a broader articulation of the importance and influence of education in bringing about social change. The development of professional dispositions was accentuated by the fact that participants had experienced an environment where English was not the main language of classroom instruction. As future teachers, this challenge resulted in a recognition of the value and ability to be able to communicate effectively. For example, PS2 noted the importance of communication skills that allow for a degree of understanding between the sender (participant) and the recipient (students):

Communication is very important, and these skills have been developed while I was teaching in Kenya because I learnt to communicate in different ways such as gestural/actions or through facial expressions. I have been professionally impacted by experiencing language barriers in the classrooms, by realising when an activity is not at all working and thus having to be flexible and think on my feet. (PS2)

Given the language barrier faced, participants realised that communication was more effective when they were able to be flexible or responsive to classroom situations: ‘The experience was good to challenge my improvisation skills and how I communicate with students whose first language is one that I understand little of’ (PS4). PS14 succinctly articulated these dispositions and the impact on their teaching:

Teaching at Aberdare Ranges also challenged me to be flexible and creative. With not fully understanding the culture and customs in the community and in the classroom, it required a lot of improvisation and thinking on my feet. I had to be creative with the use of resources, behaviour management strategies, instructing through language barriers, etc. Although we were only able to teach for a short period of time, working in Aberdare Ranges gave me professional experience and a different professional perspective that will no doubt stick with me throughout my teaching life. (PS14)

In responding to language barriers, the capacity to communicate effectively was premised on an ability to develop positive relationships with the children, underpinned by the understanding that all communication is centred on relationships. Relationships allow for communication skills to be improved, developing skills in listening, empathy, teaching and conflict resolution. Understanding the importance of the need for relationships with the children they were interacting with was articulated by many of the participants, for example:

The importance of relationships in the classroom was highlighted over our time in the classrooms in Kenya. We are taught how important it is to build connections, but until you're in a different situation do you realise how important they are. (PS20)

Further, PS9 recognised the importance of such relationships as she reflected on education in Australian classrooms:

I already had a great appreciation for education, but it's stronger now. Were so well off in Australia and I think at times we get distracted with what we have and what we don't have in our classrooms and sometimes these distractions just get in the way. I think you can never underestimate the importance of the relationships you have with the children. (PS9)

For teachers, the understanding and importance of building relationships is often associated with the concept of a classroom community. In such a community, all learners feel valued, safe and capable. PS13 alluded to the importance of a classroom community, one centred on the development of positive relationships:

Through making connections we were able to build a classroom community. The importance of this is something I will definitely take into the classroom, making individual connections with each student and building a community helps not only the teacher but also allows the children to feel safe and welcome in the environment. In this way they are able to take the most from each activity and lesson. (PS13)

While the formation of relationships with the children was important to the participants, it would be naïve to think that these were ever going to be easy. One participant shared the cognitive dissonance she faced as a result of these relationships:

Whilst I loved making connections with the children, I always had in the back of my mind that I'm probably never going to see them again, but they were such strong connections, I didn't know what to do, part of me wanted to bring them home with me as I didn't want to leave them there, especially in some of the situations they were in. The hardest thing was leaving them and saying goodbye and then having to deal with my emotions. (PS9)

Indeed, such dissonances as those articulated above are reflective of holistic learning processes. Learning that resulted from the experience of making connections; learning that was felt, perceived, engaged with and reflected upon. In grappling with such dissonances, there emerged a desire to do something:

Now I feel such a strong desire to take action but I'm not sure what that action is yet, but I know I have to, that I can't just let it bother me, that's not enough. So, yeah, I feel like I have this responsibility and I think I have more confidence in myself that I can take steps towards doing something. (PS9)

Perhaps this participant will go on to take action, or perhaps, despite the learning, no action may ensue. Dissonance, therefore, may not necessarily lead to any action being taken—perhaps self-awareness is sufficient? As one participant put it:

I think I could quite easily go back to the way I was living only because of the person that I am and because of the way society is, but I am making every conscious effort to change the way things are for me. (PS6)

Participants' enhanced perception of the role of education as an agent for social change and the importance of their role as future educators was apparent, for example:

I think that the experience confirmed to me that I want social justice and open-mindedness to different people/cultures/places to be a significant part of my teaching. (PS3)

It has made me realise that I have power being an educator and I should use this power to educate people whose lives aren't as easy. (PS1)

This is perhaps somewhat expected given that all participants were studying at a Catholic institution where the principles of social justice are overt and further influenced by specific units of study that focus on local and global social issues. PS14 reflected on their view of education prior to and post immersion:

As a future teacher, I have a deep appreciation for education, however, Kenya allowed me to see how truly lucky we are to have opportunities for education. Before experiencing this program, I valued education but didn't see the power of education and the implications it has when a person is stripped of the right to be educated. Kenya taught me to not take my own, or others education for granted. (PS14)

Participants' responses in the two semi-structured focus group interviews indicated that their level of professional confidence increased as a result of the immersion program. For example:

I have built a lot more confidence, as a result of the trip, due to working with children with little or no English and meeting new people. (PS7)

I know I've changed as a teacher; the experience has given me a lot more self-confidence to be able to work with children from all different backgrounds. (PS8)

As aspiring teachers undertaking tertiary study, participants had knowledge and understanding of experiential learning. The professional impact of the immersion was such that it led to further development of teacher dispositions, as well as a greater understanding and appreciation of their role as teachers and the value of education as an agent of social change. For example:

I have developed a greater global awareness and awareness of some of the challenges and issues that people face around the world. I have also developed a greater awareness of cultural differences and cultural sensitivity and as such I have an increased motivation to become a quality teacher and an increased understanding of the impact that education can have. (PS20)

I believe that I have become a better teacher because of this immersion. I will teach future students to be grateful for what they have as simple as being able to attend school. I will empower them to be in charge of their own education, teach them how to be sustainable and understand that not everyone is as lucky to be brought up in a country like Australia, that there are many people who struggle to survive. (PS18)

Immersion programs as experiential learning are opportunities for professional development. Banks (2004, p. 197) suggests that teacher-based professional development programs should achieve at least one of five things:

1. allow teachers to uncover and identify their personal attitudes towards racial, ethnic, language and cultural groups
2. allow teachers to acquire knowledge about the histories and cultures of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and language groups
3. allow teachers to become acquainted with the diverse perspectives that exist within different ethnic and cultural communities
4. allow teachers to understand the ways in which institutionalised knowledge within schools, universities and popular culture can perpetuate stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups
5. allow teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to develop and implement an equity pedagogy.

This immersion program gave participants an opportunity to strengthen their professional dispositions and develop the requisite skills required to be able to respond in appropriate ways

to cultural diversity in classrooms. Participants' professional dispositions included the ability to effectively communicate to foster positive relationships with the children at Aberdare Ranges Primary School. Additionally, participants grew in their confidence to improvise, developing the ability to be flexible in what they were seeking to achieve. Beyond dispositions, there was a strengthening in their awareness of the role that education plays in bringing about social change and equity.

### **Understanding of the 'Cultural Other' is Strengthened through Community Engagement**

All participants were placed in groups of four to eight people and assigned to a homestay family for the duration of the immersion program. Each homestay family was different in their family makeup, as was each of the physical homestay houses. Participants' reflections again centred on the relationships they built with members of their host family. Homestays allowed the participants time and opportunities to engage with a host family, with one participant sharing:

I loved the homestay, being able to be fully immersed with a family and the culture by participating in everyday activities was so beneficial. From walking home, to helping to cook and helping with the goats to unwinding with the family, experiencing such a different home life at times felt surreal. (PS15)

The feeling that the homestay experience was surreal—in other words, completely different to experiences participants would have in their home culture—allowed opportunity to reflect on various socio-cultural differences and examination of participants' own values. One participant shared:

I remember being in the car with my host dad and we were driving down the road and a car was coming in the opposite direction and both cars stopped and my host dad got out of the car and they just started talking to each other in the middle of the road. When I asked my host dad why he stopped, he said that he stopped because he knew him. It made me realise the communal sense of people taking care of each other. This

communal sense I feel is missing in Sydney, just having each other is the most essential, crucial thing you can have. (PS13)

Additionally, the experience of staying with a homestay family became a catalyst for self-reflection. For example:

The family I stayed with have faced and overcome horrific situations that no one should ever have to experience in their lifetime, yet they live lives based around faith, hope and love. The strength and will of the family was truly inspiring and was something that has really forced me to reflect on my life and values. I have learned and am still learning, about the greater meaning of life and what it means to be living. (PS14)

Not all participants articulated such a profound impact from staying and engaging with their host family. Perhaps PS14 experienced the holistic learning processes far more acutely than other participants.

The culture of community in Kenya became a point for further reflection and comparison with participants' perspectives of community in their home culture:

I have also been impacted by the close sense of community and inclusion in Kenyan culture. It saddens me that I do not experience this in Sydney at all and I can't walk down my street and name all the people in it. 'Loving thy neighbour' is something Catholics pride themselves on however I don't think we have a full understanding of what that entails. (PS19)

Studying at a Catholic university, where an understanding of social justice and Catholic social teaching is evident, may have contributed to this participant's response. Additionally, participants, as part of their pre-immersion preparation, were introduced to the African concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, from the Zulu, is a nebulous concept of common humanity, at times translated as 'human kindness', but its meaning is much more encompassing. It embodies the ideas of connection, community and mutual caring for all. The concept of Ubuntu appears to have become one part of the holistic learning process for the participants.

A prominent part of culture is food. Each day, participants shared lunch with children at the Aberdare Ranges Primary School and ate breakfast and dinner with their host family. Reflections around food scarcity, sourcing food and differences in diet were reported. Despite evidence suggesting that food scarcity is an issue in Australia (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2011), participants appeared to view this as an issue experienced only outside of their own country:

Normally I am a fussy eater, but when you are put into another country where food is so scarce, you just enjoy it and eat the meal prepared and given to you, in eating and enjoying it you appreciate the food more. (PS6)

Perhaps the socio-economic status of PS6 shielded them from experiences of scarcity. For another participant, such an awareness came about as a result of the school's food program: 'The lunch servings were so huge at the school, realising that for some kids this is their only meal of the day' (PS4).

Consideration of where food is sourced, for some of the participants, came about as a result of their homestays. Some host families had small plots of land used to grow much of the food the participants enjoyed for breakfast and dinner. For example:

The food was very, very different to home, there was no fibre. We had a lot of veggies, but they were all unbelievably fresh. Our house mamma grew all her own veggies and crops. Each afternoon we would go with her and pick our own spinach and tomatoes and anything else for cooking that night. Reflecting back, it was really cool to eat their food and be completely a part of their culture. (PS12)

I loved the food; it was always super simple and often included beans and rice. At home, my host mum kept chickens, which on occasion she would kill one and let us know that we were having chicken that night. It was so organic, from the backyard to our plates. Everything seemed so much fresher and tastier. (PS13)



The experience of food, centred on what was eaten and how it was sourced, led to an appreciation of food:

I have learnt to appreciate where our food comes from, meat in particular. After witnessing a goat killing, I acknowledge the hard work that needs to be done to produce meals and respect the many people who grow their own produce and live organically.

(PS2)

Empathy relies on understanding the ‘other’. However, no understanding of significance can be reached without first understanding the ‘self’. Homestays allowed participants to immerse themselves with their host families and engage with the community. The connections formed allowed them to experience day-to-day living with their host family. This experience led to reflections on aspects of their own visible culture, most notably that of food but also their own cultural values.

### **Reconciling Personal Transformation in Home Culture is Challenging**

This theme elicited a response from all the participants. It was obvious from their responses that many struggled upon returning to Australia. This may have been made more challenging given that the participants returned to Australia in the two weeks leading up to Christmas—a time of the year often dominated by food, material items and indulgence.

For some of the participants, there was no honeymoon period (Young, 2014); their struggle was felt as soon as they arrived at Sydney airport:

I found it really challenging coming back. Even at the airport, I did not want to be here; it was also difficult when people asked me about the trip, their response showed they didn’t get it, it wasn’t just a good experience it was so much more than that, it was so hard to communicate what you experienced, especially with the people that I’m closest to. (PS18)

A recurring theme was the challenge of communicating the totality of the immersion experience. How does one fully communicate what was felt, perceived, and engaged with in a

manner that one feels does justice to the experience? PS19 summarised this as: ‘I feel like you just can’t put it onto words. You just can’t explain the experience unless you were there and experienced it for yourself’. PS11 articulated the difficulty faced in sharing the experience with others who had not directly experienced it, also acknowledging the emotion of frustration:

It can be difficult to discuss my experience of the trip with others, especially since the people I am discussing it with would not be able to empathise as they are so far removed from the circumstances that I experienced throughout the immersion. It can be difficult and frustrating to discuss such an impactful experience while, in the same conversation, your friends are discussing their own first world problems. (PS11)

This and other’s responses alluded to the concept of empathy—empathy simply being the ability to understand another’s perspectives through their own personal frame of reference. The immersion placed students in and with a community where they were afforded opportunities to understand someone else’s perspectives or worldviews.

