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# Student Reflections on Study Abroad: A Collective Case Study Exploring the Experiences of Pre-Service Teachers During an International Student Teaching Program

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STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON STUDY ABROAD: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS DURING AN

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

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CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

by

Holly Hutton

2021

To:     Dean Michael R. Heithaus
        College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Holly Hutton, and entitled Student Reflections on Study Abroad: A Collective Case Study Exploring the Experiences of Pre-Service Teachers During an International Student Teaching Program, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 25, 2021

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Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all the remarkable students and educators around the

world that I have had the privilege to work with and be inspired by. And to my family for

supporting me every step of the way.

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This dissertation journey would not have been possible without the support of many incredible people throughout many years. I would first like to acknowledge my committee for lending their expertise to this study. To Dr. Flavia Iuspa and our long conversations about the benefits of studying abroad. To Dr. James Burns for his counternarrative on teacher training that inspires me to prepare fearless future educators. To Dr. Sarah Mathews and our shared passion for international education and for taking me under her wing to help develop the program that would become the subject of this dissertation. And to Dr. Hilary Landorf for encouraging me to pursue my Ph.D. at FIU and supporting me in every way from the beginning. A special thanks to the Latin American and Caribbean Center at FIU for their generous support of this program.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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As classrooms in the United States grow more culturally and linguistically diverse, schools of education are challenged to prepare more culturally responsive, globally minded educators. International student teaching (IST) programs provide a unique opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop cultural competencies in a global context. However, in order for these programs to effectively meet ambitious global and intercultural learning objectives, multiple curricular and programmatic components must be considered, and on-going research exploring individual and shared student experiences must be conducted.

The present collective case study explored the experiences of five, preservice teachers during a semester-long, IST program at Florida International University. A reentry interview took place after participants returned home from their student teaching placements in Ecuador. Participants were asked to describe their overall experience of the program, and share stories about their teaching experiences, living with host families and

engaging with the host community. Reflective assignments completed throughout the semester were also collected and analyzed. These included visual stories, written and video reflections, pre-departure surveys and other intercultural learning assignments. Data collected from both the reentry interviews and reflective assignments were explored on an individual case basis and then across cases to collectively analyze emergent themes.

Findings revealed both the similarities of student experiences across cases, as well as the nuances that make an experience like international student teaching unique to each participant, particularly ethnically diverse students. This supports the experiential/constructivist paradigm which posits that an individual creates their world both individually and with others, and learning occurs through the individual's transactions with a culture and with others. Further findings illustrated the connection between critical reflection and intercultural and global learning.

It is intended that the findings of this study will serve as valuable insights for study abroad stakeholders to develop programming more intentionally, with critical reflection and global and intercultural learning as a design framework. Additional program recommendations include providing ample preparation for both participants and faculty, a structure of support that facilitates intercultural and global learning throughout the study abroad cycle, and curriculum that elevates and leverages student voice.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) collaborated to create a whitepaper calling on teacher education programs to be more effective in meeting the demands of the global economy by "exemplifying, and embedding in instruction, the mastery of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation" (p. 6). The paper outlined core principles and shared visions on how to integrate these crucial skills, including the responsibility of higher education leaders to work with P-12 and local community leaders to "inform the redesign of educator preparation programs to more effectively meet the needs of 21st century learners" (Greenhill, 2010, p. 4).

This comes at a time when educators in the United States entering the teaching profession continue to have limited cross-cultural experience, with little knowledge of different learning styles, pedagogies, worldviews and perspectives (Gay, 2000). This cultural disparity poses an unprecedented challenge for the mostly White educator workforce to adequately meet the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, students of color are expected to make up 56 percent of the student population by 2024, while 82 percent of the elementary and secondary educator workforce identified as White (Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016, p. 1).

The growing diversity of student populations in the United States, as well as continued focus on the achievement gap, has increased the demand for culturally

responsive teachers prepared to effectively engage learners of many cultural backgrounds (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008). McCallister and Irvine (2000) believe that pre- and in-service teachers in urban, culturally diverse schools need to be provided with opportunities for professional growth that "focuses on learning and experimenting with effective, culturally sensitive and contextualized instructional strategies in order to create and sustain effective schools and classrooms" (p. 73). Many schools of education have adopted strategies such as diversity training programs to bridge this cultural disparity. However, these programs are often "inefficient and ineffective in creating tolerance and cultural awareness" and pre-service teachers remain "culturally incompetent as they enter classrooms to teach culturally diverse students" (Reiter & Davis, 2011, p. 43).

## Background of the Study

To meet the growing imperative to prepare culturally responsive educators, teacher education programs have started to offer more culturally immersive, high impact learning opportunities such as international student teaching (IST). Many scholars have reported on the perceived effectiveness of such programs in developing intercultural competencies crucial for 21st century classrooms, including global-mindedness, empathy, cognitive flexibility, collaborative problem-solving, and intercultural communication (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Dotson et al., 2014; Dunn, et al., 2018; Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Phillion et al., 2009; Quezada, 2004). DeVillar and Jiang (2012), for instance, claim that student teaching abroad experiences provide a "substantive platform and setting for student teachers to engage in a multifaceted, culturally distinct experience outside the United States to develop, and even transform,

their professional and personal perspectives, and related knowledge and skill bases" (p. 80).

Further, Malewski and Phillion (2012) affirm that pre-service teachers who decide to go abroad gain not only global awareness and diverse perspectives, but also improve their self-confidence, experience other cultures, acquire foreign language skills, and learn diverse teaching methods. Similarly, by observing and working collaboratively with teachers from other cultures, Cushner and Brennan (2007) believe pre-service teachers form core philosophical beliefs, leading to alternative approaches to curriculum development and teaching and help to understand and compare strengths and weaknesses in a society's educational system.

## Statement of the Problem

International student teaching has the potential to provide an optimal intercultural learning and development environment for pre-service teachers seeking to gain cultural competencies they would not otherwise develop on their home campus (Braskamp et al., 2011, p. 113). However, developing these competencies cannot be an assumed outcome of IST. In fact, many researchers have called into question how much significant intercultural learning is occurring during such programs. Vande Berg et al. (2012), for example, note that one such assumption is that students learn effectively while abroad simply by being exposed to different cultures and, based on self-reports after returning to their home countries, students believe they have been "transformed" and significant intercultural learning has occurred. Cushner and Chang (2015) agree that when students' international experiences focus on surface or objective-level elements of culture, it will not result in significant intercultural change.

To that end, research falls short when relying on students' self-reports or common assumptions are accepted about learning abroad. Instead, on-going research into the specific ways in which students are learning abroad, particularly as it relates to the nuances of their personal experiences, is required to better understand and assess student learning during an international sojourn.

## Purpose of Study

The imperative to train culturally competent, globally minded educators to meet the demands of a sustainable, 21st century education has never been stronger. Much has been reported on the potential of IST programs to facilitate high-impact global learning to meet this demand. However, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating the nuances found in student narratives and reflections to gain deeper insight into their learning and experiences. The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the experiences of five preservice teachers during a semester-long, international student teaching program. Student narratives were analyzed to better understand the individual and shared learning experiences of participants and to gain valuable insights on how to better facilitate student learning and more effectively achieve desired student learning outcomes.

## Research Question

This study explored the following research question: How do pre-service teachers describe their experiences during an international student teaching program?

## Definitions of Key Terms

The following key terms and concepts were integral in informing and framing this study and are defined in the following section.

*Critical Reflection.* "Brings about awareness of the self by calling into question one's prior knowledge or taken-for-granted frames of references which include beliefs assumptions, values and cultural norms of thinking and acting" (Banks & McGee Banks, 2009, cited in Sharma et al., 2011, p. 11).

*Culturally Responsive Teaching.* "Using the characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

*Diversity.* "Individual differences (e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations)" (AAC&U, n.d.).

*Equity. "*The creation of opportunities for historically underserved populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing the achievement gaps in student success and completion" (AAC&U, n.d.).

*Global Learning.* "The process of diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders" (Landorf and Doscher, 2015, p. 24).

*Inclusion. "*The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the cocurriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions" (AAC&U, n.d.).

*Intercultural Learning.* "Acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (world view), including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange" (Bennett, 2009, p.2).

*Intercultural Competence.* The top-rated definition of intercultural competence amongst international scholars as per Deardorff's Delphi study (see Chapter II) is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, cited in Deardorff, 2006, p. 247).

*International Student Teaching.* "A relatively new trend related to teacher preparation programs where teacher candidates have the option of conducting their practical experience in another country" (González-Carriedo et al., 2017, p. 841).

*Internationalization.* "The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

*Multicultural Education.* "Philosophical concept that values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice" (National Association for Multicultural Education, 2021).

*Student Voice.* "Student voice covers a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students" (Fielding & McGregor, 2005).

*Study Abroad.* An off-campus study that takes place outside the country where the student's home institution is located (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011). Study abroad cycle refers to the pre departure, on-site and reentry phases of the study abroad program. Study abroad is used as an umbrella term throughout this study to refer to the larger body of literature on the subject and is occasionally interchanged with IST to refer to the context in which the students describe their experiences particular to this study.

## Significance of Study

This study explored the experiences of five, pre-service teachers during an international student teaching program in order to gain a deeper understanding of the individual and shared learning experiences of the participants. There is a vast collection of literature on the perceived benefits of study abroad. However, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating the experiences of students in a deeper and more nuanced way. Many studies rely on self-reports, pre- and post-surveys, or limited quantitative assessments that lack rich description and insightful stories that can only be discovered through in-depth, narrative inquiry. Further, most studies reflect a White, female participant perspective. This study offers the perspective of ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically diverse students and their unique experiences studying, teaching and living abroad - a voice that is missing in the literature.

This study sought to bridge these gaps in the literature in order to contribute a unique perspective to the growing literature on teacher training, international student teaching, critical reflection and global and intercultural learning. Moreover, it is intended that the findings of this study will serve as valuable insights for stakeholders to

design IST programs that more deeply engage students with intercultural and global learning and leverage student voices to assess and improve study abroad experiences.

## Delimitations

The delimitations of this study included the availability of the sample group as well as their demographic characteristics, the individualistic nature of the lived experience of study abroad, and the context in which this study took place. The study relied on a convenience sample of students who participated in the IST program under investigation. Additionally, the sample group demographics, although unique and valuable to the field, do not reflect the majority of participants usually associated with research on this topic, nor the educator workforce in the United States; namely, White, female participants. This limits the generalizability of the study. Finally, the study explored the individual experiences of participants during their IST program which took place in the specific cultural context of Ecuador. All of these factors may not be generalizable to other studies on student learning and international student teaching experiences.

## Overview of Succeeding Chapters

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the current imperative for teacher education programs to offer high-impact global and intercultural learning opportunities for students to develop key competencies necessary to become 21st century educators. It outlined the ways in which international student teaching can serve to meet this imperative by offering pre-service teachers a unique opportunity to engage in deeper learning in a cultural context. The chapter presented the counterview that this perceived student learning cannot take place without intentionally designed programs and

facilitation of global and intercultural learning throughout the study abroad cycle. It defined key terms and explained the significance of the study as it relates to its contributions to the literature in teacher training, international student teaching and global and intercultural learning. Finally, it summarized the delimitations of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertinent to this study including the need for teacher education programs to develop culturally responsive educators, the imperative for culturally responsive pedagogy, and global and intercultural learning in the context of teacher education and international student teaching. It then addresses the crucial role of critical reflection in intercultural development and ends with a critique of the literature. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology for this study including research design, sample selection, procedure, data analysis, minimizing researcher bias, and limitations. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the study. This includes the case studies of each participant with motif tables, participant profiles and examples from student narratives to support thematic findings. A cross-case analysis is then presented in order to reveal the similarities and differences that emerged across cases.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents conclusions and a discussion based on the findings from this study. It reviews the purpose of the study, the research question, and the findings from the research. It then presents conclusions and a discussion based on the findings, followed by recommendations for practice and future research, and the researcher's final thoughts.

**CHAPTER II**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

As this study explored the experiences of pre-service teachers during an international student teaching experience, related literature in the areas of teacher education, culturally responsive pedagogy and international student teaching will be reviewed in this chapter to build context and a framework in which to conceptualize the study. The chapter will discuss the need for teacher education programs to develop culturally responsive teachers, making note of the widening cultural gap in education in the United States. Literature on culturally responsive education will be examined, highlighting global learning initiatives and intercultural development in teacher education. Next, the chapter will review the literature on intercultural development in the context of international student teaching, with a specific focus on student voice in study abroad. Finally, the chapter will explore the role of critical reflection as it relates to student learning. The chapter concludes with an overall critique of the existing literature and positions this study within it.

**Teacher Education for Culturally Responsive Educators**

**The Widening Culture Gap**

The increasing diversity of students served by public education is causing a significant challenge for educators and is continuing to have an adverse effect on overall student achievement. It is well documented in the teacher education research literature that there is an increasingly widening gap between White, middle-class females who are becoming teachers and the historically underserved, low-income, immigrant, English as a new language, and other linguistic, ethnic, racial and religious minority students they

will teach (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Evidence suggests public schools are failing to reach

culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, particularly those who are at the

highest risk (Taylor, 2010). Kea and Utley (1998) describe the eruption of social

consciousness and moral consciousness that has occurred over the "savage inequalities"

faced by poor and minority students in America's urban schools today. Burns (2014)

believes that threats to public education include the obsession with metrics of

standardization, or the so-called audit culture, which can cause teacher educators to lose

sight of their students and the children they will ultimately serve. He suggests that "both

educators and their students must critically reflect on their own assumptions and

positionalities in order to clarify their values, which may not coincide with the values

expressed in hegemonic education discourse" (p. 1).