As previously mentioned, likely compounding the challenge was participants returning to Australia in the two weeks leading up to Christmas, generally a time for gift buying and giving, food and overindulging. The incongruence between what they had just experienced and what they were returning to was now brought into stark focus:

Since coming home, I have found it challenging to accept that we live in a culture that is so materialistic and focused on consumption while there are other places where people struggle to survive and fulfil their basic needs for enough food, clean water and shelter. (PS4)

Interestingly, this was the same participant who had indicated that they did not feel as though they had been personally affected by the trip. Perhaps the two months post return had provided time for deeper reflection. It could be argued that the timing of the immersion and participants’ return to their home country presented an opportunity for participants to grapple with deeper

feelings and perspectives. For some, the culture and reality of consumerism, heightened by the time period of their return, became a recurring theme. For example:

After returning from Nakuru, where people have so little or have to rummage through a dumpsite to find food or materials to sell, it irks me that people feel pressured into the consumer culture of buying things because that's what is done at Christmas. I suppose, more so than ever, I understand that it's not the giving of stuff that matters, its more about sharing goodness and time together. (PS11)

Since returning to Australia, I have found that the priorities of people living here are vastly different to what we experienced from the community on Kenya. (Materialism, being up to date with technology and trends, always dissatisfied with what we have, concentrating on what we don't have.) I have found that people in Sydney are so often in a rush and consumed by their own business that relationships and basic privileges are taken for granted. I have also been confronted by our wastefulness with purchases and food. (PS18)

Further to this, participants intersected their home culture and its perceived focus on consumerism with the importance of social justice. One participant noted:

I think the most confronting thing upon my return would have to be constantly seeing the ignorance towards social justice in our community and the lack of selflessness. When friends have asked me about my trip it was difficult to produce an answer because no matter how I explain it, they are unable to understand how I feel and what's worse is that they don't seem to really care. Its confronting to know that it took a trip to Africa to open my eyes to see the ignorance and selfishness. (PS2)

Another noted, 'I now have a better understanding of social justice, equality and the need to help other people and a greater desire for education and the value of it to change people's lives' (PS7).

Clear from participants' responses was the difficulty they experienced upon returning home to Australia. One challenge, perhaps stemming from frustration, was how to adequately communicate to others what they themselves had experienced. Such an experience allowed for deep cognitive dissonance. Such dissonance appeared to be further heightened by the timing of their return back into their home culture. The timing—the start of the two-week run-up to Christmas—challenge participants as they grappled with notions of consumerism and waste.

### **Conclusion**

The immersion program's effects on participants can perhaps best be related to the concept of Ubuntu, which 'speaks of the very essence of being human. ... "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons." This encapsulates the depth and breadth of the immersion program—a program that immersed participants with cultural others and exposed them to experiences that allowed for shifts in their own perspectives. Homestay accommodation allowed a cultural immersion in the day-to-day life of the 'other', resulting in empathetic relationships. The profound effects of these relationships resulted in participants feeling frustration as they struggled in their attempts, after returning to Australia, to adequately share their experiences with family and friends. The effects of the immersion included personal and professional changes, which were articulated by participants. Personal impacts included changes in participants' perspectives of their own culture and personal values. Professional impacts included participants' increased confidence in their teaching and ability to respond cultural diversity, and a richer understanding of the role and importance of education.

Despite the program only being three weeks long, its impacts on participants may perhaps never be fully understood. This study sought to address identified gaps in the literature by adding to our knowledge and understanding of how short-term, international, cultural immersion programs affect the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers, thereby also offering insight into the process of intercultural competency

development in general. Additionally, the study illustrated one way that teacher educators can design a cultural immersion program - pre, during and post which include structured homestays, in country activities and the provision of service to enhance the development of intercultural competence. The findings are particularly relevant for tertiary education institutions involved in preservice teacher education that seek to utilise cultural immersion programs to enhance students' intercultural competence.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter discusses the study's findings, grouped by research phase—pre (Section 5.1), during (Section 5.2) and post immersion (Section 5.3). The various themes that emerged are discussed, followed by a discussion centred on the intersections between immersion and intercultural competence (Section 5.4) and the overall research question (Section 5.5). As data extracts were used extensively throughout Chapter 4, sections in this chapter will include a single illustrative comment for each of the themes to support the overall reading of this chapter.

### 5.1 Pre-Immersion

The following questions were used to understand participants' perspectives prior to the immersion program:

- What expectations do you have of participating the Kenya immersion?
- What are you most/least looking forward to as part of the Kenya immersion?

Expectations were largely centred on participants seeking to understand themselves (egoistic) through their participation in an altruistic experience. Participants' altruistic need to make a difference to the lives of others was reflected in their expectations for participation in the immersion program. Participants most looked forward to engaging with the 'cultural other' so as to better understand themselves as cultural beings and engage with the cultural plurality of a globalised world. Participants looked forward to immersing with their host family and with members of the school and local community. Additionally, participants' expectations of engaging with others led to an understanding that they would be stepping outside of their own comfort zones. Participants would have opportunities to meet new people, form new relationships and engage in experiences in a culture different to their own, which they expected would lead to a better understanding of themselves.

### **5.1.1 Theme 1: Through Intercultural Experiences, One is Better Able to Understand Oneself**

The participants' expectations of the immersion were diverse, but commonalities in their comments reflected social obligation theory. Participants felt an obligation or desire to give back to society, stemming from their socio-economic privilege (Fitch, 1987). From a desire to give back, to be challenged, to build relationships and learn from those relationships, participants articulated both a desire to make a difference and a responsibility to do so. The desire to make a difference accompanied by the responsibility to do so is congruent with altruistic motives. Many were about to embark on an experience that was going to challenge their sense of self and other, and they expected to change as a result of that challenge. Their articulation of what that challenge could represent and how it might change them included aspects of their own cultural selves, which were inclusive of both their values and beliefs. Additionally, they expected the immersion to challenge their own positions of privilege and what that actually meant in the wider world. Underlying all these ideas was a desire to learn—that they would go to Kenya; they would build social capital through relationships with each other and with members of the host community; and they, as an inherent disposition, would allow themselves an opportunity to build empathy. The following quotation reflected sentiments from this theme:

You always hear about those less fortunate, and I feel like this is the perfect opportunity for me to actually put words into actions and do something that would benefit someone else. To be in a position to be able to do something for someone else, especially something as life changing as the Kenya Trip, would be an amazing experience and I know I would regret it if I didn't apply. (PS19)

### **5.1.2 Theme 2: Teacher Pedagogy is Informed through Cultural Immersions**

As preservice teachers, participants acknowledged the potential of experiential learning to allow them to connect theory to practice—a practice that would be enhanced by being

placed in an environment perceived as one that was going to professionally challenge them. Such a challenge was viewed positively, as one that would present an opportunity to develop their pedagogical practice. By learning in situ, participants noted that their teaching practice would be enhanced by learning strategies that would allow for communication and understanding between themselves and the children at the host school. Further, they anticipated that some of the requisite dispositions for teaching, including confidence, flexibility and resilience, would also be increased. Through developing their pedagogical practice, participants acknowledged that the immersion would also allow for greater levels of empathy, ultimately allowing them to appropriately respond to diversity. Finally, participants acknowledged that education was a driver for social change. The following quotation summarises this theme:

I believe students will benefit in terms of development, growth and achievement. It engages you in active learning, allowing you to achieve learning goals. It translates theory into practice and ideas into actions. In helping those who are in need you are enhancing your skills in teaching and widening your perceptions. (PS9)

### **5.1.3 Theme 3: Through Intercultural Experiences, One is Able to Build Relationships with Others**

Participants' cultural expectations centred on the idea that the immersion would allow an opportunity to experience a different way of life. Immersing in a culture by staying with local families allowed relationships to be built, empathy to be developed, cultural knowledge to be enhanced and an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own values. All these activities strengthened relationships as illustrated by the following comment:

I am most looking forward to observing and being connected to a vastly different world. I feel that it is going to have an immense effect on my engrained western values and expectations. I am also looking forward to teaching ESL [English as a Second Language] students and making strong connections with children and the families I stay



with. I can't wait to learn about Kenyan customs and way of life and this immersive experience will allow me to do that. (PS19).

#### **5.1.4 Summary**

The altruistic value of making a difference, reflective of social obligation theory, featured prominently in participants' pre-immersion responses. The degree to which participants thought they were willing to immerse themselves in the culture and lives of the other allowed for an articulation of how they understood the role of service in such an endeavour. This idea of service was premised on two notions: 1) acknowledging the opportunities afforded to them through their socio-economic privilege and 2) recognising a level of social responsibility. Participants self-funded their participation in the immersion and referred to their socio-economic privilege in providing them with the opportunity to participate. Participants recognised they had a responsibility to be agents for social change and that a sense of greater social responsibility was important. Participants expected that the immersion was going to be beneficial for their future profession as teachers. They expected that both classroom pedagogy and professional dispositions would be improved and enhanced. One of the main expectations for pedagogy was improving their ability to engage children who did not understand English. Expectations for professional dispositions included developing greater confidence and flexibility in their approach to teaching. To assist them with their work at the host school, participants undertook fundraising efforts to purchase resources to be used in their teaching time at the school or donated to the school. The formation of relationships was a key expectation for participants. Opportunities existed for forming relationships between themselves and members of the host community, including their host family and the children and staff at Aberdare Ranges Primary School. Relationships with the cultural other would require a degree of openness, a sense of curiosity and a willingness to learn about others. The pre immersion results reflected aspects of Deardorff's (2006) attitudes required for the development of intercultural competence. These included openness to others and a degree of

curiosity and for many participants required them to step outside of their comfort zones. Pre-immersion reflection had the benefit enabling the participants to ready themselves for the experience and understand the types of dispositions that would be necessary to fulfil their pre-immersion expectations. By doing so, the individual can move into a position of seeking to understand the other, allowing for a more empathetic individual to emerge.

## **5.2 During Immersion**

Participants were in Kenya for three weeks and, upon entering the community, all participants enjoyed the experience as everything was new, exciting and fascinating. The cultural hosts were seen to be polite, gracious, and most welcoming (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). All participants recounted the welcoming and friendly nature of community members. Each critical experience provided participants with an opportunity to grapple with degrees of socio-cultural and economic differences. These differences resulted in deep, critical dissonances as participants navigated the incongruence between their own cultural perspectives and values and those they were now experiencing (Kiely, 2005). What resulted from these experiences was authentic holistic learning; participants deeply felt, perceived, engaged with, and reflected upon each critical experience.

Participants' journal entries documented the following experiences: teaching at Aberdare Ranges Primary School, a visit to the Giotto dump slum, spending time with children at Miti Mingi Village, visiting New Canaan Village and homestays. At Aberdare Ranges Primary School, participants taught creative arts and sports programs, interacted with school teaching and administrative staff, and participated in the school's lunch program by either serving food to approximately 400–500 children or cleaning plates afterwards. As children from Miti Mingi Village attended the school, after school finished, participants would walk with the children to the village (where they spent time playing games, reading, or doing arts and crafts). The visit to the Giotto dump slum was facilitated through local STC staff and

occurred on one afternoon after school had finished. Each of these critical experiences was an opportunity for participants to engage both cognitively and affectively with the place itself and the people.

### **5.2.1 Theme 1: Through Critical Experiences, Emotions are Heightened and Values are Questioned**

For participants, the most notable critical experience was the visit to the Giotto dump slum. This visit was acutely sensed, perceived, and engaged with, and, as such, led to deep, critical reflection. Participants' cultural perspectives and privileged economic positions were deeply challenged. Witnessing others living in abject poverty, juxtaposed with their own perceived privileges, led to dissonances that were both visceral and emotional (Kiely, 2005). Emotions expressed were varied and included guilt, sadness, anger and happiness. Given that all participants were studying to become teachers, a profession with children at its core, this visit was made more confronting by the large numbers of children who lived at the dump site. Interestingly, the cognitive dissonance surrounding this critical experience also included an articulation of the emotion of happiness. Its emergence is attributed to the group's debrief and discussion immediately following the visit to the dump slum. The discussion was co-facilitated by three Kenyan nationals (STC employees) and centred on an articulation and understanding of our global humanity—a shared and interconnected humanity built on the concept of Ubuntu. At its core, an interconnected humanity emphasises the value and understanding of our actions.

The following quotation is illustrative of the cognitive dissonances experienced by participants:

Being immersed into the community made me really question different things that happen back in Australia; we are such a materialistic, wasteful society. I couldn't help but feel guilty about where I was born and the opportunities, I have access too because it doesn't seem fair that not everyone has those same opportunities. (PS20)

### **5.2.2 Theme 2: Relationships Build Community and Foster Positive Connections**

Fundamental to all the critical experiences and dissonances that ensued was connecting participants with members of the local community. Reflections on human connectedness were framed through the participants' experiences with their host family and with members of the broader community. Homestay accommodation was organised through local employees of STC. All homestay families were vetted, and participants were placed in groups of four to eight people and assigned to a homestay family. Homestay families ranged in size and composition, from single-parent households to nuclear families. Breakfast and dinner were provided to the participants as part of their homestay arrangements. In building relationships with their homestay families, participants helped cook, went to church, travelled into Nakuru and shopped, and watched television and played games during the evenings. Homestays allowed participants to immerse themselves in the daily life of the cultural other. Through their experiences, participants discerned a degree of belonging and connection that members of their host family or local community had with each other. This connection was contrasted with the perceived absence of one in their own home culture. Positive connections were also fostered through the joint preparation, serving and eating of meals with both their homestay families and children at the school. Participants were able to reflect on their own values and perspectives regarding the importance of food. Relationships with members of their host family, other community members and the children at the school became important for the participants as they nurtured empathy and enhanced their communicative skills.

The importance of relationships in building positive connections with others is illustrated in the following quotation:

We stayed in the houses throughout our time there and I think without that it wouldn't have been the same trip because you did get to know the community that you were staying in. The family that you stayed with gave you their personal stories and just walking through the town to get home you got to see different things, meet different

people. Everyone was so welcoming and they are so accepting and happy and willing to share their stories. (P6)

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Relationships and Understanding are at the Core of Teaching**

Through developing their communication skills, participants' confidence increased and, as a result, relationships were strengthened. Being in classroom environments where they were unable to draw on the use of the English language to facilitate learning increased participants' professional knowledge and professional efficacy. Professional knowledge centred on strategies that enabled for a degree of understanding between themselves and the children they were teaching. Strategies included the use of non-verbal gestures, modelling the activity and capitalising on music and dance to engage children. Participants discerned the value of relationships as being central to any classroom environment. As reflected in the comment below, this understanding served to ground participants' knowledge and efficacy, and the ability to form relationships became a vital part of the participants' overall experience:

I'd had the preschool/kindergarten age for the time that we were there teaching and we developed really quickly a bond with the kids, they knew us and they saw us every morning and we got to know them very quickly because we did a lot of hands on, play based learning with them, interacting with them, talking with them. It was hard at first to build a connection because they didn't speak any English compared to some of the other children because they were a lot younger, but we picked up really quickly how to communicate with them. (PS5)

### **5.2.4 Summary**

This phase of the research study sought to reflect on critical experiences in Kenya. The programmatic structure of the immersion program to include a range of critical experiences served to both influence and heighten the range of dissonances encountered by participants. These experiences, combined with reflexivity through journal writing, offered opportunities for the participants to cognitively engage with their socio-cultural perspectives and values, viewing

them in a new light. They were able to explore the meanings of their cultural assumptions, attitudes and values, providing valuable insights about themselves and the cultural other.

The visit to the Giotto dump slum had the greatest impact on participants' perspectives of themselves and others. Participants' visit to New Canaan Village (formerly the Pipeline IDP Camp) also elicited responses that led to personal shifts. These shifts are an important component of intercultural competency development as they need to occur before any external outcomes or intercultural actions. Shifts were predominantly centred on meanings of privilege; participants recognised they had access to opportunities and socio-economic resources that were not available to the community living at the dump slum or New Canaan Village. In-country group discussions allowed participants to verbally process the range of emotions and cognitive dissonances experienced. These group discussions were mediated by three Kenyan nationals (STC employees). The cultural contextualising provided by these nationals contributed towards participants shifting their personal frames of reference in their perspectives and values. Feelings initially centred on notions of guilt and shame were replaced by a more philosophical perspective centred on the concepts of gratitude and happiness.

### **5.3 Post Immersion**

The following questions were used to ascertain what impacts the immersion program had on participants:

- Have you been impacted personally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Have you been impacted professionally by the program? If so, in what ways?
- Reflecting back on the culture in Kenya, what were some things that stood out for you?
- What have you found most confronting since returning to Australia?

The greatest impacts on participants related to the challenges they experienced after returning to their home culture in Australia. Participants became frustrated as they struggled to

adequately share their experiences with family and friends. Outside of this frustration, participants were able to describe the personal and professional impacts of the immersion. Personal impacts were highlighted by changes in their perspectives on their own cultural values. These values centred on understandings of connection, belonging and relationships. Arriving in Australia during the weeks leading up to Christmas had many participants questioning the value of a consumerist and materialistic society. These shifts in perspective were influenced by immersing with their respective host family and engaging in various critical experiences in Kenya. Professional impacts centred on feeling more confident as a teacher and having a greater understanding as to the role and importance of education in bringing about social change.

### **5.3.1 Theme 1: Immersion Programs Foster Personal Transformation**

Personal transformation was articulated by participants through the cognition of a deeper sense of appreciation. Appreciation for the opportunities they had been afforded; opportunities that were mainly the result of their socio-economic privilege. Changes in meaning were also influenced by participants immersing with their host family and resulted from the building of relationships. These relationships centred on the significance of connection and belonging, and, as such, also fostered empathy. The various critical experiences encountered, and cultural mediation provided by Kenyan nationals also resulted in changes to participants' perspectives and values. One value recognised by participants was that of social responsibility; that through education, they were able to be agents for change. Assisting participants to make sense of their experiences and the associated cognitive and affective dissonances was the concept of Ubuntu. This concept was discussed at various stages throughout the immersion by the assisting Kenyan nationals. These discussions assisted participants in shifting their worldview from the world as a cultural dichotomy to one that is inherently connected. The following quotation encapsulated the degree of transformation:

Most definitely! This program challenged me to reflect upon myself and opened me up to how ignorant we can be and how much we take our first world ‘simplicities’ and ‘conveniences’ for granted. Travelling to Africa allowed me to view issues such as pollution, access to clean water, living standards, health care, etc., in a different light. Just by being born in Australia we are granted privileged lives. We are given a multitude of opportunities through education. In becoming aware of our privilege, we must also acknowledge our responsibility. We have so much more than we need so how are we going to utilise these blessings to make a difference in our world? (PS17)

### **5.3.2 Theme 2: Immersion Programs Strengthen Teacher Dispositions and Affirm the Value of Education**

The time spent teaching at Aberdare Ranges Primary School allowed participants to build and improve various professional skills and dispositions. These included confidence, communication, flexibility and relationship building. Perhaps most notable was the necessity and ability to effectively communicate without the use of the English language to engage children in various activities, which led to positive relationships with the children at Aberdare Ranges Primary School. Additionally, participants grew in their confidence to improvise, developing the ability to be flexible in what they were seeking to achieve. It was during their time at the school that participants developed an appreciation as to the importance of relationships in creating a positive classroom environment. In addition to these dispositions and skills, participants acknowledged that as future teachers, they were able to effect social change through education.

The following quotation is an example of the immersion experience’s impact on a participant’s valuing of education:

As a future teacher, I have a deep appreciation for education, however, Kenya allowed me to see how truly lucky we are to have opportunities for education. Before experiencing this program, I valued education but didn’t see the power of education and



the implications it has when a person is stripped of the right to be educated. Kenya taught me to not take my own, or others education for granted. (PS14).

### **5.3.3 Theme 3: Understanding of the ‘Cultural Other’ is Strengthened through Community Engagement**

In seeking to understand others, empathy is enhanced. However, no understanding of significance can be reached without first understanding the ‘self’. Homestays allowed participants to immerse themselves with local families and engage with the broader community. Homestays allowed participants to experience day-to-day living with their host family. Participants helped cook, went to church, travelled into Nakuru town and shopped, and watched television and played games during the evenings. These allowed for individual narratives to be shared, which in turn strengthened empathy. Engaging with the community further led to participants reflecting on aspects of their own visible culture. One aspect that stood out for many was that of food. Participants reflected on notions of food scarcity, sourcing food and diet. Some of the homestay families had individual plots of land used to grow a variety of different plants and vegetables. The interactions participants shared of collecting various produce strengthened the relationship bonds.

The following quotation is indicative of this theme:

The family I stayed with have faced and overcome horrific situations that no one should ever have to experience in their lifetime, yet they live lives based around faith, hope and love. The strength and will of the family was truly inspiring and was something that has really forced me to reflect on my life and values. I have learned and am still learning, about the greater meaning of life and what it means to be living. (PS14)

### **5.3.4 Theme 4: Reconciling Personal Transformation in Home Culture is Challenging**

Although the program was of a relatively short duration (three weeks), many participants experienced challenges upon returning to their home culture in Australia (Young,

2014). Participants reported struggling in their attempts to share with others the totality of the program they had experienced. Participants became frustrated in their attempts to adequately share their experiences with family and friends. Feelings of frustration were amplified by the timing of their return to Australia. Returning just before Christmas highlighted some of their personal shifts in perspective and values. These shifts centred on connection and belonging, which were now considered far more important than individualism. These shifts also led to feelings of frustration centred on the cultural value of consumerism and the associated waste:

The challenges faced after returning home were summarised by one participant as follows:

It can be difficult to discuss my experience of the trip with others, especially since the people I am discussing it with would not be able to empathise as they are so far removed from the circumstances that I experienced throughout the immersion. It can be difficult and frustrating to discuss such an impactful experience while, in the same conversation, your friends are discussing their own first world problems. (PS11)

### **5.3.5 Summary**

Post-immersion data aligned with the current literature describing the experiences of returning to one's home culture after a period abroad. Participants articulated a disdain for the reality of the life they had returned to, and in some cases, participants lacked the motivation to do things they had previously enjoyed (Young, 2014). Participants experienced feelings of frustration and misunderstanding, and for many this was compounded by not being able to articulate to family and friends the totality of what they had experienced abroad. This frustration was in contrast to the euphoric feeling participants had experienced upon entering the host community in Nakuru, Kenya. Here, homestay families and community members were both accommodating and supportive. The participants themselves recognised that they had changed but now felt that people around them, including family and friends, either did not understand them or, for some, did they have the time to listen to their experiences. The cultural

dissonances participants encountered while abroad were again being encountered back in their home culture. Based on their experiences abroad, participants now placed importance on the values of belonging, community and relationships. Arriving back home, these values were being challenged as participants re-encountered values centred around consumerism, materialism and individualism. Again, this re-encounter was a cause of frustration and intolerance for things participants now deemed to be trivial.

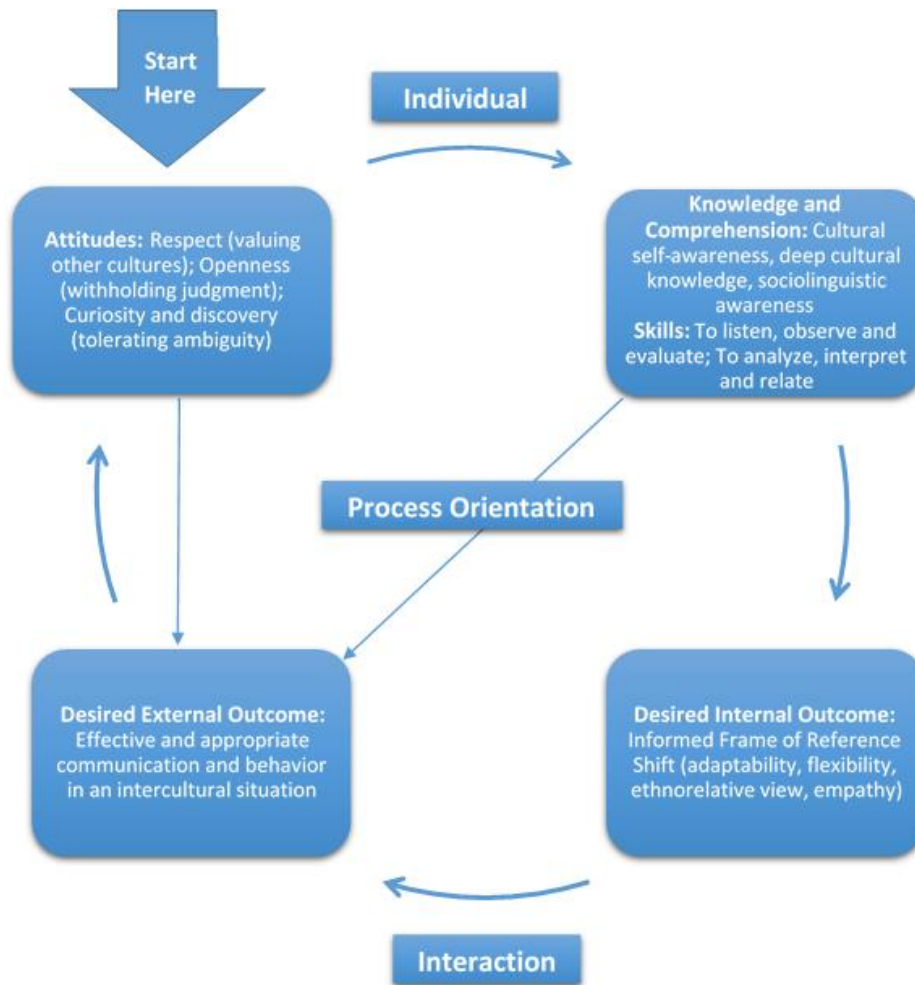
## **5.4 Immersion and Intercultural Competence**

The immersion narrative was revealed through a cyclical journey—a journey that uncovered numerous intersections with intercultural competence. The journey commenced with an introspection of participants' assumptions and expectations of the immersion prior to departure. Participants were subsequently immersed with host families, within a community where they experienced, as closely as one can, the cultural other. Following their return to Australia, the participants return to introspection, in the form of critically reflecting on the internal shifts and challenges faced upon re-entry into their home culture. The following sections present the intersections that emerged between the immersion and intercultural competence. This goes towards addressing the main research question: In what ways can a short-term cultural immersion program impact the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers?

For individuals, intercultural competence is not an end in itself—it is never complete and is always being enriched through various intercultural encounters and experiences (Barrett et al., 2014). Such encounters and experiences facilitate the development of critical self-awareness and intercultural relationships. Deardorff's (2006) process model for intercultural competence (see Figure 5.1) is illustrative of a simultaneous interactional process that is recursive at all stages, in that it feeds back on itself but also anticipates several specific, sequential, causal paths (Barrett et al., 2013).

**Figure 5.1**

*Deardorff's (2006) Process Model for Intercultural Competence*



*Note.* From Deardorff (2006).