Cushner and Brennan (2007) believe that effective educators in the 21st century

must be able to "communicate and collaborate with those whose attitudes, values,

knowledge, and ways of doing things differ significantly from their own" (p. 17). In

order to build bridges across cultural boundaries, the authors assert that it will require "a

high degree of flexibility, a tolerance for ambiguity, and an understanding of the role

culture plays in shaping thinking and behavior" (p. 17). This is not innate, and as these

skills must be developed, education must play a key role in facilitating the bridge-

building process (Cushner & Brennan, 2007).

As such, much of the current literature on teacher training calls for pedagogy that

values responsiveness, equity and social justice rather than effectiveness and

accountability (Burns, 2014). However, many studies report the deficiency of teacher

education programs in fulfilling this imperative (Bok, 2006; Burns, 2014; Cushner &

Brennan, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2011; Lee, 2002; Merryfield, 1994; Phillion & Malewski, 2011). Cushner and Brennan (2007) write about the dominant delivery system of most educational programs as predominantly "cognitive and abstract," often relying on methods such as readings and lectures to deliver content about other cultures (p.4). In the teacher education literature, the gap is often discussed in terms of White, middle-class, female teachers and the underserved, minority students they will teach (Ladson-Billing, 2001). Phillion and Malewski (2012) attribute the widening cultural gap to "White teachers' entrenched racism, which can result in opposition to ideas of White privilege, resistance to multicultural education, and unwillingness to work with diverse students and in diverse settings, such as inner-city schools" (p. 644). Sleeter (2001) further substantiates the slow response to the growing cultural gap from predominantly White institutions. She reports these teacher preparation programs as providing "disjointed multicultural content" and, by the time pre-service students get in the classroom they had "subordinated any interest in multicultural education to the demands of their cooperating teachers" (p. 95).

In an effort to close this gap, national review organizations and accreditation bodies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (now the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) have mandated standards in multicultural education for classroom teachers and teacher educators (Malewski & Phillion, 2009). These efforts by teacher education programs to implement multicultural education, however, produce mixed results because they often focus on content rather than the process of cross-cultural learning (McCallister & Irvine, 2000).

**The Imperative for Culturally Responsive Educators**

Culturally responsive teaching has thus become an imperative in teacher preparation programs seeking to develop educators that better serve culturally and linguistically diverse learners and has perpetuated the growth of studies on the topic. Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p.106). She asserts that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within their frames of reference, students have higher levels of interests, derive more personal meaning and learn more effectively (Gay, 2000). The author insists that culturally responsive teaching goes beyond mere awareness that ethnic groups have different values. Instead, teachers must have a deeper understanding of an ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions and relational patterns in order to start responding effectively to the particularities of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002). Further, Forde (2007) describes a culturally responsive classroom where "effective teaching and learning occurs in a culturally supported, learner-centered context whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured and utilized to promote student development" (p.64). To investigate the neuroscience behind the underachievement of students of color, Hammond and Jackson (2015) connected brain-based learning with culturally responsive pedagogy, positing that, if used effectively, has the ability to help students build intellective capacity and increase brain power to process complex information more effectively. The authors explain that culture plays an important role in this process, and teachers must be well-versed in culturally

responsive practices as well as brain science in order to understand the connection and facilitate student achievement (Hammond & Jackson, 2015).

Given this imperative to prepare culturally responsive educators that can effectively engage, motivate and support learners from diverse backgrounds, literature has pointed to strategies on internationalizing curriculum, including enhancing global learning and offering culturally immersive opportunities that seek to develop the capacities needed to be an effective 21st century educator.

**Global Learning in Higher Education**

For the past several decades, higher education institutions have met the demands of globalization through prioritizing a variety of internationalization strategies. Internationalization can be defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2). According to Altbach and Knight (2007), international activities of universities range from traditional study abroad programs that allow students to learn about other cultures, to providing access to higher education institutions in countries where local institutions cannot meet demand. Other activities include enhancing international perspectives and skills of students, improving foreign language programs and providing cross-cultural understanding.

Due to increased internationalization activities on campuses around the world, institutions have started to redesign program offerings to include high-impact, culturally immersive, global learning opportunities. Global learning is an educational process in which students have the opportunity to engage with diverse others. This can happen on their home campus, abroad, in person or online (Landorf et al., 2018, p. 9). Although the

definition of global learning has been contested, there is a growing consensus around what global learners can do (AAC&U, 2014; Core, 2017; Hovland, 2014; Landorf et al., 2018; Levy & Fox, 2014). Core (2014) explains that global learners can understand and apply diverse perspectives in complex situations (p. 400). Similarly, Levy and Fox (2014) assert that "globally competent teachers should have developed the following: cultural awareness and understanding, awareness of world events and global dynamics, effective communication skills, cooperation and collaboration, attitudes and dispositions" (Levy & Fox, 2014, p. 276).

While working with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to create a comprehensive global learning rubric to evaluate and discuss student learning, Hovland (2014) outlined the following touchstones of what students should know through global learning: (1) become informed, open-minded, and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences, (2) seek to understand how their actions affect both local and global communities, and (3) address the world's most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably" (AAC&U, n.d.; Hovland, 2014).

Kahn and Agnew (2017) believe that the process of global learning requires integrating multiple, diverse and often conflicting perspectives across both macro and micro contexts. The authors cite that global learning "demonstrates how the global nature of knowledge and learning in the 21st century requires a re-definition of classrooms and learning environments that recognizes how knowledge production today is a collective, global, and diverse process" (p. 52).

In terms of teacher training, Merryfield (1998) explained that teacher educators involved in implementing global learning in their programs described their efforts as preparing teachers to: (1) make connections across cultures, world regions, and civilizations and across global issues instead of teaching them separately; (2) identify historical antecedents to current world issues, events, and problems, and identify the processes of cultural diffusion and borrowing over time; (3) link global content to the local community and; (4) teach tolerance and appreciation of cultural differences (p. 344).

**Global Learning at FIU**

Given the growing literature on the importance of internationalizing the curriculum and the value of global learning, institutional initiatives to enhance global learning opportunities can be seen across university campuses all over the United States. Florida International University (FIU), for example, has developed a university-wide global learning initiative requiring all undergraduate students to engage in two global learning-designated courses in order to meet three essential student learning outcomes: (a) Global Awareness: Knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems, (b) Global Perspective: The ability to conduct a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems, and (c) Global Engagement: Willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving. Hilary Landorf and Stephanie Doscher, Executive Director and Director of the Office of Global Learning Initiatives at FIU, define global learning as "the process of diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders" (Landorf & Doscher, 2015, p. 24).

The directors stress that global learning should "enable students to understand and make connections between local and global concerns and analyze pressing issues from multiple perspectives" (Landorf et al., 2018, p.7).

Global education as a learning imperative in higher education is not new. When addressing the imperative for global education at FIU in 1982, Jan Tucker urged that "the long-term validity of higher education in the United States as a shaper of global futures hinges on whether these institutions can become more globally-minded." Moreover, schools of education and teacher education programs "stand at the intersection of the need for change in both schools and in the universities" (Tucker, 1982, p. 214).

**Intercultural Development**

Studies on global learning in higher education have also emphasized its utility to advance intercultural development and build competencies associated with culturally responsive teaching. The literature defines intercultural development and competence in multiple ways. Early definitions include Cross (1988) who defined intercultural competence as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or professional and enable that system, agency, or professional to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (p. 83). The word culture is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thought, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively. A culturally competent system of care acknowledges and incorporates – at all levels – the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations,

vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs (Cross, 1988).

Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is one of the most widely referenced conceptions of intercultural development and uses cognitive psychology and constructivism concepts to categorize observations into six stages of increasing cultural sensitivity. Each stage demonstrates a specific cognitive structure that is expressed in certain types of behaviors related to cultural differences. The stages are then divided into two: ethnocentric and ethnorelative. The six stages are Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. The first three stages are ethnocentric (individual considers one's own culture as central to reality in some way), and the other three are ethnorelative (individual considers one's own culture in the context of other cultures). Bennett asserts that in order for an individual to move from the ethnocentric stages of the continuum to the ethnorelative stage, a paradigmatic shift in thinking must occur.

Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence was developed using the Delphi technique, an iterative process to achieve consensus among a panel of intercultural experts to define and assess intercultural competence. The following definition of intercultural competence was rated the highest amongst international scholars: "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 247). To begin this process, Deardorff recommended that academic departments engage in reflection and collaboration around questions relating to specific intercultural skills and

knowledge needed for certain majors, how globalization affects these majors and what type of global learning should be required for students to graduate and, more broadly, what skills, attitudes and knowledge do students need to be successful in the 21st century. Deardorff's model identifies specific knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with intercultural competence which is offered as a guide for institutions developing their own models of intercultural competence. These constituent components of intercultural competence include: (a) Knowledge: Cultural self-awareness; culture specific knowledge; socio-linguistic awareness; grasp of global issues and trends; (b) Skills: listening, observing, evaluating using patience and perseverance; viewing the world from others' perspectives; (c) Attitudes: Respect (valuing other cultures); Openness (withholding judgement); Curiosity (viewing difference as a learning opportunity); Discovery (tolerance for ambiguity) (Deardorff, 2006). McKinnon (2012) offers a note of caution about intercultural competence stating it "cannot be acquired in a short space of time or in one module. It is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but a lifelong process which needs to be addressed explicitly in learning and teaching and staff development" (p. 1).

A development in intercultural competence is often cited as a desired student learning outcome in study abroad. The literature in this area will be discussed in the next section.

**Intercultural Development through International Student Teaching**

The demand to develop intercultural competencies such as global-mindedness, empathy, cognitive flexibility, collaborative problem-solving, and intercultural communication has become an imperative in teacher education, and culturally

immersive, global learning experiences such as international student teaching have become a viable way in which to meet this demand. Marx and Moss (2011) believe that "engagement and immersion within other cultural contexts may be an essential element in the process of transformation from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative worldview" and suggest that study abroad programs designed for teacher education can be "powerful vehicles to transform preservice teachers' ethnocentric mindsets and foster the dispositions needed to teach in culturally responsive ways" (p. 38).

Much of the literature supports a positive relationship between intercultural development and student participation in IST programs. Indeed, most scholars, researchers and theorists can agree that these types of experiences can create significant cultural dissonance, or discord in one's environment, necessary to catalyze the development of intercultural competencies associated with culturally responsive educators (Anderson et al., 2015; Bennett, 1993; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Hall, 1998; Mahon & Stachowski, 1990; Marx & Moss, 2011; Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Sleeter, 2001; Taylor, 1994; Willard-Holt, 2001). The following section will review the literature associated with positive outcomes of IST programs.

**Positive Outcomes of IST Programs**

Many scholars have reported on the perceived effectiveness of study abroad programs, specifically international student teaching experiences, in developing intercultural competencies crucial for 21st century classrooms. These include global-mindedness, empathy, cognitive flexibility, collaborative problem-solving, and intercultural communication. (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Dunn et al., 2014; Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Phillion et al., 2009; Quezada, 2004; Vandermaas-Peeler & Duncan-

Bendix, 2018). In 1990, Mahan and Stachowski conducted a study of a 13-year Overseas Student Teaching Project, comparing novice teachers in the conventional, statewide student teaching program to those with overseas teaching, living and community involvement experience. The research found that study abroad settings hold promise to developing cultural competency as pre-service teachers are exposed to new populations of students, languages and cultures in a way that is difficult to achieve on their home campus. They go on to recommend that teacher educators should "actively strive to incorporate community, cultural, and global studies into teacher preparation programs…" (p. 20).

Similarly, Medina, Hathaway and Pilonieta (2015) utilized a qualitative case study method to determine how pre-service teachers' study abroad experience led to changes in their perceptions of English language learners. Using primary data sources from reflections, questionnaires and group interviews, the study reported the positive changes pre-service teachers experienced throughout their experience abroad including second language acquisition, empathy, advocacy and self-efficacy (Medina et al., 2015).

Edmonds' (2010) study on the lived experiences of nursing students who study abroad explored the impact of study abroad on nursing students' global perspectives and cultural competence. The purpose was to identify the specific benefits and challenges these types of programs have on participants. The findings indicated that by participating in a study abroad program, nursing students experienced many benefits including, "increased personal growth, awareness of diverse cultures, adapting despite an unfamiliar environment, and increased self-efficacy" (Edmonds, 2010, p. 545).

One recurring theme throughout the literature on student learning outcomes in study abroad include participants' experience with being the cultural "other" (Mark & Moss, 2011; Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Trilokekar & Kukar's (2011) qualitative study of nine pre-service teachers engaged in a month-long study abroad program in England reported one participant as feeling like an "outsider" and that she had to come to terms with her representation of "whiteness," as someone with resources, power and privilege" (p. 1148).

Similarly, Marx and Moss (2011) labeled their first emergent research theme as "The Challenge of Study Abroad: Being the Cultural Other Within International Internships" and believed this "out of culture" teaching experience was the catalyst for their participant's intercultural development. The authors go on to say that the participant was "immersed within a different dominant cultural context where she was the cultural outsider, and she had to confront the reality of fundamental cultural differences" forcing her to develop a different cultural and global perspective (p. 41).

Although this is by no means an exhaustive review of the positive outcomes reported by study abroad research, it is clear that an experience such as international student teaching has the potential to provide a global context in which to develop intercultural competencies they may not otherwise on their home campuses. However, emerging literature challenging the long-held assumptions about student learning in study abroad settings is presented in the next section.

**A Counternarrative to Student Learning Abroad**

Despite the vast literature on positive student learning outcomes in study abroad, there is a growing counternarrative that is challenging long-held assumptions and

practices about teaching and learning in study abroad. Vande Berg et al. (2012) offers a

comprehensive volume of studies that investigate the latest knowledge of human

learning and development, and questions current theory and practice in study abroad.