This model reflects the aspects of intercultural competence agreed upon by leading intercultural experts (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Deardorff (2006) posits that the development of intercultural competence begins at the level of the individual. It is at this level that attitudes required for intercultural competence are highlighted, including respect, openness, and curiosity. Additionally, there is a requirement for cultural knowledge and understanding, along with the requisite skills for effective communication and relationship building. These lead to internal shifts in personal frames of reference, which ideally lead to external outcomes or actions indicative of intercultural competence.

Synthesis of this immersion with intercultural competence will be presented using Deardorff's (2006) four components for intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge and comprehension including skills, internal outcomes, and external outcomes. Data from relevant phases will be used to validate the intersections between the immersion and Deardorff's components. Where relevant discussion will also include intersections with service-learning, as the immersion was premised on the principles of service-learning.

#### **5.4.1 Attitudes**

Using a grounded theory approach, Deardorff (2006) identified attitudes that facilitate the development of intercultural competence. These attitudes allow for intercultural behaviour that is both appropriate and effective—appropriate in the understanding that behaviours are suitable and match the value structures and norms of the cultural other, and effective in that mutually shared meanings are derived from the encounter (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Attitudes include respect, openness and curiosity.

In the present study, participants positioned themselves as being separate or different from the cultural other. The cultural other lived elsewhere and was perceived as not having equal access to requirements for living. The quotation below is demonstrative of such self-positioning:

One of the primary reasons I chose to participate in this program is because I realise that, in our Western society in particular, we can be completely separated from the hardships of people who struggle to feed their families on the other side of the world.  
(PS4)

Participants' awareness and understanding enabled an articulation of various attitudes—attitudes reflective of intercultural competence, including being open, willing and curious to engage with and learn about people from a different culture. The following comment was reflective of an attitude of openness and curiosity: 'I am looking forward to meeting the local

community and connecting with the students. I am really looking forward to immersing into their culture and staying with other students with local families' (PS10).

Attitudes that further foster intercultural competence include an ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, which is indicative of the attitude of curiosity and discovery (Deardorff, 2006). In this study, this was widely described by participants as stepping outside of their comfort zones. For example:

I am expecting to be pushed outside of my comfort zone. Have my own beliefs and skills challenged, develop a better understanding of myself as a teacher and others around me. This Kenya immersion is going to be an eye-opening experience and I look forward to being stretched emotionally, physically and spiritually. (PS10)

Participants' willingness to step outside of their comfort zones and to empathise with the cultural other is illustrative of their openness to challenging their own assumptions, beliefs and values:

To be pushed to come out of your shell and put yourself into unusual and challenging situations. To have an experience that will develop confidence and wisdom which you can use to continue to develop your own understandings and beliefs. (PS17)

In summary, the pre-immersion data supports the range of attitudes noted by Deardorff (2006) as necessary for intercultural competence, including openness and curiosity. Mendenhall (2001) suggests that having a sense of curiosity is the cornerstone for developing intercultural effectiveness, a position supported by Deardorff (2006).

#### **5.4.2 Knowledge and Comprehension**

The components of knowledge for intercultural competence include cultural self-awareness, cultural knowledge and socio-linguistic awareness. Associated skills include listening, observing, interpreting and relating. Motivation is understood to be enhanced by the influence of these two components (Deardorff, 2006). In combination, motivation, knowledge and skills are needed to support shifts in internal perspectives, or frames of reference. Internal

shifts enhance empathy, ethnorelativity and adaptability, which in turn lead to appropriate and effective actions or outcomes (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Cultural knowledge and basic socio-linguistic awareness were addressed by participants prior to the immersion. Participants engaged in two full-day workshops. The first workshop focused on planning and preparation for their teaching and covered travel logistics. The second workshop aimed to ensure all participants had relevant cultural and historical knowledge and understanding of the Kenyan context. This specific workshop was facilitated by a Kenyan-born Australian and covered cultural norms, the history behind the host school and community in which participants would be immersing themselves, and basic communicative language skills. The workshops were conducted two weeks apart, with the second workshop held the week before departure. Given the self-selecting nature of the participants, their motivation was quite high, but it would be once they were in Kenya that the elements within knowledge and understanding required for intercultural competence would be enacted and reflected upon.

During the immersion, opportunities for reflection were ever present as participants kept journals. Their journals outlined events and experiences, including both cognitive and affective dissonances. What emerged from participants' journal entries was that their cultural assumptions were challenged. Challenges became apparent during various critical experiences. The most notable experience for participants was their visit to the Giotto dump slum. This experience brought into critical focus their socio-economic privilege and the opportunities that such privilege enables. As one participant summarised:

It was so hard. I couldn't help but compare what I had to the little that they had. Why is this the case? These people don't deserve this, we're all humans, and it's just the circumstances we happened to be born into. We were just born in a better place. (PS17)

Further aspects of cultural self-awareness resulted in an understanding of the value and significance of relationships and connection. Community connectedness and the sense of belonging that stems from relationships were valued by participants. As one participant noted:

Sometimes in our society we can feel as individuals fighting our own battles. But here, they come together as a community and help each other and there is a sense of belonging within a community beyond their immediate family members. (PS19)

PS3 further reflected on the perceived absence of this connection in their home culture: ‘Their sense of community and independence and their sense of connection is something we miss back home’.

The skills required for intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) are those needed for effective communication. These skills include listening, interpreting, and relating. For participants, communicative awareness was highlighted through understanding the importance of language and the way language influences the way one is perceived and understood. Through having communicative awareness, the development of socio-linguistic skills became paramount as participants attempted to engage with children at both Aberdare Ranges Primary School and Miti Mingi Village. These skills included using non-verbal cues, using single words in Kiswahili, using visual displays and modelling an activity. The development of these skills highlighted the significance of language (verbal and non-verbal) for appropriate and effective communication. PS2 reflected on the importance of communication and the skills associated with it: ‘Communication is very important, and these skills have been developed while I was teaching in Kenya because I learnt to communicate in different ways such as gestural/actions or through facial expressions’.

Thus, language became highly salient as participants attempted to engage children in various activities. Communication was further fostered through the relationship’s participants developed with their host families and members of the broader community. The quality of these relationships was premised on the effectiveness of participants’ communication skills. In these contexts, the skills of listening and observing enabled participants to learn about the experiences and lives of their host family and the community:



The family that you stayed with gave you their personal stories and just walking through the town to get home you got to see different things, meet different people. Everyone was so welcoming and they are so accepting and happy and willing to share their stories. (PS6)

Relationships with their host family provided further opportunity for participants to build cultural knowledge. Kenya's political history includes internecine political violence. While this knowledge was briefly covered in the final pre-departure workshop, greater understanding resulted from listening and relating with members of host families and members of the broader community—most of whom were IDPs as a direct result of this violence. Such understanding was reflected PS13:

The Kenyans I met overcame horrific situations that no one should ever have to experience in their lifetime ... the strength and will of the women, men and children is something that really forces me to reflect on my own life and values. I have learned and I am still learning about the greater meaning of life. (PS13)

For this and other participants, the skill of critically evaluating situations and their own cultural values and perspectives were further developed. Critical reflection is required for intercultural competence and is also a key component to service-learning. 'Reflection has been described as turning experience into learning, that is, a way of exploring experience in order to learn new things from it' (Boud, 2001, p. 10). Through critical reflection, participants were able to make new meanings from their experiences. Meanings included shifts in their perspectives and clarification of their values. The following quotation articulates both an experience and the new learning that resulted from it:

I have really started to question my own happiness. You walk through the camp and you can just feel the happiness, it really highlights how materialistic we are. It doesn't matter what physical items we have it is the connections that you make that essentially make you. (PS12)

As indicated by the quotation above, the immersion experience enabled opportunities for all participants to continually reflect on and evaluate their own cultural values. Their meaning making during the immersion was further enhanced through the mediation of three Kenyan nationals. The visit to the Giotto dump slum was particularly emotional and visceral for participants. Following this visit, the cultural mediation provided by the nationals to the participants allowed for a personal reframing of cultural values. One example of such reframing was described as follows:

Today we visited the community living on the dump site and I was in disbelief. It was such a shock to see vultures and wild pigs living amongst the piles of rubbish which a Kenyan community call home. I decided to open my eyes to the amazing things about this community, their level of happiness. With the amount of material possessions and luxuries we have in Australia, it is almost inconceivable that we do not attain any true happiness. (PS2)

In summary, intersections exist between the knowledge, comprehension and skills required for intercultural competence and the immersion experience. Experiences in Kenya provided the participants with opportunities to evaluate aspects of their cultural self-awareness. Through homestay and community engagement, participants were able to deepen their comprehension of aspects of cultural knowledge, and through their teaching at the school, they built socio-linguistic awareness and skills.

#### **5.4.3 Internal Outcomes**

Possessing the requisite attitudes, knowledge, comprehension, and skills is not sufficient for intercultural competence (Barrett et al., 2013). Interculturally competent actions result from internal shifts which, according to Deardorff (2006), are the result of an informed frame of reference—a frame that includes what Bennett (2004) describes as an ethnorelative view of the world. In this immersion, ethnorelativism included participants integrating themselves into their host family and broader community and empathising with the cultural

other, which fostered an appreciation for cultural diversity; enhanced communication skills, which allowed for greater understanding; challenged worldviews; and prompted re-evaluation of situations from various cultural perspectives.

Shifts occurred in participants' ability to adapt and integrate knowledge, understandings and skills (Bennett, 2004), resulting in new meanings. New meanings were centred on participants' reframing of meanings associated with their cultural values and socio-economic privilege. New meanings that resulted from participants recognising their socio-economic privilege led to articulations of appreciation and gratitude, for example:

I think it has taught me appreciation and how grateful I am, the privileges I have and what I can do with that ... I didn't choose where I was born, just as the children we met didn't choose to be born in Kenya. What I can choose is what I am going to do with my life and appreciate the endless opportunities I have in life. I'm going to start appreciating every opportunity I have and not take anything for granted. (PS15)

As described by PS7, internal shifts also resulted from participants being immersed with their homestay family and through the relationships they were able to build with both their homestay families and members of the community:

To experience another way of life, to live with the families and experience part of their day to day changed my perspective on my own life. The people in Kenya deal with a certain level of 'real' stress daily, like water supply, food, clothing, paying for essentials and so on, things that as an Australian, I take for granted. This experience has allowed me to be truly grateful for everything I have. (PS7)

In addition to homestays, the range of critical experiences provided participants with opportunities to empathise emotionally and intellectually with the cultural other. From the data, as illustrated in the following quotation, it became obvious that high-intensity experiences (Kiely, 2004) can greatly influence internal shifts:

It was really challenging, really hard. I think a challenging part was that the fact that we have so much and sometimes we are not grateful for it and we don't appreciate the things that we have, but these people are living on a dump site. I was overwhelmed with guilt of how I'd lived my life and how I hadn't valued the things that I had, and I didn't appreciate those things. It just really shook my perspective. (PS11)

In summary, the immersion experience resulted in internal shifts by participants. These shifts occurred because of the various experiences within the immersion which provided opportunities for participants to have what Deardorff (2006) describes as informed frames of reference. These frames of reference were informed through requisite attitudes for the development of intercultural competence, the various critical experiences in Kenya, culturally mediated discussions, and critical journal writing and reflection.

#### **5.4.4 External Outcomes**

According to Deardorff (2006, 2011), the desired external outcomes of intercultural competence are an individual's effective and appropriate behaviour and communication and the experience of these by others. Effectiveness is determined by the individual, while appropriateness can only be determined by the other person. Appropriateness of behaviour or communication is related to the adherence of cultural norms by the other person (Deardorff, 2006). Interculturally competent actions result from the summation of requisite attitudes, knowledge, skills and internal shifts. Barrett et al. (2014) contend that all of the components required for intercultural competence are lacking if they do not lead to actions.

The study did not seek to quantify or qualify the effectiveness or appropriateness of participants' behaviour or communication. As the study focused on participants' experiences of the immersion, the effectiveness of their behaviour and communication can perhaps be surmised from the degree of engagement and relationships with others. Regarding external outcomes, what the immersion is able to demonstrate is that suggested by Barrett et al. (2013), that intercultural actions include seeking opportunities to engage with people who have

different perspectives and cultural orientations to one's own. This was demonstrated by the participants through their openness and willingness to participate in the immersion and through their relationships with their homestay family. Further, the immersion program allowed opportunities for participants to act in ways that were interculturally competent. As participants engaged in relationships with homestay families, the broader community and the children and staff at the school, they were required to communicate in ways that were respectful and effective (Deardorff, 2006). Respect here is described as regarding, appreciating, and valuing the other (Barrett et al., 2013). For the participants, this valuing was most notable during their time at the school. To engage with the children, they were required to develop and utilise various socio-linguistic skills to foster a degree of mutual understanding between themselves and the other.