For example, many authors have called into question the assertion that immersion alone

leads to ethnorelativism. Savikie (2012) framed student learning in the context of

psychology and advocates for its application in study abroad in order to "create learning

experiences by intention rather than leaving them to fate and hoping for the best"

(p.216). Other researchers have also advocated for intervening in student learning abroad

as a way to maximize positive learning outcomes. Bathurst and la Brack (2012) assert

that a "carefully guided, interventionist approach facilitates significant intercultural

learning prior to, during, and after the study abroad experience" (p.261). The authors

pointed out the lack of post-experience interventions in many study abroad programs,

and provided several anecdotal examples supporting the importance of such reentry

interventions in facilitating intercultural learning and integrating and applying their

learning once back home. In examining the interdisciplinary and research evidence

about what students are learning and not learning abroad, Vande Berg et al. (2012) put it

this way:

> Most students abroad are at this point not learning to negotiate cultural
>
> differences, whether inside or outside the classroom, unless educators intervene
>
> in their learning in ways that help them develop the types of knowledge and
>
> skills that will allow them to shift perspectives and adapt behaviors to new and
>
> often challenging cultural contexts (p. xiv)

**The Value of Student Voice in Study Abroad**

As this study explored the experiences of pre-service teachers during an international student teaching program, the elevation of student voice, that is, presenting their stories through multiple platforms, was an essential component to this research. Although many studies on student learning abroad employ qualitative methods that utilize student self-reports, reflections, etc., few studies deeply investigate the individual student experience using new digital media methodology, such as digital storytelling, that emphasize student voice. Recent studies, however, have highlighted the pedagogical value of student voice and experience when developing high-impact global learning opportunities, and have utilized digital media such as blogs, videos, audio, digital photographs and social media as data sources to explore the ways in which students experience study abroad (Bell, 2016; Alexander, 2017; Allen et al, 2019; Hamilton et al, 2019). As this study incorporated multiple modes of reflective storytelling from participants, the literature on the use of student narratives as well as the method of digital storytelling is pertinent and will be discussed in the following section.

*Student Narratives*

Narrative inquiry has emerged as a valuable methodology to explore participant experiences in study abroad. It is defined as the study of experience understood narratively, and usually begins by asking participants to tell their stories (Clandindin, 2000). Many researchers have started to employ this fairly new methodology to systematically inquire about the lived experiences of study abroad students. Lee (2018) explored the narrative of a returning study abroad participant as he reintegrated into a language program in his home country. The author described using narratives as a

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cultural tool that can empower participants, and brings into being "history, identity, authenticity, subjectivity, and meaning for present existence" (p. 580). Similarly, Tarchi et al. (2018) assessed intercultural sensitivity of participants using a narrative of a critical incident during their study abroad experience. The researchers believe that analyzing narrative can "make one's observations of and interactions with a foreign culture concrete and available for development" and can support the development of socio-cultural sensitivities (p.885). Finally, by using journal entries, field notes and assignments, digital artifacts and social media evidence, Craig et al. (2018) examined the way learning, culture and context shaped the knowledge, identity and social interactions of a teacher study abroad participant. The aim of narrative inquiry, according to the researchers, is not to tell good stories, but to create research texts that animate the lives of the participants.

### Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling can be described as the process of constructing a short video recording, using images, video clips, audio, and/or narration to illustrate a story. It has recently been adapted to the study abroad context by making use of digital artifacts, such as pictures and videos that students are often already collecting during their travels (Hamilton et al, 2019). Hamilton et al (2019) analyzed undergraduates' digital stories for evidence of intercultural understanding and found that digital story formatting "offers students an opportunity to weave together digital artifacts that they often are already collecting" (p. 59). The authors report that the process of creating digital stories both promotes and displays reflection. Similarly, Bell (2016) used interpretative phenomenological analysis to interpret data collected from blogs written by students

throughout their study abroad experience. He asserts that the process of using blogs to collect data enabled "'in-the-moment' feedback during the study abroad program and lending greater depth to the understanding of student perceptions" (p. 196). Finally, Allen et al (2019) implemented digital storytelling into a reflective assignment as an assessment tool for learning outcomes of a study abroad course. Themes such as cultural awareness, intercultural difference, intercultural similarity, personal impact, personal growth, importance of relationships with others, and future career applications were found. Results supported that intended learning outcomes were achieved and the authors concluded that "digital storytelling was a unique and successful method of capturing the variety of outcomes provided by a study abroad experience" (p. 10). Studies on digital storytelling also note the potential of such approaches in objectifying the members of the host community. Rose (2007, cited in Rodríguez, 2010) advocates for a critical approach, stating "a critical approach to visual images is therefore needed: one that thinks about the agency of the image, considers the social practices and effects of its viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences, including the academic critic" (p. 222).

**The Missing Voice in Study Abroad**

As much of the literature on underrepresented students and study abroad focuses on barriers to participation (Brux & Fry, 2010; Chama et al., 2018; Dessoff, 2006; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012;), the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion have thus been largely neglected in the field of study abroad (Contreras, 2019). Indeed, most of the sample participants in study abroad research represent the experiences of White students (Black & Bernardes, 2014; Marx & Moss, 2011; Sharma et al., 2011; Trilokekar &

Kukar, 2011). This is not unsurprising, as 70% of students who participate in study abroad identify as White (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). Although the literature is lacking the perspective of underrepresented students in study abroad, there are a few studies that sought to explore the motivations, influences and experiences of this unique demographic of students. Using an anti-deficit orientation, Perkins (2020) analyzed the survey responses of a sample of students of color who studied abroad to illustrate their self-reported motivations and the influential factors present in their decision-making process. To address the underrepresentation of students of color in study abroad, Sweeney (2013) offered ways in which institutions can contribute to the inclusion of students of color in study abroad on their campuses through an examination of areas of access and equity, climate, diversity in the curriculum, and learning and development. The author believes that "dialogue regarding the participation of students of color in study abroad must move beyond a focus solely on numbers, access, and deficits of students of color" (p. 13). Finally, Blake et al. (2020) examined the recently developed Frederick Douglas Global Fellowship program, which provides study abroad opportunities for students from minority serving institutions. By interviewing and analyzing student narratives, the study systematically interrogated how study abroad opportunities can be more culturally relevant to students of color. The author put it this way: "by explicitly investigating how study abroad experiences can be designed in service of students of colors' needs, we can offer a roadmap for strategies that foster culturally responsive environments" (p. 165). Diversity, equity and inclusion in study abroad, specifically IST experiences, remains a field for further investigation.

It is clear that the literature on study abroad and student learning supports the potential of such programs to develop intercultural competencies that are associated with culturally responsive teaching. However, most theorists will agree that without systematic critical reflection throughout the study abroad cycle, deeper meaning-making and learning will be challenging to achieve. This imperative is presented in the next section.

## The Crucial Role of Critical Reflection

John Dewey's (1933) famous quote, "We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience," is a sentiment echoed by many learning theorists. Indeed, the literature on student learning abroad and intercultural development is rich with support for systematic critical reflection as a way to facilitate deeper student learning (Braskamp et al.,2011; Marcus & Moss, 2017; Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Smith & Wang, 2017; Vande Berg et al., 2012; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018). Moreover, some of the leading learning processes include critical reflection as a crucial component to the development of higher order thinking and learning. Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, for example, explains that when a person is faced with an experience or with information that does not align with their frames of reference, disequilibrium occurs, and the person is likely to reject the experience or information to regain equilibrium. However, if critical reflection is applied during the state of disequilibrium, learning can ensue (Mezirow, 1994, 1998). Similarly, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory states that learning occurs when a person goes through a concrete experience, followed by observation of and reflection on that experience, which leads to the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations which can then be

applied to test future hypotheses and result in new experiences (Kolb, 2014). Further, Hammer (2012) believes cultural mentoring, that is, facilitating students' reflections on encounters with cultural differences and commonality, is foundational in intercultural development.

Many studies on student learning abroad have used critical reflection as a way to assess what kind of learning occurs during such experiences. Sharma et al. (2011) examined the practice of critical reflection for developing multicultural competencies in pre-service teachers. Their study advocated for a combination of two registers when preparing teacher education students through study abroad programs. The first register is through critical reflection which "provides a general framework for teacher education students to develop multicultural competencies by examining their beliefs and perceptions and questioning how their beliefs and perceptions shape their worldview toward self and other." The second register looks towards "transformative ways for framing multicultural experiences, constructing multiple perspectives, and reconceptualizing self and other as a continuous and systematic educational practice" (p. 20). When learning strategies combine these two registers, the authors assert it can be a powerful way to prepare pre-service teachers for multicultural classrooms.

Marcus and Moss (2015) believe intercultural learning is enhanced through pre-service teachers' exposure to different cultural perspectives. They recommend that teacher educators support intercultural learning by cultural reflexivity that includes "perspective taking, by promoting collaborative experiences to better see how others view and experience the world, and by reflecting on the advantages and limitations of their own experiences and privilege as Americans" (Marcus & Moss, 2015, p. 34).

Finally, Dewey (1933) believed that critical reflection as a meaning-making process is the basis of all teaching and learning. His notion of reflective practice, as it relates to educational experience, is a dialectic interaction between the self and the world that brings about self-awareness and an awareness of the other. This process consists of experiencing, reflecting and acting upon experience to transform how we perceive ourselves and others. According to Dewey, critical reflection lends itself to change and learning through allowing one the ability to make meaning of an experience or the perceived meaning constructed from experience (Sharma et al., 2011).

## Critique of the Current Literature

### Overview

This literature review presented the current cultural gap in American public education, and how teacher preparation programs are meeting the demand to develop more culturally responsive educators. It investigated the growing importance of global learning in higher education and recent institutional strategies that seek to offer such learning opportunities, exemplifying the global learning initiatives at Florida International University. The review then discussed the literature on intercultural development as it relates to building competencies for culturally responsive teaching and outlined Deardorff's model of intercultural competence. Finally, the research on international student teaching as a way to foster intercultural development was presented, highlighting student voice in study abroad and the crucial role of critical reflection in making meaning of IST experiences.

Although there is growing interest in all the academic areas explored in this literature review, there are also gaps in and limitations to the current research that has been conducted. A critique of those limitations is presented in the next section.

**Limitations of Data**

Many studies on student learning abroad have relied on self-reported data and from surveys which carry inherent bias issues (Jochum et al., 2017; Medina et al., 2015). The concerns with the validity of student self-reports as a way to gauging cognitive and affective changes include: (1) correct interpretation of the survey question; (2) accurate memory recall of the relevant information; (3) integration of that information into proper judgement, and (4) correctly mapping that judgement onto the survey response scale (Porter, 2000; cited in Herzog & Bowman, 2011). Trilokekar and Kukar (2011), for example, based their study on students' self-reports of their study abroad experiences which could not be verified by the researchers.

Similarly, quantitative tools used to measure student learning such as intercultural development include their own limitations. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), for example, do not often show statistically significant changes in students' pretest/posttest data. Braskamp et al. (2011), the developers of the measurement tool, explained that evidence from the GPI is a "means and not an end" and is most effective when the results are used to facilitate conversations, discussions and debate on student learning and development (p.114). To strengthen the validity of these studies, researchers have recommended a mixed method design to include conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews to give a more holistic perspective into participants' experiences. Additional recommendations include

conducting longitudinal studies that track pre-service teachers after their program has ended to determine student learning over time (Vatalaro et al., 2015; Mathews, 2017).

**Generalizability**

There are several concerns regarding the generalizability of findings from studies on student learning abroad. These include limitations related to convenience sampling, small sample sizes, length of program, and diversity in program location (Jochum et al., 2017; Medina et al., 2015; Smith & Yang, 2017; Vatalaro et al., 2015). As mentioned, the gap in the literature as it relates to ethnically diverse students and study abroad is significant. Most participants in study abroad research self-identify as White, females (representing the majority of the teacher workforce in the United States) and come from relatively privileged backgrounds, limiting the generalizability of findings (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018). Researchers suggest investigating different program models (longer length of study, non-English speaking program locations) and utilizing larger and more diverse sample groups in order to increase the generalizability of these studies.

**Limitations to What is Being Measured**

Finally, and most importantly to this study, there is a gap in the literature as it relates to an exploration of intricacies in the learning process of pre-service teachers during an IST program. Marx and Moss (2011) believes that research has not "shed sufficient light on the way programs influence student growth during the experience" (p. 37). Further, Taylor (1994) believes research in cultural identity and transformation has not adequately addressed questions such as: "What is the process of learning that is taking place? Is it transformative? How are these skills developed? What does a stranger do that is central to the process of learning that allows development of a more inclusive

world view? How does a stranger revise and change a former interpretation of a culture for a new and broader interpretation?" (p. 157). Without understanding the process of intercultural learning, it is difficult to determine what changes take place and how they take place (Taylor, 1994). Vande Berg et al. (2012) pose a similar question about the learning that is taking place abroad and propose that future research focuses on the experience of learning abroad that is allowing students to develop competencies they may not have acquired if they had stayed at home.

## Summary

This study contributes to the literature in teacher education, study abroad, and international student teaching in several ways. As it explored the experiences of five, pre-service teachers during a semester-long, IST program, the length of the program, diversity of sample group and insights gained were all valuable research contributions. The longer length of the program meant that more data on student experiences could be collected throughout the study, which differs from most studies that measure student learning over much shorter periods of time. Although the sample group was small, the diversity of the participants was significant. Ethnically diverse, first-generation, and low-income students are less likely to have international experiences and are, therefore, underrepresented in study abroad, and even more so in international student teaching programs. The participants of this study contribute a unique perspective that is virtually non-existent in the literature and represent an important and growing voice in study abroad. Finally, by deeply exploring the individual and shared experiences of participants through in-depth reentry interviews and analyzing a variety of reflective assignments, this study offers valuable insights into the intricacies of student

experiences abroad and provides guidance to global program developers seeking to

foster the intercultural development of their students as they participate in overseas

experiences.

**CHAPTER III**

**METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will outline the research methodology used to answer the research question: How do pre-service teachers describe their experiences during an international student teaching program? First, the research design will be outlined and justified, followed by a description of the role of the researcher. Next, a description of the program and study participants will be presented. The sources of data will then be outlined as well as the procedure through which the data was collected, analyzed and managed. Finally, the ways in which data integrity was strengthened will be discussed, followed by a summary of the chapter.

**Qualitative Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative, collective case study design. Justification for a qualitative approach, as opposed to a quantitative or mixed methods approach, is based on the objective of the research question. As this study explored the individual and shared experiences of students abroad, quantitative measurement tools are limited in providing a more nuanced understanding of students' experiences after studying abroad (see, for example, Ferrari & Fine, 2015; Engberg, 2013). Creswell (2006) explained that qualitative research relies on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) believe that qualitative researchers "seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are" (p. 38). The authors explain that qualitative researchers use empirical observation because "it is with concrete incidents of human behavior that investigators can think more clearly and deeply about the human

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condition" (p. 38). Considering this, qualitative research was more appropriate in exploring the nuanced experiences of students as they made meaning of their experiences abroad.

A collective case study is also an effective research design to explore the experiences of multiple participants in order to present a rich description of individual and shared experiences. Merriam (1988) defines a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit" (p. 21). Similarly, Creswell (2013) explains that the case study method "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes" (p. 97). A multiple case study, according to Stake (2006), is bound by individual cases that share a common characteristic or condition, and are often presented intact, accompanied by a cross-case analysis with an emphasis on the binding concept or idea (p.5). He refers to this grouping as a "quintain" - the object or phenomenon or condition to be studied (p. 6). Stake explains that the aim of multi-case research is to come to understand the quintain better (p. 6).

This study was presented as five individual cases bound by the common condition of the IST program, which represents the quintain of the research. A rich, thick description of each student's experiences was presented, followed by a cross-case analysis that compared the experiences of the participants. It is for these aforementioned reasons that a collective, qualitative case study design was the most appropriate of this study.

## Role of the Researcher

The purpose of this study is deeply personal to me. As a White, female educator, I reflect most of the teacher workforce in the United States. Conversely, the demographics of students I have taught over the last 10 years have been culturally and linguistically different from me. Although I believed myself to be a culturally sensitive educator, it was not until I started exploring deeper issues of social justice and equity in education that I realized I had a long way to go on my journey to becoming a more culturally responsive educator. This was when I became interested in teacher education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the potential of study abroad experiences to foster intercultural development. As a former study abroad student, and fervent supporter of its transformative potential, I knew I wanted to be involved in developing high-impact, meaningful global programs that are inclusive for students who may not otherwise be able to study abroad. When I was provided the opportunity to help develop the pilot IST program investigated in this study, I also knew I wanted to explore the first cohort of students to gain insight into how they processed their experiences during the program. From this, my dissertation research project was born.

To begin, I had to acknowledge my positionality as not only researcher, but co-developer and teaching assistant of the program under investigation. That meant that I would be developing closer relationships to the potential participants that may alter the way they divulge information to me, and how my relationship with participants may alter the way I interpret the information. To minimize this research bias, I practiced reflexivity from the onset of the project. Okely (1996) explains that the role of reflexivity is extremely important because "the specificity and individuality of the

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observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use" (p. 28). As such, analytic memos were created throughout the data analysis process to monitor my biases and remain a neutral researcher.

## Description of Program

This study explored the experiences of five undergraduate students who participated in a semester-long, IST pilot program, designed as two mini semesters taking place in two distinct locations. First, participants completed a seven-week preparation course on their home campus of Florida International University, the largest minority-serving research institution in the state of Florida. The preparation course focused on preparing students to teach abroad which included developing cultural identity through various reflective assignments, building knowledge of the host country, and exploring culturally responsive teaching practices. Ecuadorian scholars were invited as guest speakers to expand on cultural topics of Ecuador. The students then spent three weeks of the planned five-week teaching practicum course in the host community of Cumbayá, Ecuador. Students lived with host families, co-taught with cooperating teachers at their placement schools, met once a week with an on-site professor from FIU's partner university in Quito, Ecuador, and engaged with the host community through various cultural activities. Due to the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, students had to return home after three weeks in Ecuador.

Considering FIU's institution-wide global learning initiatives, as well as the culturally responsive nature of the curriculum, the IST program explored in this study was ideal to understand the experiences of participants in the context of student teaching and learning abroad. Furthermore, my close involvement with the program made it

convenient to conduct the study. Finally, as this was a pilot program, the insights gained from the study serve to inform program developers on how to improve the program's design and delivery in order to ensure its future success at FIU.

**Study Participants**

The convenience sample group for this study was recruited from undergraduate students enrolled in the IST pilot program during the spring 2020 semester. As mentioned, the sample group from this study is unique in that it does not reflect the most common demographics of study abroad sample groups (i.e., White, middle class females). Instead, the sample reflects the diversity of FIU's student population, which is 61% percent Hispanic, with about 25% first generation college students and 87% of students receiving need-based financial aid (FIU, 2021; US News, 2021). Below is a demographic chart based on the self-reported information collected from each participant of this study.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Sample Group*

| Name | Gender | Age | Ethnicity | Year in College | Major | Previous Int. Travel | First Gen. | Need-Based Fin. Aid |
|------|--------|-----|-----------|-----------------|-------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|
| Gabby | Female | 20 | White/Hispanic | Junior | Chemistry | Multiple Countries | Yes | Yes |
| Sofia | Female | 21 | White/Hispanic | Junior | Early Childhood Education | Multiple Countries | No | Yes |
| Bethany | Female | 25 | White/Hispanic | Senior | Interdis. Studies | Multiple Countries | Yes | Yes |
| Samuel | Male | 23 | Black/Haitian | Senior | Public Admin. | Multiple Countries | Yes | Yes |
| Mateo | Male | 22 | White/Hispanic | Senior | Special Education | Multiple Countries | Yes | Yes |

According to Merriam (1998), the number of participants in a case study depends on what information you need to answer your research question. Similarly, Yin (2009) believes that due to the nature of the case study approach, "the typical criteria regarding sample size are irrelevant" (p. 50). Yin suggests that the researcher should focus on getting information on the various aspects of the case. As such, five was an adequate sample size to collect enough data to provide a rich, in-depth description of the experiences of each participant and to present a cross-case analysis of each case within the quintain of the IST program.

After approval from both my dissertation committee and from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is required for conducting research with human subjects, the participants for the sample group were officially recruited from the students enrolled in the IST program in the spring 2020 semester (FIU Research, 2019). Recruitment included an explanation of the goals and aims of the project and a reiteration that participation was voluntary. Interested participants then received an IRB-approved consent form that they signed to formally participate in the project.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through a reentry interview with each participant within a month after they returned to Florida from their student teaching practicum in Ecuador. The interviews were conducted over Zoom online video conferencing and lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours. Interviews were recorded with consent from the participant and transcribed for analysis. Other primary data were collected through reflective documentation completed by participants throughout the semester.

**Interviews**

Qualitative data is conveyed through words and consists of quotations from people about their feelings, experiences, knowledge and behavior, obtained through interviews, observations and excerpts, quotations or passages extracted from various types of documents (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990, p. 10). The most common means of data collection in qualitative studies is in-depth interviews. According to Patton (1990), "The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 196). Interviewing is necessary when the researcher cannot "observe behavior, feelings or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 1998, p.72), or if the researcher is interested in "understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Accordingly, an in-depth, semi-structured, reentry interview was conducted to better understand the experiences of participants during their IST program and to gain insight into the shared experiences of students through a cross-case analysis.

Although the study was originally designed to include three interviews - pre-departure, on-site and reentry - limiting factors including the IRB approval process and the unexpected circumstances surrounding the growing COVID-19 pandemic made this impossible. Instead, the data collection was redesigned to conduct a longer, more in-depth reentry interview that gave the students an opportunity to reflect on their entire experience and share their stories during this interview. I had established a relationship with the participants throughout the semester, allowing them to feel more comfortable to share their experiences in a way they might not have if the researcher were unfamiliar to them. However, I was aware of this privileged relationship and reflexivity was essential

in order to question my involvement in the research and to acknowledge what may have inhibited my analysis of the students' narratives in order to minimize my bias and remain a neutral researcher (Kim, 2004; Russell & Kelly, 2002). The reentry interview was conducted within a month of the students' return from their student teaching placements in Ecuador. Questions were semi-structured to elicit broader narratives from students about their experiences regarding student teaching abroad, living with host families, cultural interactions, personal and professional implications, etc. (see Appendix A). Students were also asked to choose 2 important photos - one from the preparation course and one from the practicum course - and share their significance. As visual storytelling was a core component of the IST program curriculum, the students were familiar with this process and it allowed variation during the interview for me to observe and compare the way students responded to their chosen photos (Harper, 2002).

When interviews were completed, the recorded Zoom interview, as well as the subsequent transcription documents, were stored in a secured Google Documents file that was password-protected and could only be accessed by the researcher.

**Reflective Documents**

Reflective documents were essential sources of data for this study. Students completed reflective assignments throughout the semester that created the space for them to critically reflect on topics that served to facilitate intercultural learning. These topics included cultural self-awareness, culturally responsive teaching practices, and challenging cultural assumptions to name a few. Reflective assignments were completed in a variety of ways including pre-departure surveys, online discussions, visual stories (Appendix B & C), cultural autobiography projects, video blogs (vlogs), final

PechaKucha presentations (format of digital presentation consisting of 20 photographs and 20 seconds to present each photo), and ePortfolio which is a "collection of work (evidence) in an electronic format that showcases learning over time" (Clemson University, n.d.). These reflective documents were collected from each participant and served to support the findings from the reentry interview. In other words, by collecting data in the participants' own words, from multiple sources and in a variety of contexts, I was able to triangulate the data to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study's findings (Glesne, 2006).

## Data Analysis

The data was simultaneously collected and analyzed as soon as the first set of data was available (Merriam, 1998). Each case was analyzed separately, and a cross-case analysis was conducted to present themes found across cases. A modified version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 phases of thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data in 5 phases. I chose this method of analysis for its theoretical flexibility, compatibility to a contextualist paradigm (i.e., its ability to reflect the reality of participants and to unpack the surface of reality in the context of international student teaching) and its potential to "provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). These phases are explained in the following section.

### Phase 1: Familiarization

The first phase of data analysis was to get familiar with the data as soon as the first set of data was collected. This simultaneous data collection and analysis allowed for the development of initial codes and categories (Merriam, 1998). After the reentry interviews were conducted and recorded for each participant, the voice typing feature

was used on Google Docs to transcribe the audio recordings. Although this feature has a low accuracy rate, it gave a base to go back and correct grammatical and structural errors and ensure verbatim transcription. I re-read the transcripts several times, added analytic memos and marked notes for coding to parts I found particularly insightful (Saldaña, 2009). I did the same as I collected and explored participants' reflective assignments. The data for each case study was then organized in a comprehensive, password-protected Google Sheets document. This laid the groundwork for the second phase of code development.

**Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes and Categories**

After I familiarized myself with the data of each case, and developed a list of ideas from the data, I started to generate initial codes using a combination of values coding and in vivo coding techniques. Codes refer to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998: 63). Values coding applies to participants' values, beliefs and attitudes, representing their perspective or worldview, and is particularly useful to explore cultural values and intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies (Saldaña, 2009). In vivo coding places emphasis on the participant's own words and is helpful to understand the stories or ideas of the participant, giving it nuanced meaning that other forms of coding may not allow (Manning, 2017). Both of these methods of data analysis were appropriate in allowing for holistic codes to be generated based on student narratives. After I thoroughly went through the transcript and reflective documents, the data was collated together into groups, identified by codes and categories, and corroborated by analytical

memos taken throughout the interview process to enhance trustworthiness (Saldaña, 2009). The codes and categories served as a condensed overview of the main points and elucidated common meanings and patterns that occurred throughout the data.

**Phase 3: Generating and Reviewing Motifs**

After initial codes and categories were created, a second, two-level cycle of coding took place to find patterns and extract key motifs from recurring codes in the participant's narratives and reflective documents. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), pattern coding is a way of grouping large amounts of material into a more meaningful unit of analysis in order to develop larger categories or themes from the data. A motif is defined as a symbolic image or idea that appears frequently in a story and can help produce other narrative aspects such as themes. The codes were then reviewed and refined based on whether they formed a coherent pattern and if they "adequately captured the contours of the coded data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21). The key motifs from each case were then presented through verbatim excerpts chosen for their ability to encapsulate a larger idea found in each participant's narrative and/or reflective documentation. Below is an example of the data coding process.

**Figure 1**

*Example of Coding Process*
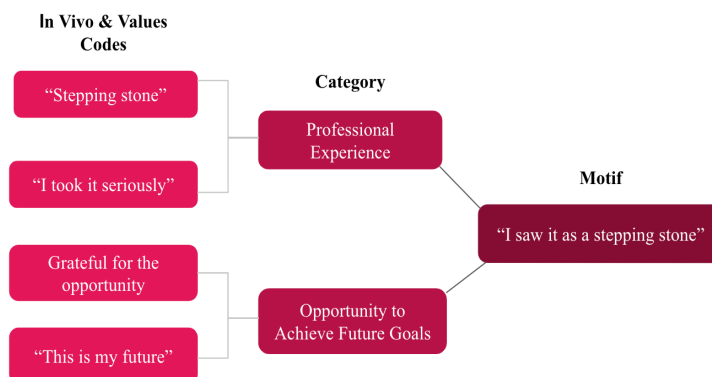
**Phase 4: Generating and Reviewing Themes through Cross-Case Analysis**

After the data from each of the five cases were analyzed, coded and categorized, a cross-case analysis was conducted to generate themes and sub-themes found across cases. Data for the cross-case analysis were coded and categorized simultaneously during the individual case study analysis. Patterns found across cases were categorized and emergent themes were presented. The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to better understand the quintain, or the common context or phenomenon in which each case took place, i.e., the international student teaching program. By generating themes and subthemes across cases, and then reviewing and refining those themes, commonalities and unique attributes within and across cases emerged, and assertions could be made about the quintain (Stake, 2006).