As such, the willingness of the participants to resonate with the cultural other allowed them to foster empathy. Empathy resulted from the intercultural skills of listening and relating with the other, which participants experienced in homestays, through critical experiences and through their teaching time at the school. Galloway-Thomas (2010) would argue that empathy has the greatest potential to alter our intercultural actions.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

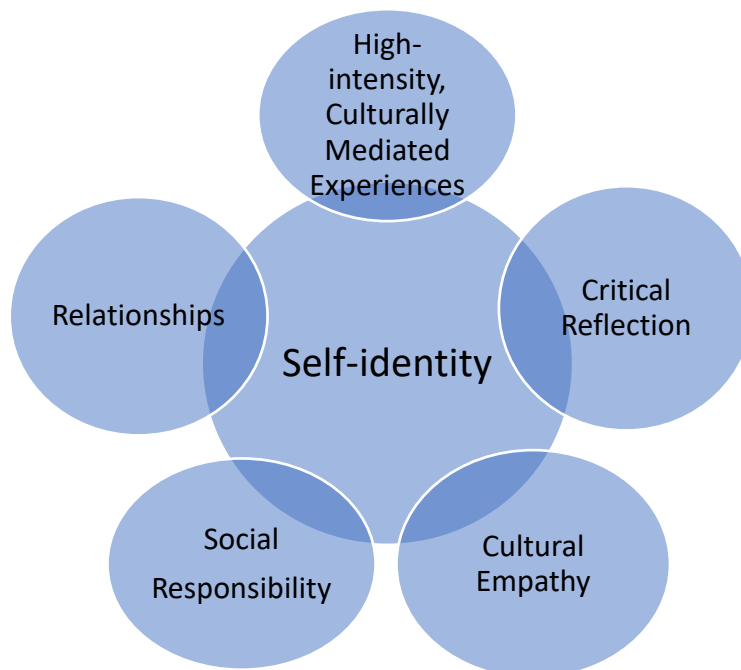
This section returns to the overall research question: In what ways can a short-term cultural immersion program impact the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers? Based on the study's findings, the impact of short-term cultural immersion on the development of intercultural competence is illustrated in Figure 5.2. The figure depicts the key findings distilled from the main themes that emerged in this study and the connection of these to the development of intercultural competence.

Deardorff (2009) describes intercultural competence as a spiral. Thus, Figure 5.2 presents the key findings from the present study in the development of intercultural

competence as being both spiral and recursive in nature. Support for positing the figure in this manner is provided by Barrett et al. (2013), who contend, ‘An individual’s intercultural competence is never complete but can always be enriched further from continuing experience of different kinds of intercultural encounter’ (p. 8). This immersion is one such encounter. The five aspects, which both surround and interconnect with each other and with self-identity, are described as permeable constructs, rather than rigid concepts (Kelly, 1970). They are permeable in that the perceptions individuals have of themselves; others and the world are open to constant shifts in perspectives and in the meanings made from such perspectives. These aspects are discussed below.

**Figure 5.2**

*Conception of the (Ever-Ongoing) Development of Intercultural Competence*



**5.5.1 Self-Identity**

At the core of the proposed model is self-identity. Historically, the words of the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates— ‘Know thyself’—is where all wisdom begins. Such wisdom is

derived from ‘a person’s sense of who they are and the self-descriptions to which they attribute significance and value’ (Barrett et al., 2013, p. 5). These self-descriptions, both personal and social, are continually reflected on as individuals position themselves in relation to others. Deardorff’s (2006) cultural competency model provided a useful framework to analyse participants responses and experience. The model commences with attitudes and the attitudes required for intercultural competence are connected to an individual’s sense of identity (Fernández-Agüero & Garrote, 2019). Attitudes included valuing of the Kenyan culture, an openness and curiosity to discover and learn (Deardorff, 2006). Descriptions of self, include personal and social identities, various attributes, relationships and roles, allowing people to both define their own individuality and, when in relation to others, their position in the world (Barrett et al., 2013). Through a socio-cultural lens, identity is concerned with how individuals come to understand themselves and how they ‘come to “see” who they are, through the social and cultural “worlds” that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds’ (Urietta, 2018, p. 17). Requisite attitudes for intercultural competence reside within the knowledge and understanding of self-identity. Savicki (2020) suggests that openness and flexibility are prerequisites for continually redefining one’s identity and for personal growth—the same attitudes required for the development of intercultural competence. Further, at both an individual and collective level, the association between one’s identity and attitudes has implications for actions or behaviours (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014).

### **5.5.2 Social Responsibility**

Deardorff (2006) notes that having the right attitude assists in becoming interculturally competent. In support, Okayama et al. (2001) suggest, ‘what may be most important is a willingness to make changes ... underlying attitudes that support everything that can be taught or learned’ (p. 97). While research suggests that there is no exhaustive list of attitudes required for intercultural competence (Barrett et al., 2013), the disposition of responsibility is rarely explicitly mentioned. A finding from the present study that is both of value and interest is that

participants articulated a desire to be socially responsible, which they further understood as being important (Barrett et al., 2013). The following quotation is indicative of this sentiment: ‘You always hear about those less fortunate, and I feel like this is the perfect opportunity for me to actually put words into actions and do something that would benefit someone else’ (PS19).

In addition to the attitudes suggested by Deardorff (2006) for the development of intercultural competence, for participants in the present study, having the right attitude included an articulation and understanding of responsibility. From the study’s findings, in light of Deardorff’s (2006) process model, an assertion can be made that responsibility may also be an antecedent for the development of intercultural competence. As much as a person *acknowledges* that they have a responsibility to decide whether to critically reflect on their self-identity and whether to acquire requisite knowledge and understanding (not only of themselves but of the cultural other), they must then *take* responsibility for the development of the requisite skills to effectively engage with the cultural other. Thus, a degree of responsibility is able to facilitate both internal and external outcomes. Social responsibility will be further discussed in the discussion of the cultural empathy aspect (Section 5.5.4).

An articulation of social responsibility reflected participants’ motivations for participating in the immersion program. PS3 articulated a similar sentiment to the previous participant, but couched it within an understanding of service-learning:

I think that service-learning programs are attractive as they provide an experience that is truly unique and different from the everyday, privileged, Western world that we live in. I believe that as fortunate humans, we hold an innate responsibility to help those in need. (PS3)

As mentioned above, knowledge and comprehension, including skills required for intercultural competence, are enhanced through motivation (Deardorff, 2006). Motivation, in combination with knowledge and skills, support shifts in internal frames of reference. This in



turn enhances empathy, ethnorelativity and adaptability, leading to appropriate and effective actions or outcomes (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Participants in this immersion were motivated by altruistic reasons, which they phrased as wanting to make a difference. This, when combined with the service-learning nature of the immersion, may provide further justification as to why social responsibility should be included as an aspect for the development of intercultural competence. Further, the association between identity and attitudes, including social responsibility, have implication for actions or external outcomes (Deardorff, 2006). These actions can lead to both individual and social change.

### **5.5.3 High-Intensity, Culturally Mediated Experiences**

The development of intercultural competence requires that individuals shift their internal frames of reference. Such shifts enhance empathy and adaptability, leading to appropriate and effective intercultural actions (Deardorff, 2006). This study was able to demonstrate that shifts in perspectives result from high-intensity intercultural experiences (Kiely, 2005). According to Yunkaporta (2009), 'It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another's eyes, or at the very least to recognise that others may view the world through a different cultural lens' (as cited in Walker et al., 2014, p. 200). During the immersion, participants were able to build the skill of empathy through the various experiences. The most notable experience was the visit to the Giotto dump slum. Cultural mediation of this experience allowed participants to recognise that material possessions were not really the source of happiness; rather, when viewed through a different cultural lens, happiness is sourced internally through connection and belonging. It is recognised that cultural immersion programs provide experiences that are experiential and unique in nature. The learning within immersion programs results from divergent worldviews, which leads to thoughts and actions that are global in nature (Zong, 2009).

#### **5.5.4 Cultural Empathy**

Cultural empathy results from an appreciation of and reflection on both the similarities and differences between one's own culture and the culture of others. Depraz (2001) would contend that empathy is an ethical responsibility towards yourself as a person. Additionally, Galloway-Thomas (2010) would argue that empathy has the greatest potential to alter our intercultural actions. With these in mind, the immersion program in Kenya included homestays. Through being immersed in the day-to-day lives of their host family, participants were able to build a deeper appreciation of the cultural other, which enabled cultural empathy. Williams (2005) posits that actual cultural immersion is important if students are to develop intercultural capabilities. The participants' engagement with their host families was such that it could foster empathy and also be transformative (Daloz, 2000). Engagements of this nature are described by Daloz (2000):

For the experience to be more than simply an encounter ... there had to be some sense of empathic connection with people different from themselves. In some significant way the inner experience of the other was engaged, a bond was formed, and some deep lesson about connection across differences was learned. (p. 110)

Deep connection and learning also resulted from other experiences, including visits to New Canaan Village and the Giotto dump slum, teaching at Aberdare Ranges Primary School and exploring Miti Mingi Village. All experiences provided the participants with opportunities to both appreciate and reflect on cultural similarities and differences. The cultural differences gleaned by participants included a greater appreciation and understanding of the importance of community connection, the value of relationships and the significance of belonging. This cultural juxtaposition is reflective of Western cultural values that tend to support individualism over collectivism. Intersections between the immersion experiences and participants' development of cultural empathy were such that, according to Daloz (2000), they could lead to

greater social responsibility. Social responsibility can thus be considered an outward manifestation of intercultural competence.

### **5.5.5 Relationships**

Any positioning of the self in relation to the cultural other requires that both people enter into a relationship. Williams (2005) posits that immersion experiences can develop intercultural capabilities only when participants interact with the locals, immersing in the culture. Relationships were formed by the participants through immersing with their homestay families. These relationships fostered cultural empathy which, in turn, required requisite attitudes for intercultural competence. Attitudes that develop intercultural competence include openness, curiosity, respect, and flexibility. For the participants, these attitudes, in combination with the relationships they formed, strengthened the immersion experience, and fostered the development of intercultural competence. Central to the development of these relationships was communication. Effective and appropriate communication is the goal of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). The importance of communication, including the role of language for relationship building, was highlighted throughout the participants' time at the school. Being placed in classroom environments where participants were not able to draw on the use of the English language to facilitate learning led to participants' development and employment of socio-linguistic strategies that fostered a degree of understanding between themselves and the children. The ability to form relationships with the children was vital to participants' experiences at the school. Underpinned by the service-learning principle of reciprocity, this immersion, facilitated through the NGO STC, was also premised on the understanding of respectful and mutual relationships.

### **5.5.6 Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection is a key component to defining self-identity and personal growth. Further, to engage in critical written reflection and discourse should lead to action or external outcomes. On both a personal and professional level, action is the outward manifestation of

internal shifts in perspective, or frames of reference (Deardorff, 2006). Such shifts result from critical reflection and subsequent new learning. Savicki (2020) suggests that the purpose of critical reflection is to increase levels of self-awareness and encourage a desire to engage dialectically with the world. In this immersion, participants' reflections were centred on critical experiences which allowed them an opportunity to explore and evaluate their culturally held beliefs, attitudes and values. The service-learning aspects of this immersion provided shifts in frames of reference that importantly created opportunities for participants to grow and develop through action (Savicki, 2020). The kinds of action that participants described were both personal and professional. Personally, shifts occurred from values reflecting individualism to a greater appreciation and valuing of belonging and human connection. As future teachers, professional shifts resulted in greater confidence and a desire and willingness to meet the needs of culturally diverse students. The immersion provided opportunities for participants to empathise with the cultural other, which should further translate into interculturally competent interactions and relationships with diverse members within a school community. The critical experiences within this immersion were also culturally mediated. The discourse within these discussions fostered cultural awareness and knowledge that led to new understandings by participants of themselves and the world (Mezirow, 1996). As a result, participants were challenged in their understanding of their own socio-cultural privilege and the values associated with an individualist culture.

### **5.5.7 Summary**

In building on and discussing the findings in Chapter 4 and responding to the main research question, this chapter aimed to build an immersion narrative to ultimately demonstrate intersections between a short-term cultural immersion experience, relevant aspects of service-learning and the development of intercultural competence in preservice teachers. The acquisition of intercultural competencies is an ongoing process (Deardorff, 2006) that can take place during any stage in human life. Central to human life is the individual and their sense of

identity; an identity that embodies an articulation and understanding of personal and social representations. Such representations are open to evaluation as one positions themselves with cultural others. Positioning an individual in high-intensity intercultural experiences, when culturally mediated, leads to critical thinking and self-evaluation. In summary, the demonstrated impacts of the short-term cultural immersion on the development of intercultural competence in preservice teachers allow for the following key assertions to be made:

- self-identity is an integral component for intercultural competence
- social responsibility strengthens intercultural competence
- high-dissonance, critical experiences intensify understandings and skills, heighten internal shifts and lead to new meanings
- communicative awareness and competence are enhanced through authentic immersion in the community, and strengthened connections lead to critical thinking
- cultural mediation enables and strengthens shifts in perspective.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter revisits the main research question by discussing the key assertions elicited in Chapter 5. The chapter then identifies the significance and contributions of the study (Section 6.2), the implications of the findings for practice (Section 6.3), the study's limitations (Section 6.4) and recommendations for future research (Section 6.5).

### **6.1 Discussion of Key Assertions**

As a mini-ethnographic case study, this study set out to document and understand the collective experience of 20 preservice teachers who, in 2016, elected to participate in a short-term cultural immersion program in Kenya. The immersion was premised on the following principles of service-learning: participants engaged in experiential learning, relationships, reciprocity and critical reflection. Although the immersion was premised on the principles of service-learning, the focus of the research was on the collective perspectives and experiences of the participants, pre, during and post immersion. This ultimately aimed to provide a deeper understanding of any impacts cultural immersion programs have on the development of intercultural competence. The findings and resulting understanding allowed for five key assertions regarding the impact of short-term cultural immersion programs on the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers. These assertions are discussed below.