**Phase 5: Producing the Report**

The final phase of analysis was to produce a report of the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the report serves to "tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis" and it must provide a "concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell - within and across themes" (p. 92). Each case study was presented through motif tables, participant profiles and examples from student narratives and reflective documents to support findings and provide the essence of each student's stories of their experiences abroad. The cross-case analysis was then illustrated through a cross-case theme and subtheme diagram and narrative examples from each case. Finally, concepts found in the literature on global and intercultural learning and student learning abroad are connected to the findings from the data and weaved throughout the report.

Ultimately, the final report of findings from this study can provide valuable insights into the unique and shared experiences of student teaching abroad, and guide program developers to incorporate these insights into improving future global programs.

## Data Management

Most data collected for this study (reflective documentation, Zoom interview recordings and transcriptions, consent forms) were in a digital format which was securely stored through my password-protected laptop. Any paper documentation (demographic and pre-departure surveys) was uploaded digitally, then stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Further, all participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Upon completion of the data analysis, all data associated with this study were destroyed.

## Data Integrity

Data integrity in qualitative research is often explained in terms of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify criteria such as credibility, transferability and reflexivity to increase trustworthiness of qualitative research. Credibility refers to how true and accurate the findings are, which, for this study, was strengthened through a triangulation of different data sources. Transferability refers to how applicable the findings are to other contexts. Thick descriptions were used for each case and for the cross-case analysis to present the ways that this study can be applicable in other contexts, circumstances or situations. Finally, reflexivity refers to the process of critical self-reflection about oneself as research as well as the researcher-participant relationship and how that can affect participant's answers to questions. In order to

reduce researcher bias, the data analysis process included my self-monitoring and reflective memos taken throughout the process.

Another way data integrity was strengthened for this study was through member-checking. As data was analyzed and interpreted, I engaged participants to check if the interpretations represented their beliefs and made changes if necessary. Additionally, a peer examination was conducted by asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerged (Merriam, 1998).

## Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology used to explore the experiences of five pre-service teachers during an IST program. Data was collected through reentry interviews and reflective documents and analyzed first on an individual case basis using in vivo, values and pattern coding to generate key categories, and then across cases to present emerging themes and explore the unique and shared experiences of participants. Chapter four presents the findings from the data analysis of this study.

# CHAPTER IV

## FINDINGS

This chapter presents the case studies of each participant, and includes motif tables, participant profiles and examples from student narratives to support findings. The motif tables illustrate the three main motifs that emerged from recurring ideas or patterns found throughout the participant's narrative and reflective documents. These are presented as verbatim excerpts to honor the words of the students. The meaning of each motif and an example from the narrative are provided to clarify and support each category. The motif charts are followed by participant profiles that give a brief description of each student. Finally, the three main motifs are illustrated and discussed through examples from participant narratives and reflective assignments. A cross-case analysis is then presented to reveal themes that emerged from collectively comparing data across cases. These four emergent themes and related subthemes are illustrated in a diagram and followed by examples from individual cases to compare and discuss student experiences across cases. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

## Case One - Sofia

**Table 2**

*Motif, Meaning and Examples from Narrative*

| Motif | Meaning | Examples from Narrative |
|---|---|---|
| "I Saw It as a Steppingstone" | Experience was a professional opportunity that she took very seriously and was very grateful for | "I actually saw it as a steppingstone to reach my future goals and my future achievements." |
| "I Needed to be Part of My Culture. I Needed to Immerse Myself into What I Know" | Strong ties to and pride for her upbringing, culture and family, as well as acknowledgement of the pressures of society to uphold family reputation | "I think that my culture makes me who I am. I represent my culture every day. My family members and I assimilate well with mainstream culture but at the same time we represent our own culture." |
| "I Gained Confidence in Doing Something Unexpected" | Developed confidence through experience, positive reinforcement and doing something out of her comfort zone | "This has taught me to gain confidence in myself and in doing something unexpected because you never know what that has for you in the future." |

**Participant Profile**

Sofia was a unique participant because she is from the host country of Ecuador. Although she has spent nearly half of her life in the United States, her narrative was rooted in her familiarity and comfort with Ecuadorian culture, her strong ties to her upbringing and family reputation, and a constant comparison of United States and Ecuadorian systems and customs. She spoke positively about her student teaching experience and described it as a "steppingstone" for her future professional goals. As such, she took the experience very seriously and saw it as a possible job opportunity

after graduation. She also spoke at length about the pride in her culture and upbringing, and the importance of representing her family in a way that Ecuadorian society expects. She explained that she is used to doing the safe thing and not "going out of the box," but that her experience helped her gain confidence through "doing something unexpected" (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020).

From an analysis of Sofia's reentry interview, reflective assignments, and pre-departure survey, three motifs emerged. The following section defines these motifs and provides evidence from the data to present an interpretive narrative of Sofia's international student teaching experience.

**"I Saw It as a Steppingstone"**

Sofia's case is unique in that she is from Ecuador; however, she did not take this experience as an excuse to have a vacation back home. Instead, she saw the opportunity to return to her home country as a "steppingstone" for her future profession as a teacher. Indeed, on her pre-departure survey Sofia indicated that her reason for wanting to participate in the program was to learn more about the school systems of Ecuador in order to become a better teacher. When asked about why she signed up for the program and what her expectations and goals were, she responded: "I wanted to give back to the country that raised me and see how education is in another country. I want to become a better teacher and learn how to manage a classroom and experience different environments" (Sofia, pre-departure survey, February 19, 2020). Because Sofia is from Ecuador, her priorities differed somewhat from her peers in that she already anticipated this experience as a possible job opportunity and treated it accordingly. When asked about how this experience differed from other travel experiences, she reiterated how

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seriously she took this opportunity:

Well, this experience was very different from when I usually go back to Ecuador. I had a lot more responsibility than I do when I go, so it was very different. I didn't take it as a vacation or I'm going to just visit my family and friends. I kind of took it as this is my future and if I do want to eventually get a job here, it has to reflect from the beginning. First impressions are super powerful, so I took it as more of a professional interaction. I took it more as it's my job, so I told my family that if you want to see me, or if I want to do something, my job comes first. On the weekends, I spent time with my family and friends. I went out, but I took it more seriously, I guess. I didn't go out as much, I didn't go as crazy or I didn't venture out as much as maybe the other students, my fellow classmates, did. I took it more as this is serious, this is my life, this is my goal. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

This quote is important because it highlights a few subcategories that emerged throughout Sofia's narrative. She is clearly emphasizing the significance of this opportunity to her future teaching career. However, she also mentions the importance of first impressions and the difference between how she treated the experience versus her peers. These two important subcategories come to light when Sofia discussed her family upbringing and culture which will be discussed further in the following section.

Sofia continued to reflect on the importance of this experience in achieving her future goals and plans after graduation:

So, basically for me this opportunity, as you know I'm from there, so this was always something that I wanted to do, and I've always dreamed of. So, I saw it

like, instead of going back to my country how I always go, like on vacation, I

actually saw it as a steppingstone to reach my future goals and my future

achievements. Eventually I want to graduate, and I want to move back and

become a teacher in Ecuador. Then my final goal would be to get all the concepts

and values that they teach over there and that I think are so important for

children to learn and see if I could bring those concepts and values to the States

or somewhere that it's really needed. (Sofia, reentry interview, 4/14/20)

The final part of this quote indicated Sofia's tendency to compare the United States with

Ecuador, often implying that Ecuadorian systems and customs are more favorable than

those found in the United States. Here, she expressed her desire to bring back all the

concepts and values she experienced in her placement school in Ecuador to somewhere

where she perceives they are needed, namely, the United States.

In her reflective assignment, Visual Story #3: Life at School, Sofia positively

described the students and teaching methodology found at the placement school

reflecting her enthusiasm for her teaching placement and her preference towards the

education system in Ecuador.

**Figure 2**

*Visual Story #3: Life at School*



Photo courtesy of Sofia.

Life at [name of placement school] is amazing. All the students seem eager to go

to school and learn. The campus is beautiful! It's on top of this mountain and you

get a view from all the valley of Cumbayá. The main focus of the school is to

make sure that each student is environmentally conscious. Compared to other

schools in the United States, this school is more student-centered, while also

helping the environment. Students just seem to be happier and have more self-

control. When it came to the teaching part, [name of school] has their own

teaching methodology. It's a mix of Montessori and Velbert. Their teachers have

more leeway in the classroom than in the U.S. The classroom itself is every

teacher's dream, with toys and a bunch of supplies for the kids. But the most

important part is that kids get to be kids and learn by play and exploration.

(Sofia, Visual Story #3: Life at School, March 4, 2020)

Again, Sofia's perception is that the teaching methodology used at the placement school

results in students being "happier" and having more "self-control" than students in the

United States. This reinforced her desire to return to Ecuador to teach in a school

environment that she perceives as being more exceptional than schools she has

experienced in the United States, particularly as it relates to student-centered learning

and teaching autonomy. This United States/Ecuador comparison also reflected Sofia's

preconceived notions that by participating in a student teaching program in Ecuador she

would acquire the preferred skills to not only secure a future teaching position in

Ecuador, but to bring those skills back to the United States where "it's really needed"

(Sofia, reentry interview, 4/14/20).

Overall, Sofia described her experience with student teaching as extremely

positive and as an important steppingstone to her future career. She took it very seriously and treated it as a reflection of her professionalism and dedication to becoming a teacher.

**"I Needed to be Part of My Culture. I Needed to Immerse Myself into What I Know."**

The second theme that emerged from Sofia's data can be interpreted in a few ways. Throughout her narrative, Sofia emphasized the strong ties to her culture and upbringing. She also made several implications regarding societal and familial expectations to uphold the reputation of her family through her behaviors and actions. This theme also represents Sofia's preference to doing what she knows and her hesitation to break from her comfort zone. She grappled with respecting her culture and what is expected of her, and, at the same time, staying open to new experiences and perspectives.

It is clear that Sofia has a deep connection to her Ecuadorian culture. She mentioned it many times throughout the course of the program. For example, in her Cultural Autobiography portfolio, she was asked how closely she identifies and affiliates with her culture, and how assimilated the members of her family were into mainstream culture. She responded: "I think that my culture makes me who I am. I represent my culture every day. My family members and I assimilate well with mainstream culture but at the same time we represent our own culture" (Sofia, Cultural Autobiography questions, January 13, 2020).

Again, she acknowledged the importance of culture in shaping her own identity and her responsibility in properly representing her culture. This also reflected a development in cultural self-awareness, an important intercultural competency.

Sofia also eloquently revealed her respect for her family and upbringing, through her reflective I Am From poem:

De una niñez que pude correr y jugar todo el tiempo. De pasar con mis abuelos y primos hasta pasar con mis mejores amigos y hacer locuras. Mi crianza no la cambiaría por nada por que es lo que me moldeo a ser quien soy.

Translation: From a childhood that I was able to run and play all the time. From spending time with my grandparents and cousins to spending time with my best friends and doing crazy things. I would not exchange my upbringing for anything because it is what molded me to be who I am. (Sofia, I Am From poem, January 3, 2020)

Sofia also expressed her sense of belonging in Ecuador as compared to the United States where she sometimes feels out of place:

Well, for me, since I lived 11 years in Ecuador and 10 years in the States, when I go back, I always say as soon as I step into the airport I'm home. I feel like my interactions over there come out as me being more of an extrovert, like me feeling more excited and feeling at home. So not feeling weird, like I don't belong. When it comes to going out and interacting with people, I feel like people are nicer and that's something I've always remembered, like people are warmer. You can meet somebody in an hour and become friends for life or be with somebody for five minutes and feel like you've been with them your entire life. So for me it's more of a sense of home, a sense of tranquility, a sense that I belong here. I don't feel like the odd piece out as I do sometimes in the States and

it's less of a fight, too. Instead of just fitting in, I am able to stand out as myself

and for who I am and my personality, instead of here where I feel like I'm just

like anybody else. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

Although she has spent nearly the same amount of time in both countries, it is clear that

Sofia has a stronger connection with her Ecuadorian cultural background. She explained

that she feels more herself when she is there, and she can "stand out" in a way she feels

she cannot in the United States. She also described the people of Ecuador as being

"warmer," implying that people in the United States are not as friendly. Again, her

comparison is in favor of Ecuadorian culture, and is more critical when contrasted with

cultural differences in the United States.