#### **6.1.1 Self-Identity is an Integral Component for Intercultural Competence**

Requisite attitudes for intercultural competence reside within knowledge and understanding of self-identity. Two attitudes required for the development of intercultural competence are openness and curiosity (Deardorff, 2006), which are also prerequisites for continually redefining one's identity and personal growth (Savicki, 2020). Self-identity became a key feature across all phases of the study. In the pre-immersion phase, participants articulated

their expectations of the immersion program and their motivations for participating. Of significance was the concept of altruism, which was articulated as ‘making a difference’. In seeking to make a difference, participants recognised requisite attitudes for intercultural competence, including being open to, respectful of and curious about cultural others (Deardorff, 2006).. These attitudes served as prerequisites for continually redefining participants’ identity, and by doing so, led to personal growth (Fernández-Agüero & Garrote, 2019). Throughout the during immersion phase, descriptions of the self in relation to the positioning of oneself with the cultural other were highlighted. In seeking to understand themselves, participants were in a position to become aware of and better understand others. Both observing and engaging in the real-life experiences of people at the Giotto dump slum, New Canaan Village, homestay families and Aberdare Ranges Primary School allowed participants opportunities to reflect on their position of socio-economic privilege. These critical experiences enhanced participants’ understanding of the range of opportunities they were afforded because of their socio-economic privilege. The post-immersion phase further reframed notions of privilege, now viewed through the perceived levels of materialism and consumerism evident in participants’ home culture. Participants’ understanding of privilege led to an internal shift that reframed the value they place on education and their own personal and professional social responsibility. All phases of the immersion echo Deardorff’s (2006) assertion that the development of intercultural competence rather than being linear is recursive and as such the development of intercultural competence is never complete, always being enriched by different intercultural experiences.

### **6.1.2 Social Responsibility Strengthens Intercultural Competence**

Articulation of the need to be socially responsible was evident throughout all three phases of the study. The findings were not conclusive as to the reason why, though it could be argued that such perceived responsibility was due to one or more of the common characteristics of the participants: studying to become teachers and studying at a Catholic institution (whose

intellectual tradition is based on Catholic social teaching, including the principles of human dignity, rights and responsibilities). Research in intercultural competence suggests that motivation enhances the knowledge and understanding required for intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). During pre-immersion, participants were motivated to participate in the program for altruistic reasons, with the view to wanting to make a difference. As the immersion was premised on the principles of service-learning, the motivation to make a difference resulted in participants interrogating their understanding of their own culture and seeking a deeper understanding of the cultural other. Such an interrogation encouraged participants to view themselves as agents for social change. In combination with their understanding of their cultural worldviews, including their privileged socio-economic positions (Boyle-Baise, 1998), participants were able to better appreciate the role of education as one conduit for social change. This understanding of social responsibility was enhanced through the critical experiences encountered in Kenya. In developing intercultural competence, these experiences increased empathetic understanding of the cultural other, which then resulted in internal shifts in participants' frames of reference. Empathy has the greatest potential to alter our intercultural actions (Galloway-Thomas, 2010). The range of critical experiences within the immersion enabled participants to build empathy. As future teachers, their levels of empathy enable conscious consideration of ways to respond. As a result of the immersion, they placed greater value on becoming a teacher and improved their understanding of the ability of this vocation to bring about change.

### **6.1.3 High-Dissonance, Critical Experiences Intensify Understandings and Skills, Heighten Internal Shifts and Lead to New Meanings**

During this immersion, the range of critical experiences, which were high dissonance (Kiely, 2005) intensified experiential learning. The learning that resulted from divergent worldviews led to thoughts and actions that are global in nature (Zong, 2009). The immersion provided participants with several opportunities to deeply reflect on their own values and



beliefs, and they were able to learn about the experiences of people different to themselves (Deardorff, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Such cultural self-awareness is a necessary precursor of intercultural learning as it involves recognising cultural differences (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006)). Cultural differences that led to new meanings about people and culture included the value and importance of belonging and community connectedness. Participants recognised that material possessions were not really the source of happiness; rather, when viewed through a different cultural lens, happiness is sourced internally through human connection and belonging. After their return to Australia, this notion was further reinforced as participants contrasted the high levels of material possessions and consumerism with the need for and importance of human connection. The immersion experience acted as a catalyst for the formation of coherent understandings about culture, cultural identity, and intercultural relations, all positively impacting the development of intercultural competence.

#### **6.1.4 Communicative Awareness and Competence are Enhanced through Authentic Immersion in the Community, and Strengthened Connections Lead to Critical Thinking**

Communication skills were fostered through the relationship's participants developed with their host family and members of the broader community. Immersing with a host family was important to the development of intercultural competence as it allowed interaction with the host family and culture (Deardorff, 2006; Williams, 2005). The quality of the relationships formed was premised on the effectiveness of participants' communication skills. In homestay contexts, the skills of listening and observing (Deardorff, 2006) enabled participants to learn about the experiences and lives of their host family and the broader community. Participants were open to and excited by living with a local family and fully immersed themselves in the experience; they cooked meals together, shared stories over breakfast and dinner, and spent time with their family on the weekends, going into town and to church. Homestay accommodation fostered connections that became the currency for the development of

relationships. In building authentic relationships, participants needed to explore their own beliefs and assumptions to value the experiences of their host family and others (Deardorff, 2006; Delpit, 2006). Critical introspection of values and assumptions (Deardorff, 2006; Blasko, 2012) is a key requirement for the development of intercultural competence. Relationships were strengthened through participants' ability to critically reflect on their experiences. 'Reflection has been described as turning experience into learning, that is, a way of exploring experience in order to learn new things from it' (Boud, 2001, p. 10). Critical reflection is a component of service-learning and is also required for the development of intercultural competence. Through critical reflection, participants shifted perspectives and made new meanings from their experiences. The shifts from the experiences resulted in increased intercultural understanding, empathy, and communication skills.

#### **6.1.5 Cultural Mediation Enables and Strengthens Shifts in Perspective**

Throughout the immersion, the involvement of cultural mediators enabled discussions that bridged cultural differences and promoted deeper thinking of the various experiences. Mediation assisted in making shifts in perspectives, which became transformative in nature. A significant and notable shift occurred after the visit to the Giotto dump slum. Rather than focusing on the community at the dump slum as one that lacked material possessions, participants were encouraged to see the strong sense of community and connection that existed. The mediation allowed participants to view this experience through a different cultural lens; one that developed empathy, connected knowledge and recognised that others' view of the world was different to their own view (Yunkaporta, 2009). The intensity of the experience challenged participants to reflect on their own assumptions and biases through the actual encounter with the community at the dump slum. The risk of participants further entrenching deficit assumptions and deficit cultural worldviews were lessened because of the cultural mediation (Hepple et al., 2017). Through culturally mediated group discussions, participants

were encouraged to share, consolidate or refute their thinking, and were able to integrate any shifts in perspective into their lives and actions.

## **6.2 Significance of the Study**

This study sought to answer the research question, ‘in what ways can a short-term cultural immersion program impact the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers?’ The significance of the study highlighted that short-term cultural immersions, characterised by principles of service-learning, designed as a pedagogical tool, delivered as a co-curricular program (with no course credit awarded to students who participated) and undertaken outside the parameters of a regular semester, positively impacted the development of intercultural competence, specifically in Australian preservice teachers. The short-term cultural immersion facilitated preservice teachers to critically evaluate their cultural self-awareness, deepen their comprehension of cultural knowledge and improve their socio-linguistic awareness and communication skills. Short-term immersion experiences provide learning opportunities for students to garner a deeper understanding of being and living in a globalised world. Thus, the findings support prior research suggesting that immersions of a shorter duration allow teachers to challenge deficit mindsets and foster positive orientations towards cultural difference (Sleeter, 2008). Further, short-term cultural immersion experiences are a potential way to address Miller’s (2015) finding that preservice teacher training in Australia fails to train teachers in the understanding required for cultural responsiveness, including competencies relating to social and cultural aspects of diverse classrooms. The short-term immersion positively impacted preservice teacher pedagogy, assisting to address research where preservice teachers expressed doubt in their ability to teach in culturally diverse classrooms (Helfrich & Bean, 2011).

Despite the sizable research on intercultural competency, few studies have examined the impact of a short-term cultural immersion on the development of intercultural competency

in Australian preservice teachers (Wang, 2019). This gap is highlighted by Roy et al. (2019), who identified the wide range of cultural outcomes from such programs and reported that most of the data focused on students from the United States and Europe. In seeking to fill this gap in the literature regarding Australian preservice teachers, the next section will highlight the implications of the study findings for the development of intercultural competence in Australian preservice teachers.

The acquisition of intercultural competency is an ongoing process that can take place during any stage in human life (Nganga, 2016). Central to human life is the individual and their sense of identity; an identity that embodies an articulation and understanding of personal and social representations (Urietta, 2018). Such representations reflect the desire to know, to understand and to be, which are continually open to evaluation as one positions themselves with cultural others. In light of Deardorff's (2006) process model for intercultural competence, self-identity as cognitive constructions and evaluations of self in relation to the cultural other was evident and significant throughout the three phases of the study. Given that prior research suggests that there is no exhaustive list of attitudes required for intercultural competence (Barrett et al., 2013), a noteworthy finding of the study, considering Deardorff's (2006) process model, was that assuming both personal and social responsibility becomes an antecedent for the development of intercultural competence. Participants acknowledged that they had a responsibility to critically reflect on their self-identity, and a responsibility to acquire requisite cultural knowledge and understanding (not only of themselves but of the cultural other). They also took responsibility for developing the requisite skills required to effectively engage and communicate with the cultural other. Therefore, regarding intercultural competence, the study found that having the attitude of responsibility contributed to both internal and external outcomes.

Research suggests that the key focus for the development of intercultural competence is the process itself (Deardorff, 2011). The present study found that high-dissonance, critical

experiences intensified understandings and skills, heightened internal shifts and led to new meanings. The involvement of cultural mediators was a significant aspect of the process of development and, in combination with challenging situations, led to deeper levels of awareness, understanding and empathy. The study captured pre-, during and post-immersion data, which provided a more complete understanding of the process for the development of intercultural competence. Such an understanding assists to address research by Buchanan et al. (2017) which suggests that there is little evidence as to how intercultural competence is developed before, during and after immersion experiences.

### **6.3 Implications for Practice**

This study analysed the impact of short-term cultural immersion on the development of intercultural competence for preservice teachers. The process model for intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) provided a useful framework to record and analyse the experiences of the participants. As the name of the model suggest, the framework reflects the development of intercultural competence as being a lifelong process; thus, it becomes paramount that the focus is on the development process and how the necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills are acquired (Deardorff, 2011). Given that intercultural competence is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, institutions need to be intentional in addressing its development through both curricular and co-curricular efforts (Deardorff, 2011). For tertiary educators, the process model for intercultural competence framework can facilitate any efforts around course or program development by enabling a more comprehensive and integrated approach to design (Deardorff, 2011).

Banks (2004, p. 197) states that any professional development program for teachers should achieve at least one of five things:

1. allow teachers to uncover and identify their personal attitudes towards racial, ethnic, language and cultural groups

2. allow teachers to acquire knowledge about the histories and cultures of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and language groups
3. allow teachers to become acquainted with the diverse perspectives that exist within different ethnic and cultural communities
4. allow teachers to understand the ways in which institutionalised knowledge within schools, universities and popular culture can perpetuate stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups
5. allow teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to develop and implement an equity pedagogy.

The present study's findings confirm research that supports offering preservice teachers short-term cultural immersion opportunities that capitalise on authentic engagement for learning and transformation to enhance their intercultural competence (Boyd et al., 2019).

In Australia's multicultural classrooms, teachers require a deep understanding of cultural diversity and the capability to manage diversity in a culturally competent manner. This need is significant given that research suggests that preservice teachers have expressed concern and anxiety about feeling unprepared to teach in culturally diverse classrooms (Maloney & Saltmarsh, 2016). As such, the findings of this study have implications for practice. The findings highlight the impact of short-term cultural immersion on the development of intercultural competence for Australian preservice teachers. This experience assisted in shifting participants' internal frames of reference, becoming transformative in nature. Professionally, students affirmed dispositions required for teaching, including confidence, flexibility, and socio-linguistic awareness and communicative skills to engage children who were culturally different. Further, participants developed critical self-awareness and empathy for diversity.

In light of these findings, providers of teacher education programs can look to integrate short-term cultural immersion programs into curricular or co-curricular courses as a way to address the need for teachers to be interculturally competent. This is also crucial to counter

dominant deficit discourses. This study found that short-term immersion positively impacted the development of intercultural competence in preservice teachers. This finding is significant for the development of preservice teachers and in their ability to respond both appropriately and effectively to cultural diversity in Australian classrooms.

The growing demand to educate interculturally competent teachers requires the analyses of programs that are settings for intercultural learning and the development of intercultural competences (Posti-Ahokas et al., 2020). This study has provided a better understanding of internationalisation programs in higher education. The study highlighted the impact of including short-term immersion as both a service function and research activity in institutions (Harman, 2005). Research suggests that by better understanding the expectations of participants regarding their participation can lead to sustainable programs being designed by institutions (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). Pre-immersion reflection in the present study enabled participants to ready themselves for the experience and also understand the types of dispositions that would be necessary to fulfil their pre-immersion expectations. By doing so, they were able to move into positions of seeking to understand the other, which allowed a more empathetic individual to emerge.