Sofia's strong ties to her culture and upbringing, and her perception of what is

appropriate behavior, also caused friction between her and her peers. When asked about

whether she found any connections between her own cultural identity and those of her

classmates, she recalled an incident at the beginning of the trip that tested her comfort

and made her reflect on cultural differences

At the beginning of the program, we all stayed at an Airbnb and we all decided

to stay together until we had to meet our host families. And, I was like cool,

whatever, these are my classmates. So, it was a different experience. I guess I

thought of it as being with my friends and how it always is when I rent an Airbnb

with my friends, but it was very different. I guess how you were raised has to do

a lot with the way you live. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

This final sentence is a very strong statement and can be interpreted in a few

different ways. Sofia could be implying that the way she was brought up was preferable

to those of her classmates, and that their behavior did not reflect her family-oriented, conservative upbringing. This is a common example of what Bennett (1993) and other intercultural development theorists call an ethnocentric worldview in which an individual sees their own culture as central to reality. This statement is also very conclusive, which does not necessarily reflect an open attitude towards other cultures and an ability to suspend criticism to be proven wrong about cultural differences. Sofia went on to describe her experience with her classmates and how it made her feel:

It was very shocking for me to see the differences between all of us and their lifestyle. I guess for them it was ok. For me it was more shocking, so I got to a point where I was uncomfortable, and I was totally out of my security blanket. I guess my culture showed a lot there because over there the culture is more like family-centered, more, I don't know how to explain it. But it's more conservative. When I go out with my friends and family, they do have the same background and culture. So, for me, I got to a point where I wasn't doing good. I had to call my family and say I need you to pick me up because I need to get back to what I feel safe with. I didn't think it was going to be a big thing. Like over here it's normal, but I guess being over there and being surrounded by stuff I don't know or stuff I don't feel comfortable with or differences with living made me feel uncomfortable. I guess I needed to be part of my culture. I needed to immerse myself into what I know. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

It appeared that Sofia was trying to fit in with the rest of the group, but because she was in her home country, where she had already indicated that her behavior reflects on her family, she did not want to be associated with behavior she did not feel comfortable

with. She made the connection between how one is raised with one's lifestyle, implying that her more family-centric, conservative upbringing was not reflected in the way her peers were behaving. This dynamic is interesting because Sophia experienced a dilemma within the group as a result of being in her home country where this behavior is perceived as being unacceptable and made her more uncomfortable than if she were in the United States where it is "normal." Her response was to immerse herself in her culture and what she knows by calling her family and leaving the group. By removing herself from the group, she consequently created a distance between her and her classmates, resulting in a lack of openness to understanding each other's cultural differences.

Finally, when asked if she had a feeling of reverse culture shock, i.e., feeling surprised or shocked returning to her home country after living abroad, she continued to discuss the importance of family reputation in a "small society:"

Maybe sometimes when I go back it's that sense of maybe it's not as secure as it is in the States. You do have to be aware of your surroundings, and when I was there it wasn't like there was a lot of crime and all that, but I guess it's just being more aware especially now that I'm older and I can do certain things. Also, over there I guess I have to be more careful with what I do and what I say. It's a very small country and it's a very small society, so word travels really fast so you always have to look the part. I have to be more conscious than here in the States. Over there you're representing your last name, you're representing your parents, your grandparents, your whole family, basically. So, if you don't do something right and then word gets around, that reflects on your parents and the way that

they raised you, whereas in the States you just account as a person instead of as

your family. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

Again, Sofia compared the pressure she feels in Ecuador to uphold her family's

reputation to only having to account for herself in the United States. She mentioned how

Ecuador's society is small, and word travels, so she always has to "look the part." On

the one hand, Sofia feels the most comfortable and more at home in Ecuador; on the

other hand, she feels more conscious of the fact that she is in a fishbowl, so to speak,

and her actions carry more consequences.

This motif reflected Sofia's strong connection with her Ecuadorian culture and

her deep respect for representing her family and upholding their reputation. She

emphasized how her actions reflect her upbringing and implied that she was raised

differently than her peers who she perceived as behaving inappropriately in the family-

oriented, conservative environment of Ecuador. This suggested that the dynamics

between a participant that is from the host country and fellow participants who are

discovering the host country for the first time are unique and complex and should be

considered in future program development.

**"I Gained Confidence in Doing Something Unexpected"**

The final motif that emerged from Sofia's narrative related to her sense of

confidence that developed throughout her student teaching experience. She admitted to

staying in her "little bubble" and always having the "safety blanket" of family around

her. Positive reinforcement from the students and administrators of her placement school

allowed her to gain confidence not only in her teaching, but also her decision to pursue

teaching as a profession after graduation. When asked about what transferable skills she

felt she gained from the experience, she said:

> I guess one of the main transferable skills has to be confidence. I'm really shy unless I get to know you. I'm an introvert, I'm not an extrovert at all. I'm used to my little bubble, being by myself and doing the safe thing. So, I've always had my safety blanket; I never go outside the box. So, this has taught me to gain confidence in myself and in doing something unexpected because you never know what that has in store for you in the future. Maybe it's what you've always been looking for, but you've been scared to do. So, confidence and pushing forward and living day-to-day instead of planning my future or like retrogressing about my past and just living in the moment. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

Sofia mentioned gaining confidence from this experience multiple times in her narrative. Here she illustrated how her introversion and inclination to stay in her "little bubble" and "never go outside the box" prevented her from gaining confidence by doing something unexpected, in this case, student teaching in Ecuador. Her introversion might have also contributed to her lack of engagement with her peers.

When asked to reflect on the biggest lesson learned from her experience, she explained why her decision was considered so unexpected:

> I think that the biggest lesson I learned was that I realized that teaching is exactly what I want to do. I did have doubts because society puts a lot of pressure on what you want to do in the future like not only concerning your profession but concerning money and how are you able to maintain a household. Like, if that's going to be enough, or if you need to get a husband or something like that.

Society puts so much pressure on you that you end up doubting yourself. I have a lot to live up to. I'm at that stage that my family is asking me when I'm going to get married because they got married at my age. Or why haven't you finished school and what are you doing after? So, it's a lot of pressure not only from my family but from society as well. Like teaching is not going to give me enough money, I'm not going to be able to provide. But working with the children, I was like no, this is exactly what I want to do. I don't care what other people say. I see that the teachers are moms as well, so it helped to reassure me that I was doing the right thing. It taught me to believe in myself. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

This quote is an important illustration of the pressures Sofia has felt throughout her life, both from her family and society. She expressed her doubts before this experience but emphasized the role this experience has played in reassuring herself that teaching is what she wants to do. Sofia's conviction to pursue her dream profession, against the perceived pressures from her family and society, led to an articulated gain in confidence and a shift in her perspective on what she thinks is possible, both personally and professionally.

Finally, Sofia's newfound confidence in pursuing teaching as a career was reinforced by the positive feedback she received from her students and colleagues. In both her reentry interview and PechaKucha final presentation, Sofia joyfully shared photos and recounted her favorite lesson that she taught:

**Figure 3**

*I Like Myself Paper Plate Activity*



Photo courtesy of Sofia.

> My favorite lesson was called I like Myself and it was based on this book in
> English and Spanish. The book is about a little girl explaining that she likes
> herself no matter what. I actually created this assignment with the cooperating
> teacher. What I did was I created an assignment for them that involved literature
> engineering with language and vocabulary. So, we sat down at the rug and we
> read the book and then afterwards the students drew themselves but in a different
> way. So, I got paper plates and googly eyes and yarn so they could interpret how
> they see themselves. So, it was kind of like a self-portrait through art. It came out
> very cute. It was my favorite activity that I did out of my whole experience,
> especially when I saw how the kids reacted. And, seeing themselves in that paper
> plate and showing their parents afterwards and the reactions they had after the
> activity the following day were very positive. They were amazed at how the
> children saw themselves, so I was very pleased. (Sofia, reentry interview, April
> 14, 2020)

Sofia's recollection of teaching this particular lesson reinforced her growing confidence
in her pursuit of becoming a teacher. Her joy in watching her students connect with the
story and create self-images through art, and the positive feedback received from their

parents, helped to reiterate Sofia's decision to do the unexpected and pursue a profession she is so evidently passionate about.

After analyzing Sofia's narrative throughout the semester, it is clear that she experienced significant gains in her confidence to pursue teaching as a career. Although she sometimes grappled with her devotion to her family and doing what was expected of her, her narrative emphasized her determination to explore her passion for teaching, and her deep appreciation for having a student teaching experience in Ecuador, where she ultimately wants to continue her teaching career.

The fact that Sofia was from the host country of Ecuador made her case unique. The cultural dilemmas that she faced were not between her interactions with the host country, but with her peers. She demonstrated moments of ethnocentrism as she explained how she felt about their behavior and did not exhibit an openness to invest in reconciling those differences. This could be attributed to her tendency to stay in her comfort zone in Ecuador, her conservative upbringing and/or her introversion. As such, Sofia's growth was not strongly related to the constituent elements of intercultural development. Instead, she demonstrated personal and professional growth within the context of a culture she is quite familiar with. Further investigation of Sofia's case could elucidate the interesting and complex dynamics of a student returning to their home country in the context of study abroad.

**Table 3**

*Motif, Meaning and Examples from Narrative*

| Motif | Meaning | Examples from Narrative |
|---|---|---|
| "Rolling with the Punches, Going with the Flow" | Flexibility with teaching, group dynamics and adjustment to new environment in general | "I know that I'm a go-with-the-flow person, but really experiencing myself actually having to roll with it in that moment was personal growth." |
| "It's Just Ingrained in Their Culture to be That Way" | Making connections and comparisons between education, society, family and life in general between the United States and Ecuador | "Although we try to be socially and consciously aware, it's like Ecuadorians are more of that way than we are because it's just ingrained in their culture to be that way." |
| "Going to Ecuador Made Me Realize…" | Deeper realizations about self, values, gratitude and empathy for family in Venezuela | "It was something that made me value everything that I do have right now." |

**Participant Profile**

Gabby is a Venezuelan-American undergraduate student studying chemistry. Although she has traveled to multiple countries in Europe, this was Gabby's first time traveling to a South American country other than Venezuela, and without her family. From an exploration of Gabby's reentry interview, reflective assignments and pre-departure survey, three motifs emerged that focused on discoveries she made throughout her experience. The following section defines these themes and provides evidence from

the data to present an interpretive narrative of Gabby's international student teaching experience.

**"Rolling with the Punches, Going with the Flow"**

Throughout the program, Gabby exhibited an easy-going, calm and confident demeanor. Although Gabby would also describe herself in that way, it was not until she found herself in new situations during her experience in Ecuador that she realized how much she could "go with the flow" and "roll with the punches" (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020). When asked about what she took away from the whole experience, she answered:

> So, we didn't have as much time to really plan everything out before leaving, like
> our weekend trips and lessons because we didn't know what grade level and
> subject we were going to teach. So, once I got there, I was trying to figure out
> how my co-teacher worked and what the students were like and what they were
> learning so I could go ahead and start a lesson plan. All that was done at a very
> fast pace since we didn't have a lot of time to talk to our co-teachers beforehand.
> This showed me that I'm able to push out a lesson plan a lot faster than I thought
> I would be able to professionally. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Gabby was put in a situation where she had to think on her feet and adjust to last minute lesson planning based on the short amount of time she had before student teaching in Ecuador. This is indicative of real-life classroom situations and gave Gabby the opportunity to grow professionally and experience how to adapt to unfamiliar situations. She went on to explain how she grew personally:

Also, carrying that into my personal life as well, we did a whole bunch of weekend trips with not very much planning. We would talk about what we wanted to do each week, and then, that's it. We're going. And, we just did it. So, it was very much like rolling with the punches, going with the flow. It was very interesting because although I am that type of person, it was interesting to see me put that part of myself into traveling which I rarely get to do. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Gabby described herself as an easy-going person, but explained that she has not had many opportunities to put that part of her personality into practice. Having to push out last minute lesson plans, as well as organize weekend trips with little time, proved to Gabby that she could be flexible and tolerate ambiguity and see it as a positive. This is a reflection of an attitude of discovery and openness indicative of intercultural development.

Similarly, Gabby was asked about what she thought was the most transformative part of the experience for her. She reiterated that discovering how much she could think on her feet when it came to lesson planning and teaching, as well as breaking out of her eating comfort zone to be flexible and open to trying new things, were both personally and professionally transformative:

Well, the fact that I had to create a lesson plan really quickly when my co-teacher gave me the activity and I had to plan it my way, and I managed to do it in a day. It really surprised him. He would say, actually you're going to teach your lesson today. I was like, okay, I guess we're going! That was personal

growth for me because I managed to do it. I did it. I can look back and say, wow,

I actually did that. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Again, Gabby viewed this ability to be flexible and produce lesson plans in a short amount of time not only as a professional feat but personally transformative. She continued to explain how she pushed herself personally to stay open to cultural customs around eating in Ecuador:

Another thing is that I'm kind of a picky eater and over there they are fruit-heavy

people. I'm not much of a fruit person, but I was like well, if you put it in juice,

I'll drink it. So, I ended up having a lot of fruits, which was another thing that

made me grow personally. Knowing that I'm a go-with-the-flow person and I'm

able to do that, but really experiencing that myself, and actually having to roll

with it because there's nothing else that I can do in that moment, was

transformative. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

It is clear that the experience of living and teaching in Ecuador provided Gabby numerous opportunities to test her ability to be adaptable to new and unfamiliar situations. Although she said she has always perceived herself to be a "go-with-the-flow" person, the experience of being out of her comfort zone and in situations where being flexible is essential allowed Gabby to explore that side of her personality. She then expressed how valuable this discovery was for her, both professionally and personally.

**"It's Just Ingrained in Their Culture to be That Way"**

The second motif that emerged from Gabby's narrative revolved around cultural comparisons between systems and customs in the United States and Ecuador. Unlike the

United States/Ecuador comparisons made by Sofia which tended to be in favor of Ecuadorian cultures and customs, Gabby described both positive and negative experiences that she encountered which enabled her to challenge her cultural assumptions and understand more deeply the culture of Ecuador.