## **6.4 Limitations of the Study**

A key limitation of this study's research design was selection bias. While not unique to this study (Wang, 2019), selection bias is acknowledged for this study and deemed to be unavoidable given the programmatic design of the short-term immersion. As the immersion was co-curricular and self-funded, participants with the requisite financial resources, free time and interest in cultural immersion were more likely to apply. A further limitation associated with selection bias is those that applied may have previously travelled and spent time abroad, increasing the likelihood of them having higher levels of intercultural competence. A further limitation of the findings is that all participants were preservice teachers, having chosen a

profession that is service oriented and provides a public service. The study was conducted at an Australian Catholic university and involved a relatively small number of students (n = 20). A small sample size may make the findings difficult to generalise; however, one should leave the transferability of the findings to the reader and future researchers to determine (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Another limitation is this researcher's own personal background and experiences, having been involved in the immersion programs for five years prior to undertaking the study. These will influence the interpretations of the immersion experience; thus, a conscientious effort was made to objectively treat the pre-, during and post-immersion data.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the limitations of the chosen methodology have been mitigated to the degree that there was an acknowledgement of my personal background, experiences and values; acknowledgement that a relationship existed between insider/outsider and researcher/participant; and recognition that this could be view as a strength or a weakness (Draper & Swift, 2011).

## **6.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several recommendations for future research emerging from this study. These recommendations seek to address gaps within this study. Gaps include specific focus on participants awareness of their own culture; conceptualisations of privilege; the impact of pre immersion preparation and cultural distance on the development of intercultural competence. As the overall research project aimed to improve our understanding of the impact of an immersion experience on the development of intercultural competence, the themes that emerged from the data—as they relate to participants' awareness of their cultural self, which includes values and their interest in the cultural other—warrant further exploration. The implications of the complexities for understanding oneself as a cultural being when in relationship with a cultural other cannot be understated. While immersion experiences have



positive impacts, issues of white privilege and the cultural competence of those who participate in and design such programs must be questioned (Kearney et al., 2018). Research on more culturally and socio-economically diverse populations in similar short-term cultural immersions could provide a juxtaposition to this research to address concerns that these kinds of transformative experiences are born from white privilege.

Participants engaged in two full-day workshops in the lead up to the immersion experience. However, these workshops did not constitute part of the study, so one can only provide conjecture as to any influence these workshops had on participants in Kenya or on the development of intercultural competence. Considering that there appears to be no consensus as to the best way to prepare for an immersion experience or on the standard length of time for preparation for an immersion experience (Philips et al., 2017), research centred on the specific impact of any preparation program may assist to fill gaps in the literature. Preparation programs as one variable of immersion experiences can be captured through pre- and post-immersion surveys and interviews to determine effectiveness and impact.

The cultural distance between a student's home culture and the host culture is said to predict the extent to which intercultural competence is developed (Roy et al., 2019). Comparative research into short-term national and international immersion programs could be undertaken to ascertain to what degree cultural distance impacts the development of intercultural competence.

This specific cultural immersion in Kenya was for a short, three-week duration. Literature on the impact of the length of time of immersion programs is unclear. Per Cushner and Karim (2004, p. 30), 'it appears that although both short- and long-term study abroad programs have an impact on participants, the longer and more fully integrated the program, the greater the potential for impact'. The findings of the present study highlighted responses that indicated transformation had resulted for participants. Given the short-term duration of the

study, there is a need for longitudinal research aimed at understanding the longevity of any stated impact.

Finally, from the perspective of both a teacher educator and researcher, Deardorff (2011) questions the level and development of intercultural competence of tertiary educators and asks what measures can be undertaken by them to increase their own development. This is strengthened by research cited by Maloney and Turunen (2020) that suggests that in various global contexts, teacher educators are a neglected research group—there being limited research into teacher educators themselves, their identity and the tertiary pedagogy, and the impact this may have on the overall experience from the participant students' points of view. Further research in this area could help to determine the impact of the immersion leader/teacher on the overall experience and resulting cultural competence of participants.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

At the core of intercultural competence lies our humanity. Our humanity is inextricably linked to the concept of being global citizens. Global citizenship requires self-reflection, acknowledging that our lives and futures are intertwined with others. Essentially, we are all members of a global community. In 2020, as this thesis was being finalised, our shared humanity was brought into sharp focus as the result of a global pandemic. It would be easy to say that throughout the year, the global discourse in the news and across our screens was one of cultural duality—the highlighting of differences centred on 'us' and 'them'. Contrary to this was the race to find a vaccine for COVID-19, which required an awareness and appreciation of cultural relativity, and international cooperation for the benefit of the common good. This year, the value of our human connectedness became increasingly significant.

As the study was set in Kenya, the concept of Ubuntu encapsulates this human connection. Ubuntu is a nebulous concept of common humanity, at times translated as 'human kindness', but its meaning is much more encompassing, embodying the ideas of connection,

community and mutual caring for all: ‘Ubuntu ... speaks of the very essence of being human. ... “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.” We belong in a bundle of life. We say, “A person is a person through other persons”’ (Tutu, 2012).

Intercultural experiences, as Deardorff (2006) eloquently writes, become part of our continual:

search for ways to get along together as human beings sharing this one planet, the need to transcend boundaries, to bridge and transform our differences, to be in relationship with one another, to join in the oneness of our humanity while accepting our differences – these needs will continue to drive us as we seek to overcome differences that may divide us. In the end, intercultural competence is about our relationships with each other and ultimately, our very survival as humankind, as we work together to address the global challenges that confront us in this century. (p. 5)

What is required of the twenty-first-century graduate is to be better able to respond to the social inequities in an everchanging world. Thus, how an individual understands themselves, the manner in which they respond to an experience and their ability to think critically will all affect their ability to be globally minded individuals and interculturally competent. The practical implication of this study highlights that the inclusion of international inter-cultural immersions, in any form, aid the development of preservice teachers’ capacity to better understand themselves as individuals as well as building the competency and skills required to effectively engage with cultural diversity. For preservice teachers, this study has demonstrated that a short-term immersion, characterised by the principles of service-learning, designed as a pedagogical tool, delivered as a co-curricular program (with no course credit awarded to students who participated) and undertaken outside the parameters of a regular semester, had a positive impact on the development of intercultural competence.

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# Appendix A: Application Form



## Kenya 2016 Immersion Program APPLICATION FORM

Please use BLOCK/CAPITAL letters, indicate with "N/A" where questions are not applicable and tick boxes where appropriate.  
This application can be submitted directly to your program coordinator(s)

### WHICH EXPERIENCE ARE YOU APPLYING TO PARTICIPATE IN?

Kenya- Aberdare Ranges Primary School + Miti Mingi Village (Holding Hand's Children's Home)

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

<b>TITLE</b> eg. Mr/Ms/Mrs	<b>SURNAME/FAMILY NAME</b>	<b>GIVEN NAMES</b>
<b>PREFERRED NAME</b>	<b>STUDENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>DATE OF BIRTH (E.G. 20 Sept. 1989)</b>	<b>COUNTRY OF BIRTH</b>	<b>NATIONALITY (as on passport)</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>University Course</b>	<b>University Year</b>

Do you hold a current passport?

<b>Contact Address:</b> (the address where you can be contacted most times)	<b>Number:</b>	<b>Street:</b>
	<b>Suburb:</b>	<b>Post Code:</b>

<b>Contact Phone Numbers:</b>	<b>Home:</b>	<b>Other:</b>
<b>(include all dialling codes)</b>	<b>Fax:</b>	<b>Email:</b>

### ACADEMIC RECORD

**Degree Course:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Major( if applicable)** \_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONAL STATEMENT**

The purpose of the section below is to determine your health history and any special medical needs you may have when travelling. Information provided will be treated confidentially.

TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT:

Name of Primary Physician/Clinic:	
Are you generally in good physical condition?	
Are you currently being treated for any physical condition?	
Do you have a heart condition?	
Are you a diabetic?	Do you have asthma?
Do you have, or have you had, any eating disorders?	
What diseases have you had in the past five years (if any)? Please list:	
Have you ever been treated for an emotional disorder/illness?	
Do you have any allergies to foods, medications, environmental factors, insects, etc?	
If yes, please list:	
Are you taking any medications?	
If yes, please list:	
Are you on a restricted diet (vegetarian, diabetic, allergies)?	
If yes, please provide details:	
Do you anticipate needing any health care or counselling while travelling?	
If there is any additional health information that you feel it would be helpful for the University to be aware of during your study abroad experience, then please provide details on a separate sheet.	

DECLARATION	
I, _____, _____, certify that all information included in my application is factually correct.	
Signed (Student) _____	Date (day/month/year) ____/____/____

**Privacy Statement:** The information provided in this form will be used for the purposes of, and in relation to, your potential involvement in the School of Education Immersion Program. Where the privacy principles apply, the University restricts access to those staff members who may need the information in the carrying out of their responsibilities in the academic and/or personal interests of the student. The University does not provide, by commercial arrangement or otherwise, the personal information of students or other stakeholders except in the following cases:

a) when authorised in writing to do so, and b) where required or authorised by law to government and regulatory authorities; credit reporting and fraud-checking agencies; to your authorised representatives (e.g. legal representatives).

## **Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet**

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

### ***What is the project about?***

This research project seeks to investigate and understand intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is a way of relating and communicating with others across-cultures in order to develop an effective relationship.

### ***Who is undertaking the project?***

This project is being conducted by Julie Maakrun and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Notre Dame Australia, under the supervision of Dr Sean Kearney from School of Education and Dr Gabrielle Russell from the University of Sydney.

### ***What will I be asked to do?***

This study is comprised of:

Complete an application form;

Complete a pre and post questionnaire to be returned via email, as an attached word document, prior to and after the conclusion of your immersion experience. Each question will require a response;

Maintain a written journal during the immersion;

Volunteer to participate in focus group interviews pre and post immersion.

### ***Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?***

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study.

### ***What are the benefits of the research project?***

The data collected will help to inform an in-depth understanding of intercultural competence and ways that teacher educators can structure programs that assist in developing culturally responsive teachers.

### ***What if I change my mind?***

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without discrimination or prejudice. If you withdraw, all information you have provided can be removed if you so wish.

Participants who chose to withdraw may do so by informing Julie Maakrun. Alternatively, you can contact Dr Sean Kearney. Even though Julie is a Senior Lecturer at this University your non-participation or withdrawal from this study will not affect your relationship with her.

***Will anyone else know the results of the project?***

Information gathered about you will be held in strict confidence. This confidence will only be broken if required by law.

Once data has been collected and analysed, you will then be de-identified and pseudonyms will be used when reporting the results of the study.

Once the study is completed, the data collected from you will be stored securely in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame Australia for at least a period of at least five years. The data may be used in future research but you will not be able to be identified. The results of the study will be available to the University Teaching and Learning Committee and will be published as a thesis and in peer reviewed journals.

***Will I be able to find out the results of the project?***

Once we have analysed the data from this study we will provide you with a summary of our findings via email.

***Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?***

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact the researchers:

Dr Sean Kearney – [sean.kearney@nd.edu.au](mailto:sean.kearney@nd.edu.au) (8204 4436) or

Dr Gabrielle Russell - [gabrielle.russell@sydney.edu.au](mailto:gabrielle.russell@sydney.edu.au) (9351 8090) or

Julie Maakrun - [Julie.maakrun@nd.edu.au](mailto:Julie.maakrun@nd.edu.au) (8204 4206)

We are happy to answer questions or concerns you may have about this study.

***What if I have a concern or complaint?***

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia (approval number 016141S). If you have a concern or complaint regarding the ethical conduct of this research project and would like to speak to an independent person, please contact Notre Dame's Ethics Officer at (+61 8) 9433 0943 or [research@nd.edu.au](mailto:research@nd.edu.au). Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

***How do I sign up to participate?***

If you choose to participate you will be required to sign a consent form at the beginning of the first focus group session.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

**Julie Maakrun**



## Appendix C: Consent Form

- I agree to take part in this research project.
- I have read the Information Sheet provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this study, the procedures involved and of what is expected of me.
- I understand that I will be asked to:
  - Complete an application form;
  - Complete a pre and post questionnaire to be returned via email, as an attached word document, prior to and after the conclusion of your immersion experience. Each question will require a response;
  - Maintain a written journal during the immersion;
  - Volunteer to participate in focus group interviews pre and post immersion.
- The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained possible problems that may arise as a result of my participation in this study.
- I understand that I may withdraw from participating in the project at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.
- I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not disclosed.

Name of participant			
Signature of participant		Date	

- I confirm that I have provided the Information Sheet concerning this research project to the above participant, explained what participating involves and have answered all questions asked of me.

Signature of Researcher		Date	
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## **Appendix D: Survey Questions**

### **Pre-Immersion Questions**

What expectations do you have of participating in the Kenya immersion?

What are you most looking forward to as part of the Kenya immersion?

What are you least looking forward to as part of the Kenya immersion?

### **Post Immersion Questions**

Have you been impacted personally by the program? If so, in what ways?

Have you been impacted professionally by the program? If so, in what ways?

Reflecting back on the culture in Kenya, what were some things that stood out for you?

What have you found most confronting since returning to Australia?

## Appendix E: Coded Pre-Immersion Question

What expectations do you have of participating in the Kenya immersion?