One such experience was during her time teaching at her placement school. When asked to draw connections between her experience with her placement school and other school systems she is familiar with, she replied:

> The school was very different. Like an outsider trying to be Western. There's a lot of things that they're doing similar to what Western schools do, but then there's a lot of things that they were doing that were completely different from stuff that we do. For example, the PPE course which is a project-based course for community hours and is required by the government. And, although we do have something similar, it's nothing to that extent. These kids are doing projects like activism for biodiversity. Some students are recycling items and then turning that into furniture. Other students are gardening. So, although the community hours that I did in high school were like going to volunteer at a summer school program, I was just there, that was my volunteering. Some people go volunteer at a hospital and stuff like that, but it's very different. I'm socially and culturally aware of how we have to help the planet, but I was like, wow, that's interesting. Although we try to be like that, it's like they're more of that way than we are because it's just ingrained in their culture to be that way. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

This quote reflected Gabby's impression of how environmentally-centered the school system in Ecuador is. She implied that the required volunteer hours in United States schools are not as impactful or deeply involved as those of the student engagement program, or Programa de Participación Estudiantil (PPE) of Ecuador. She even drew a comparison between herself and the program and explained that although she perceived herself as being "socially and culturally aware of how we have to help the planet," she was impressed at how ingrained it is in the culture of Ecuador.

In another cultural comparison, Gabby grappled with her appearance in Ecuador and how it would have been perceived if she had been "more like herself" (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020). She spoke extensively about her experience with toning down how she normally looks in the United States to try and fit in with the "cookie-cutter" appearance of Ecuadorians:

> I feel like the people in Ecuador...like in America we're very much like oh don't judge anyone, or, if you're judging someone you come off as rude, so people try not to judge anyone from the get-go. People also take their personal style much more seriously in America. But in Ecuador, it felt like a lot of people dressed very similarly. There weren't many people that would do crazy hairstyles. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Gabby went on to explain how Ecuadorian students did have piercings and tattoos, and compared that to students in the United States and how that is not allowed, which she found to be interesting yet contradicting to the uniform style she encountered in Ecuador:

> I worked over there, and I was like oh, people are definitely OK with that and their personality comes through in that way, but everyone is still kind of cookie

cutter mode. If I had my hair dyed, I'd be getting a lot more looks than what I already get normally because I was speaking English with the group, so we look like foreigners even though I don't look that different from them. Like, she's not from here. She's Hispanic, but she's not from here. That was interesting. I'm kind of used to having people look at me because of the way I dress and look, like, wait, why are people looking at me? Oh, it's because my hair is some random color. So, I'm kind of used to that. But, because it was in a different setting, I didn't know what people would think if my hair was like I usually have it. Some people would be totally cool with it, but other people would probably be like, oh, she's totally weird, she's probably into some weird things or something. In America, most people are like your hair is awesome, it's cool. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Again, Gabby explained that she felt like she stuck out as being foreign even though she is Hispanic, and she does not "look that different from them" (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020). She expressed her concern about potentially being judged even more if she had her hair dyed the way she usually does. This reconciliation of how her appearance could have been perceived demonstrated the process of analyzing, interpreting and relating indicative of intercultural development. Gabby's process included seeking out linkages, causality and relationships through comparing her experiences with how her appearance has been perceived in the United States with how it could have been perceived in Ecuador. When asked to elaborate on how she felt, she continued:

I just feel like I wouldn't know what people thought of me, so I toned down the way that I was dressing and how I do my hair. Also, if I were more myself I don't know what people would have thought of me, because I already didn't know at that point what strangers on the street would think. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Gabby speculated on how she might have been perceived if she had not toned down her appearance. This speculation stemmed from Gabby's view that Ecuadorians have more of a conservative style and may have disapproved of how she looked. She continued to make a comparison between the rural parts of Ecuador and the city of Quito, and how in both places she believed she was being perceived differently:

And it also varies place to place like when we went on the weekend trips all of those towns are a lot smaller and more rural than Quito. So, you look a lot more like a foreigner even though you're dressed completely normal because more people dress in traditional type clothing and it's just different. In the city you fit in a lot more because there's a wider variety of people. Some people are dressed traditionally because they take the bus here or they come from different towns here to sell things and then they go back. And then there are higher working professionals, like lawyers and businessmen and women who have to be dressed like super fancy. And then there's normal, casual people. So, it's very mixed in the city. Once you go out to a more rural area you stand out, but they're also not very judgmental of you because it's a touristy kind of town so they expect tourists to be around. But you become very aware that you stand out there. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

From the extension of this narrative, it appeared that Gabby was trying to reconcile her personal appearance that is unique and different from the "cookie-cutter" look of Ecuador. Her concern about sticking out as a foreigner, and her speculation on how she would have been perceived if she had not toned down her appearance, seemed to reveal potential insecurities of how others perceive or judge her, especially in a context in which she is not familiar with. Although she accommodated her look to fit in in Ecuador, Gabby's lengthy narration revealed that this adjustment to fit in affected her on a deeper, more personal level, but that she attempted to critically think about this dilemma in order to view it from the cultural perspective of Ecuador.

Finally, in a more appreciative tone, Gabby expressed her admiration for how Ecuadorians connect to their cultural roots and make an effort to preserve their past. For her visual story reflecting on life in Ecuador, Gabby chose to share the deeper meaning behind the alpaca sweaters she had purchased at a local market:

**Figure 4**

*Visual Story #7: Life in Ecuador*



Photo courtesy of Gabby.

The picture that I am showing you is of sweaters made of alpaca fur that I bought when we went to Otavalo for a weekend. If you're wondering why I chose this as a representation of daily life in Ecuador, I don't blame you. At first glance there seems to be no real correlation but let me explain. I will first talk about what these sweaters meant to my personal experience in Quito, and then I will talk about it in a more figurative way. At our placement school, practically every teacher has an alpaca sweater, and they get together to figure out a day in which a group of them come with their sweaters. The teachers all made sure to tell us about where to buy the sweaters and how much they should cost, which was very thoughtful of them to do so. Them looking out for us and being excited about us getting the sweaters really helped us feel like they were our colleagues and not just polite co-workers. Them giving us advice on prices and what to get didn't just stop with the sweaters, they made it a point of their day, usually during lunch or snack, to talk to us about our past and future weekend trips and gave us travelers tips and advice on where to go and what to do. When we walked in wearing our sweaters after our weekend trip to Otavalo, they were all really excited to know what else we bought and thought that we all looked great in them. My host family was also really happy that we went to Otavalo and were able to get traditional goodies from the market. They even helped me wrap up the ones that were gifts for my family. (Gabby, Visual Story #7, March 15, 2020)

The first part of Gabby's visual story demonstrated her considerate connection between the alpaca sweaters and the subsequent cultural bonding with her colleagues and host family. This effort to seek out intercultural interactions to better understand the

meaning of these alpaca sweaters demonstrated Gabby's attitude of curiosity and respect for cultural diversity indicative of intercultural development. She continued to explain the figurative meaning of the alpaca sweaters:

> In a more figurative way, these sweaters represent the traditions that are rooted in the hearts of the Ecuadorian people. Although we were living in a modern place next to the city, the people there still very much cared about their cultural past and about the tribes that are still present in Ecuador. The Ecuadorian people know about their past and care about keeping those memories, traditions, and culture alive, even when they move into a more modern setting. They do this by buying clothes, art, trinkets and other things from tribal markets, like the one in Otavalo. By doing this, they help support the tribes and their culture financially, as well as showing the tribes that their work and art is still very appreciated. This mix of modern yet traditional was very common and present in all the places we stayed at during our time in Ecuador. (Gabby, visual story #7, March 15, 2020)

Gabby's thoughtful retelling of the story behind her alpaca sweaters reflected her critical thinking process as she deliberately sought cultural connotation beyond a literal meaning. Her respect for how Ecuadorians preserve the past, and her acknowledgement of the cultural nuances that are involved in such preservation, indicate a higher level of intercultural understanding.

In her reentry interview, she mentioned the sweaters again to compare Ecuador's connection to their ancestral roots and the United States' more future-oriented mindset:

> I think in America we're very future orientated in life, either think in the now or think in the future, but we forget about the past and the past tends to be one of

the main factors of how we're doing things and why we got here and why we

need to be doing certain things to move forward. It's very interesting to see how

there are also two very different mindsets in Ecuador, but they tend to blend

them very well. Where in America, there are some areas that do blend them well,

but some areas that are horribly failing at it. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10,

2020)

Gabby's commentary on the meaning of these alpaca sweaters demonstrated her deeper

consideration of their connection to Ecuadorian culture. She used the word "blend" in

reference to the country's ability to appreciate and apply ancestral traditions to modern

mindsets. Contrary to that, she described future-oriented America as "horribly failing" in

some areas to integrate the past with our so-called future mindsets. She expressed the

importance of respecting the past to understand where we are and how we move forward

as a country. Her comparison and connection emphasized her appreciation for the way

she perceives Ecuadorian culture as achieving this blending of past and present and

indicates an earnest respect for the new culture she was experiencing.

Gabby's considerate narrative illustrated her deeper curiosity to understand the

intricacies of Ecuadorian culture. She critically acknowledged cultural differences and

expressed both her appreciation for and criticism of these cultural variances. Her

openness to understanding cultural differences, as well as her curiosity and respect for

the culture she was experiencing reflected the attitudes associated with intercultural

development.

**"Going to Ecuador Made Me Realize…"**

The final motif that emerged from Gabby's narrative was based on the

realizations and the shifts in her perspectives she experienced during her sojourn in Ecuador. One such realization was a deeper appreciation for the opportunities she has had as a result of moving to the United States from Venezuela. When asked about how this experience might have changed her perspective on other countries and cultures, she explained:

> So, I'm Venezuelan, which is a neighboring country to Ecuador. Going to Ecuador made me realize that this is how people in a country where there isn't much communism going on, like, this is how they're living. So, it made me think like, okay, I'm Venezuelan and it's a lot worse there. And it made me think of the family members that I do have living over there still, and all the things that I have that either I take for granted or I didn't even realize that I had. Like, just being able to go to school and my school getting paid for. And being able to travel is not something that all students get to experience. So, it was something that made me value everything that I do have right now. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

In her narrative, Gabby exhibited a shift in her perspective on the way she might have thought other countries in South America were similar to Venezuela. After her experience living and working in Ecuador, she compared it to her home country of Venezuela and was surprised to realize that a neighboring country could have so many more opportunities. She expressed her gratitude for things she had previously taken for granted, like having her school paid for and the ability to travel. She discussed her awareness of the fact that not all students have those opportunities and she explained that the experience made her value the things she has right now. This development in

Gabby's global perspective, i.e., her ability to conduct a multi-perspective analysis of the current issues of Venezuela as it relates to Ecuador and the United States, as well as a demonstration of her awareness of the complexity of the issues could be seen as an outcome of the global learning, she was encountering during her time abroad (Landorf & Doscher, 2015).

Gabby also recalled an unfortunate incident that happened with her fellow classmate. The incident involved a local Ecuadorian using racial slurs that were directed at Samuel, her Black Haitian classmate (and also a participant of this study). This incident was also mentioned by two other participants and will be addressed in their individual cases. What stood out with Gabby's recollection was her remark on racism that she believes exists between racial minority groups in the United States, namely Hispanic and Black. When asked to describe her interactions with other Ecuadorians, she responded:

> I don't know, very normal. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary. Even when I was by myself or with my host mom or with the group, it was just very normal. One thing that did happen was when we went to Otavalo. We were with Samuel as well, right. So, he's Black. Although there are Black Ecuadorians, Hispanics still tend to be racist towards Black people even though there are still Black people where they come from. It's a thing. Just because you're a minority doesn't mean you can't be racist. Just a fact of life. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Gabby continued to describe the incident in detail, recalling perceived discriminatory behavior from local Ecuadorians towards her classmate. She was forthright when

making the statement about Hispanics "tending to be racist towards Black people,"

implying that she might have had previous experiences that would have shaped her

perspective. Although she described Hispanic racism as "a thing" and "just a fact of

life," she did not seem to expect this particular incident to happen based on her other

"very normal" interactions with Ecuadorians up until that point (Gabby, reentry

interview, April 10, 2020). This incident reflects the cultural complexities of students of

color who study abroad. In this case, Gabby, a Hispanic student, felt a certain level of

normalcy in Ecuador as she shared many sociolinguistic and cultural attributes with the

host community. However, after witnessing a discriminatory interaction involving her

Black classmate, she was inclined to share her perspective of racism between the two

ethnic groups. This narrative provides a compelling case to further investigate the

nuances of how students of color interact in diverse cultural contexts and provides

valuable insights for program developers seeking to incorporate such issues in pre-

departure orientations.

Gabby was asked if she wanted to add any final thoughts about her experience in

Ecuador, and she concluded with this:

> Personally, it made me realize that although I am a person that's very nature
>
> conscious and I try to minimize waste and do a lot of things, I realized that I
>
> could be doing more and that I should be doing more. But I also realized how
>
> much harder it is to do here than it was to do over there. It's a lot easier to find
>
> natural fruits and vegetables and stuff in the market just because they're literally
>
> grown like a couple feet nearby. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Again, Gabby mentioned her appreciation for Ecuador's natural, more

sustainable resources that she believed are more readily available than in the United States. After her experience, she realized that she "could be doing more and should be doing more" (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020). She went on to explain another realization she had after encountering many stray dogs in Ecuador:

> That's something that was interesting for me to think about. Now it makes me want to go out and do stuff here to help stray populations because it's something that I am passionate about in a sense, and it's something that I have done research on. It really breaks my heart and it's something that I want to help contribute to, but I need a job. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Gabby's realization about the global problem of stray dogs, and subsequent motivation to get involved with improving the problem in her local community, is reflective of a development in her global engagement, or a willingness to engage in local and global problem solving and can be considered a positive outcome of her global learning experience in Ecuador (Landorf & Doscher, 2015).

An analysis of Gabby's narrative revealed her thoughtful comparisons of culture, her new appreciation for the opportunities she has been afforded, and her deep connections with her own cultural identity. These strong, cultural connections are beautifully illustrated in this excerpt from Gabby's I Am From poem:

> I'm from Maracaibo and Venezuelan streets,
>
> pastelitos y tequeños
>
> From the stories my abuelos share at the dinner table,
>
> the family and life my parents left behind to further mine.
>
> Hidden in closets are boxes full of old pictures,

The glossy films that captured my past and a past that came before mine.