PS	Response	Category: Personal	Category: Professional	Category: Cultural
1	I expect this experience to be a <b>once in a lifetime</b> <b>Change the way I look at life</b> Give me a <b>different perspective</b> of how people are educated and for me to <b>bring that experience into my future teaching career</b> To make life long friends Make <b>connections with the families and children</b> in Kenya	once in a lifetime; Change the way I look at life; life long friends	different perspective; bring that experience into my future teaching career	connections with the families and children in Kenya
2	To be honest, I have tried to <b>avoid making any expectations</b> of the trip. This includes expectations of how I will react to the experience. Hopefully, I expect to <b>make a difference</b> to the community.	No expectation; make a difference to community.		
3	Perhaps I can expect the immersion to be <b>different</b> to my life back at Sydney and be a <b>life changing experience</b> for me. To be honest, I have tried to <b>avoid making any expectations</b> of the trip. This includes expectations of how I will react to the experience. I guess the only expectation I have is that I will be <b>confronted and challenged</b> in a way I have never been before.	life changing experience; be challenged		
4	I expect that I will experience <b>feelings</b> of satisfaction, joy, shock and emotional exhaustion on this trip. Being in the classroom teaching and interacting with children always brings me joy and satisfaction but since this is such a different experience and that we will be seeing the atrocious conditions in which many of these people live, I expect that I will also <b>experience disbelief</b> at how difficult their lives can be and resentment towards how life in our society can be so superficial and removed from true hardship.	experience feelings of satisfaction, joy, shock and emotional exhaustion; disbelief; resentment	classroom teaching and interacting with children	
5	I have expectations to <b>build relationships</b> with the people that I work with, and these friendships will last beyond the time we have in Kenya. As we all share similar interests and passions, I believe <b>strong connections</b> can be made in such a new situation that we are immersed in to together. My expectation is that Kenya immersion will <b>change and challenge my values and perspectives</b> on things such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ my value of education</li> <li>○ my quality of life</li> <li>○ my appreciation for things that I take for granted sometimes</li> <li>○ and challenge my current pedagogy</li> </ul>	Build relationship; will change and challenge my values and perspectives	challenge my current pedagogy	
6	I expect to experience a rollercoaster of <b>emotions</b> and amazing <b>life changing</b> experiences. I expect that I will be a bit of <b>overwhelmed</b> and have a culture shock. However, I expect that these experiences will <b>help me grow into the well-rounded, honest teacher</b> that I aspire to be who is able to share an experience like this with students to teach them about abundance, displacement, what it means to be	experience a rollercoaster of emotions; life changing experiences	help me grow into the well-rounded, honest teacher	

	grateful and the importance of school and education.			
7	My motivation for going to Kenya this year was seeing how much it has changed everyone's life who has gone. When talking to anyone who has gone to Kenya their instant reaction is, their faces light up and then a massive smile grows on their face, they then start talking about how beautiful the children and people are but then they stop dead in thought because they don't know how to put it into words. I want to know what the part they don't know how to articulate is. I want to be apart of what they are trying to do to teach and change the norm for this displaced community. I want to make a difference. I've always thought that because I have grown up with everything and anything I could of asked for I should give back to the community anyway I can. Although, I would like to be apart of any project that would benefit the community.	I want to be apart of what they are trying to do; I want to make a difference		give back to the community
8	My expectations for participating in the Kenya immersion is to ultimately give to a community who need my assistance. Although the immersion is for a short amount of time, I have an expectation within myself to contribute positively to the community. Moreover, I also have the expectation of broadening my own knowledge and understanding of the daily challenges that are faced by the community. For this to happen I know I am going to be challenged as this is not something I have experienced before.	challenged; give to a community; contribute positively to the community; broadening knowledge and understanding		
9	Not only will this trip broaden my experience, but I expect to experience a wide range of emotions from happiness, sadness, disbelief. I expect to build understanding and compassion with the people there.	wide range of emotions from happiness, sadness, disbelief; build understanding and compassion with the people there.		
10	I am expecting to be pushed outside of my comfort zone. Have my own beliefs and skills challenged, develop a better understanding of myself as a teacher and others around me. This Kenya immersion is going to be an eye opening experience and I look forward to being stretched emotionally, physically and spirituality.	pushed outside of my comfort zone; eye opening experience	develop a better understanding of myself as a teacher	
11	I'm expecting that it will be about my personal growth and development of understanding other cultures and experiencing these cultures to the best of my ability. It was also important for me to experience cultural differences and to build relationships, that we can learn off each other. I know that this experience will change my life and my perspective of it.	change my life and my perspective of it.		personal growth and development of understanding other cultures; build relationships
12	I believe it is hard to imagine what to expect. You can have some ideas about what you think it is going to be like, and for me I have thoughts about what I imagine my Kenyan experience to be, but I also think in reality it will be nothing like what I imagine. I don't think you can know what to expect that's why I believe you have to be as open minded as possible to all situations as it is nothing what I have			

	experienced before.			
13	I have expectations to build relationships with people. I believe strong connections can be made in such a new situation that we are immersed in together. I also expect that the experience is going to challenge me as I will be stepping outside of what I normally know.	build relationships; challenge me as I will be stepping outside of what I normally know.		
14	I have had limited travel experience in the past only having been to New Zealand. However, this service learning trip is a great opportunity to see the world and represent The University of Notre Dame at a global level, I can make a difference and be apart of something bigger than myself.	I can make a difference Something bigger than myself		
15	An expectation that I have through participating in the Kenya immersion program is that it will change my view towards many areas of life I expect to appreciate the simple things in life e.g. family and connecting. Also to come back to Australia and be disheartened by the consumerist, privilege and materialistic values we have. I expect to form strong friendships with others on the trip.	will change my view towards many areas of life; form strong friendships		
16	I expect that it will be challenging but that I will be able to get through these challenges. I also expect that I will learn about myself and that this immersion will help me grow as a person.	it will be challenging; learn about myself; grow as a person		
17	The immersion will allow me to experience another new culture giving me the opportunity to learn and experience a new language and traditions, as well as their general way of life.			experience another new culture;
18	I really have no idea of what to expect. I hope it would still be many things – fulfilling, perspective changing, a chance to step outside my comfort zone and be of use, rewarding, forming meaningful connections etc. I am trying my best to be super open-minded about the experience and not have any expectations. I guess the only expectation I have is that I will be confronted and challenged in a way I have never been before.	step outside comfort zone; be of use; rewarding, meaningful connections; confronted and challenged		
19	I know that this trip is going to change me and the way I look at life. Just from the journey so far, it has emphasised the importance of over indulgence, and the things that we take for granted. I hope to make life long connections, develop a friendly relationship with the community, serve endlessly everyday, and make the most of the immersion by helping wherever is needed. As cliché as it may sound, I expect to make a difference in some way to the children and families	change me and the way I look at life; life long connections; serve; helping where needed; make a difference		
20	I have expectations that this experience will be a life-changing one for me and I will gain deeper understandings of the world and myself.	life-changing; deeper understandings of the world and myself.		

## Appendix F: Excerpt from Focus Group Interview Transcript

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:00]

Facilitator: I suppose the first question I'd like to ask is prior to the immersion you would have had expectations of what it was going to be like for you. So maybe we can start, just share with me how you actually found the immersion experience, did it live up to expectations, was it beyond expectations and just share, what the immersion was actually like for you.

Female: [00:00:23] I think before we went we were really, I didn't have any expectations, I wanted to keep clear so I wasn't disappointed. And I knew I wasn't going to be disappointed but, I think we were more scared to begin with and I think that as soon as we got there it was just gone. Like we weren't, I wasn't scared or nervous or ... The whole like pressure with the lessons and it all just kind of flowed so, I wasn't expecting that.

Facilitator: Can I ask XXXX, what were things that made you use the word scared?

Female 1: [00:00:52] I think it was just the unknown. Not knowing ... Yeah. I mean you hear what people say about the trip but you don't actually know how it's going to feel. I didn't know how I was going to react to hearing stories or how the kids were going to react to our lessons and, yeah.

Facilitator: XXXX, how was the experience for you?

Female 2: [00:01:13] Yeah well, before coming I was really unsure about it because I think I was really scared because I didn't know what to expect just of the environment. I didn't know what it would be like but as XXXX said, I did not feel unsafe or scared [unintelligible 00:01:32] I didn't really know what to expect when going but it definitely did live up to any expectations or beyond.

Female 3: [00:01:44] I feel like I went in thinking I didn't have expectations but I did. Because everything felt different from how I subconsciously imagined it. I think it challenged me in different ways than I anticipated so I think I was scared about the unknown and not feeling comfortable in the situation and I think it was more compacted by how it [00:02:14] affected me emotionally and how I would respond to that.

Facilitator: Do you want to share with me more on how the experience affected you emotionally?

Female 3: [00:02:23] It was a range of emotions. There was a lot of joy and excitement and a lot of positives as well. I think seeing mostly the dump site that affected me the greatest, yeah that was the strongest feeling. Yeah, I don't know it was just a lot to take in and you don't know how to respond because you want there to be an instant fix but it doesn't work that way.

Female 4: [00:02:56] So my expectations were to let everything and anything from anyone and just learn more about the culture and it definitely lived to up my expectations and more. And I sort of found that the answers were coming straight to me, I had to find them and through the interactions with people I learnt things. It wasn't

like they were just giving me something on a plate but I had to, but I was learning from them. I had to engage and interact with people to learn [00:03:26] to meet the expectation there.

Facilitator: Can I then ask from the immersion what did you find the most challenging either personally for yourself or the experience you had. What was the most challenging for you?

Female 1: [00:03:44] I think it was processing the emotions like I mean it's probably not one of my big strengths is controlling and learning to, I just manage them and I express them and usually I follow everything up but I think while we were over there I kind of let everything just out and being with, not strangers but people that you weren't really close with before you went was, and I found that hard opening up to someone that you don't know that well but I found it really easy when we there [00:04:14] So I was kind of like oh I'm not going to, I knew I was going to cry but I didn't think I'd be angry or putting my emotions into words. Yeah, I really learnt how to manage with that over there and ...

Facilitator: XXXX what challenged you the most?

Female 2: [00:04:33] Probably for me would be making the connections that I made with the children and then also having in the back of my mind that I'm probably never going to see them again but they were such strong connections and I just didn't want, I wanted to bring them home with me and I didn't want to leave them there especially in some of the situations that they were in. That was probably the hardest thing and then leaving them and saying goodbye. And also dealing with emotions so when we went to the dump site [00:05:03] they were all happy and I was fine and then just randomly I just started, yeah broke down and could not stop crying and then I think you like embraced their happiness when we were singing but I was sort of like in my head, how, it was making me more emotional and more sad that they were so happy that they were living there but they were still so happy and I think that had more of an impact [00:05:33] on me because I couldn't understand it. How we are back home, how it's so easy for us to be unhappy.

Female 1: [00:05:42] Seeing them so happy and us being so sad at them, we're empathising with them like oh so unfortunate but we shouldn't be sad though. When you see them so happy I was like well I have no right to be sad, when they're so happy.

Female 2: [00:06:03] Just [unintelligible 00:06:03] stop crying.

Female 1: [00:06:04] Stop crying and be happy with them and, yeah. And once they start singing and dancing at the dump site as well it was like, I don't know, and the lady I was dancing with she was like, why are you crying, don't cry, you should be happy, we're all dancing, singing and it was like, oh okay.

Female 2: [00:06:21] I think it was a weird emotion for me there. I had no control over it whatsoever.

Facilitator: XXXX you actually mentioned as well the dump site had a profound impact on you. Would you like to share more about that?

- Female 3: [00:06:34] I saw the joy and the excitement and the dancing but I still saw the tragedy in that situation and it just felt so unfair to me seeing the kids in that situation. And I think it's so amazing that they had those community bonds and it's like a family and that's incredible but in particular holding onto a baby in that situation [00:07:04] that had no say and no control over that, yeah being in that. They were born into that and had nothing to do with it and yeah they appreciate what they have and they value it and that's something to take away from it but it's not the right environment for a child. Just thinking how fortunate I was and how different life was for them.
- Female 4: [00:07:30] Me and XXXX when we were there we were actually saying, it's just unfair because they have no choice they're born, they're born straight away into having a disadvantage and it was just unfair.
- Female 1: [00:07:46] Our household [unintelligible 00:07:47] actually lived there and we didn't know until after but she married a man who lived there and so she basically said that she chose that life and that was what she wanted. She's happy and she has a family and that's all that matters. Doesn't matter what environment she's in but as long as she's with her family and her children, that's what makes her happy. It is kind of sad to think that her children have to grow up in that but there's always a possibility of them getting out of it [00:08:17] so ... Yeah.
- Facilitator: XXXX would you like to share your thoughts?
- Female 2: [00:08:22] It was definitely a challenge, just to see it. I think from the previous video I imagined it flat ground with a circle of rubbish in the middle and people just ... But it was massive mountains and just, it was just so overwhelming.
- Female 3: [00:08:39] I didn't expect them to be living in the rubbish as well. I thought they lived by it and they would come to it, but yeah.
- Female 2: [00:08:48] And just, when we went to visit someone's home there we were asking how often do you eat and it's like whenever there's food. How often do you get water, whenever we can. Just those things that we can have every day that it just isn't there for them all the time. And that's a challenge. Yeah.

[End of recorded material at 00:09:10]