I am from those captured moments,

A little faded but full of life,

And never forgotten (Gabby, I Am From poem, January 20, 2020).

**Case Three - Samuel**

**Table 4**

*Motifs, Meaning and Examples from Narrative*

| Motifs | Meaning | Examples from Narrative |
|---|---|---|
| "I Learned to Have an Open Mind" | Experience changed preconceived notions and reinforced the importance of having an open mind to other cultures and ways of life | "... be open-minded, see things from different angles, different perspectives, and just accept how different cultures do things and try to adapt and be flexible." |
| "I Learned to Accept Uncertainties" | Navigating uncertainties during student teaching in the classroom and in interactions with local Ecuadorians | "From my experience, I learned the importance of collaborations in the workplace, I also learned how to adapt in a new environment and how to be okay with uncertainty." |
| "I Learned Different Ways of Communicating" | Learning to effectively communicate in the workplace, with host family and classmates in a different cultural context | "It's always going to be a challenge because every situation is different, but it was interesting because everybody was different in their own ways. One thing I noticed was we had an open communication with each other." |

**Participant Profile**

Samuel is a Black Haitian student who graduated with a degree in public administration. Although Samuel was one of two students who were not education majors, he expressed his desire to participate in the IST program to explore South America as a potential region to work as a volunteer with the Peace Corps after graduation. Samuel was distinct from the other program participants for his extensive

volunteerism and participation in previous study abroad programs in Thailand, Argentina and Costa Rica. Despite his diverse international experience, his narrative revealed new lessons learned during his sojourn as a student teacher in Ecuador.

From an analysis of Samuel's reentry interview, reflective assignments and pre-departure survey, three motifs emerged. The following section defines these themes and provides evidence from the data to present an interpretive narrative of Samuel's international student teaching experience.

**"I Learned to Have an Open Mind"**

As mentioned, Samuel has an extensive background in studying abroad. These experiences are likely to have developed Samuel's sense of adaptability and open-mindedness. When asked about the most important lesson he learned after student teaching in Ecuador, he shared how the experience reinforced the importance of being open-minded:

> The most important lesson I learned was to have an open mind for the people that you work with, and to take into consideration the cultural differences between my own culture and the culture of the students we are teaching. Having an open mind was something really important that I learned. It reinforced that it doesn't matter where you go, you have to be open-minded, see things from different angles and different perspectives and accept how different cultures do things and try to adapt and be flexible. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Samuel answered this question first in the context of his school placement and student teaching and then in the culture of the host country. He exhibited a willingness

to consider the cultures of the people he worked with, the students he taught and the host community in which he lived. He continued to explain the need to stay open to experiencing the culture for yourself rather than developing preconceived notions before embarking on an international experience:

> I think my perspective has changed in the sense that even though you might do a lot of research about the country before you go, until you experience it in person and go through all the mistakes, all the ups and downs, talking to locals, trying different foods, until you do all those things in person instead of just like reading about it, you don't really know the culture. Even if you think you have an idea through what people have published and their opinions on what the culture is like. I think until you experience it yourself you don't really know what to expect because the experience is different for everybody. The way I experience it is different than how the other students experience it. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Samuel demonstrated an awareness of the importance of first-hand experiences in shaping cultural understanding, and the risk of developing misconceptions if ideas are formed without these direct experiences. This curiosity to seek out intercultural interactions as well as his awareness of his own ignorance about the host country, exhibited Samuel's open willing attitude towards understanding cultural differences. This is reflective of intercultural development.

Finally, Samuel shared a story of visiting a church in Ecuador on Ash Wednesday. Although he is not Catholic, he wanted to experience the service to gain a different perspective of Ecuadorian culture in a religious context:

The predominant religion in Ecuador is Roman Catholic. Throughout the

community there are several churches. During Ash Wednesday on February

26th, I was invited to go to a church called Iglesia La Ascensión De La

Primavera in Cumbayá. Although the invitation was last minute, I decided to go

so I could experience what it's like inside the church.

The first part of Samuel's story once again demonstrated his curiosity to seek out

intercultural interactions and how he views differences as a learning opportunity to more

deeply understand and experience a new culture. He continued his story by describing

his observations during the service:

Ash Wednesday occurs six and a half weeks before Easter. As I walked to the

church, the area was active with many people. Once I arrived, I noticed that the

church was packed with people. Many of us had to stand during the Ash

Wednesday service. This was my first time experiencing the service. Many

church goers dressed in formal attire while others dressed in semi-formal attire.

From the experience, I was reminded of the importance of togetherness. The time

was valuable for families and the community to practice their faith. The service

was in Spanish, so I did not understand everything. I had to go with the flow by

observing what the other people were doing. Even though I am not a Catholic,

the experience gave me a new perspective about Ecuadorian culture. (Samuel,

Visual Story #2, March 5, 2020).

Samuel's respectful observations about the churches in his community, the people

attending the service and what he took away from the experience further iterates his

propensity to keep an open mind when he is exploring and experiencing an unfamiliar

culture. His willingness to move out of his comfort zone, in this case to experience a
different religious ceremony, reflects an attitude of discovery indicative of intercultural
development.

**"I Learned to Accept Uncertainties"**

Unlike some of his other classmates, Samuel had not had any experience
teaching in a classroom setting. Through his narrative, he expressed how he learned to
accept uncertainties both inside and outside the classroom. When asked about how he
believed his student teaching experience would help him professionally, he explained:

> I learned to have an open mind to a different reality. Another thing I learned was
> to accept uncertainties and be fine with not knowing what could happen. Just be
> open to not knowing what you're doing and be OK to learn from other people."
> (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Similarly, in his final vlog, Samuel shared his thoughts on his international
student teaching experience overall:

> My school placement was both challenging and exciting. It was challenging for
> me because it was a new environment. I didn't really know what to expect.
> Sometimes I had to just go with the flow and just observe the people around me
> and see what they were doing. From my experience, I learned the importance of
> collaborations in the workplace. I also learned how to adapt in a new
> environment and how to be OK with uncertainty. (Samuel, video log, April 10,
> 2020)

It is clear that accepting uncertainty and to "just go with the flow" was an
important lesson learned during Samuel's experience. His willingness to adjust to an

unfamiliar environment reflects Samuel's openness to experience culture without preconceived notions and his tolerance for ambiguity.

Unfortunately, Samuel experienced an incident that reinforced for him the importance of accepting uncertainties as it relates to unexpected discrimination. As mentioned in Gabby's case, Samuel encountered a discriminatory incident during a weekend trip to a different town. When asked to describe his interactions with other individuals from Ecuador, he explained:

> Every weekend, we took trips to different cities in Ecuador. The first place we went to was Mindo. The interaction there was kind of different because we stayed at a hostel, so we met a lot of tourists. I didn't really have a lot of interactions with the locals except for when I went on the different excursions. Um, how do I describe it? The place was a touristic place, so I wouldn't say we had pure interactions with locals because in places like Mindo, they know we're tourists.

Samuel set up the retelling of the incident by describing his interactions in the tourist town of Mindo. This is important to the overall story as it is used to compare his interactions in a town where he "just felt like a tourist" to another, less touristic town that he described as a place where everybody looked different:

> And then we went to a different place called Otavalo. It's a place where they have a lot of indigenous people. I was kind of surprised. So, when I was there everybody looked really different from Quito and Cumbayá - the skin tone, the culture. Where we were staying was more of a touristic place. It was close to a market and most of the vendors at the market were indigenous.

Samuel continued to set up the story to give context as to why he might have encountered what could be perceived as discrimination. Here, he alluded to the possibility of the indigenous locals, whose skin tone and culture were different than what Samuel had experienced in other towns, might have attributed to less interactions with tourists and more potential to experience discrimination. He went on the explain the incident in detail:

> I was surprised one night when we went out for dinner. We were sitting by two other locals that were eating, and I told the other students, let's try and talk to them because that's part of the experience, to interact with the locals and to see how they are. Just to feel more like a local. [laughs] They were ignoring us. I'm not sure if they were ignoring us because we looked way different and we didn't look like we were from there, or they were just not interested. I don't know why they were not interested, and then they just left.

Here, Samuel seemed to be grappling with why these locals would not interact with him or the rest of the group. He suggested that it could have been because of the way they looked, but still he was surprised at how the locals ignored them. He went on to explain the second incident where he felt uncomfortable during a negative interaction with a local:

> And then the night after, another friend and I went out to walk around and then we met an indigenous Ecuadorian. It was a little uncomfortable because he was saying a lot of racial slurs. My friend's skin tone is lighter than me. So, the person that we met there was telling her to not talk to me since we don't look the same. So he was basically saying you shouldn't be talking to someone that's

different from you. I just thought that was really different from the experience I had in other places in Ecuador and I didn't expect that. Even my friend was really shocked that that was the reaction she had from that person. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

The retelling of this incident is significant. Firstly, Samuel compared his interactions with locals in another small town where he "just felt like a tourist" to another town where he experienced interactions that could be interpreted as discriminatory. The choice of words he used during the retelling of this incident are also notable. He described the people in Otavalo as having different skin tones and culture from other parts of the country, implying that they were indigenous peoples that he had not encountered before. He also downplayed the interaction with the locals at the restaurant by saying that they were "just not interested." He again used skin tones to compare himself and his friend, saying his friend's skin tone is "lighter than me" which is why he believed the local they encountered was using racial slurs. Both the avoidance of using another term such as "Black" to describe himself, and also saying the incident was "a little uncomfortable" might imply that Samuel could have been in denial of the severity of the situation or that he had not experienced such a blatant discriminatory incident before and was in genuine shock. It could also indicate his unwillingness to share his deeper thoughts on discrimination with his White interviewer. However, Samuel's narrative indicated his higher-level process of analyzing, interpreting and relating in order to seek out linkages, casualties and relationships to what he had experienced. This reflects an intercultural skill that goes beyond a surface interpretation of the interaction to find cultural meaning and reconcile cultural differences.

My follow-up question was simply, "how did you handle the situation at that moment?" in which he responded: "I didn't really say much. I just sat there and then after a while we left and just went back home" (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). It is important to note my handling of the response during the interview. I did not feel prepared to elicit more information from Samuel about the incident, nor did I get the sense he felt comfortable to share more. As a novice researcher, it is my intention to become more willing and trained to probe deeper into uncomfortable topics such as racial injustice and discrimination to garner a better understanding of the experiences of participants. This also reiterates the need to investigate the experiences of students of color as they interact with other cultures in the context of study abroad.

Although Samuel was a seasoned study abroad student, he described unfamiliar situations in which he learned the importance of accepting uncertainty. Whether it was learning to adapt to the new environment of a foreign classroom, or facing an unexpected incident of discrimination, Samuel expressed his willingness and ability to accept and adapt to the inevitable uncertainties of studying abroad and stay open to reconcile cultural differences.

**"I Learned Different Ways of Communicating"**

The final motif that emerged from Samuel's narrative illustrated the new ways in which he learned how to communicate. Finding himself in many unfamiliar situations, Samuel described moments where adapting to different communication styles was essential. Samuel recalled a moment of major miscommunication during the first week of school. When asked if there were any kind of cultural differences or issues he had to navigate in the classroom, Samuel prefaced the incident by expressing his preconceived

notions of Ecuadorian culture:

I would say that before my trip, the way I was thinking about Ecuador was that it was an open culture, even though it's more conservative and religious. I was thinking of it as more of an open culture where foreigners are really safe and open to share their own opinions which was the case in Ecuador. However, there was an incident that happened in the first week in the classroom that changed my perspective. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Samuel went on to recall in detail the day he arrived in the classroom to find his cooperating teacher was absent. Not prepared to teach the class, Samuel engaged the students in a conversation about Miami and what they knew about the city. He was disappointed to hear that most of the students only talked about Miami in terms of shopping and beaches. Samuel then took the initiative to show the class a video on YouTube about Miami. Since Samuel had not pre-screened the video, he was unaware of the content that would be shown, and found himself in an uncomfortable situation:

The video started talking about the drug trade in Miami because that's part of the history of Miami. The nightlife, the street art, the different ethnic and cultural diversity in Miami and also the inequalities in Miami because there's a lot of gentrification going on in a lot of poor neighborhoods. They're kind of getting pushed out. So, I wanted to just teach them something valuable about Miami, so they knew that that's the real Miami. A lot of people come to Miami, but don't really know what's going on. I just wanted the opportunity to teach them something important about Miami. But an administrator came in after class and asked why I was showing that type of video. I was like, what do you mean?

There was nobody in the classroom, so I wanted to do something productive. She said no, that's not the culture of Ecuador, the kids shouldn't be learning about that, the parents might get mad at the school. So, I was freaking out. I thought I was doing a good thing and then it turned out to be something that was, I guess, not good at the time. I think the problem was a lack of communication between the school and administrators, and the teacher and myself because I didn't have anything planned for the day. I was just sitting there doing nothing so it was just a lack of communication and me not having enough experience in the classroom to know I should have reached out to the school administrator before I showed them anything. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

In the beginning of Samuel's narrative, he seemed to be justifying why he showed the video. However, he acknowledged that not viewing it before, as well as his lack of experience in the classroom and a lack of communication amongst all parties involved, contributed to the incident occurring. Samuel admitted that he learned a valuable lesson about the importance of communication in diffusing misunderstandings and verbalizing expectations. Samuel was in a position where he had to come up with something to teach last minute which turned out to be slightly inappropriate for the students. He was grappling with the situation by saying he thought Ecuador was more "open" and less conservative, implying that his assumptions about Ecuadorian culture were challenged and his perspective on the openness of Ecuador shifted.

Samuel described another important communication lesson he learned in the context of group dynamics. During his reentry interview, Samuel explained how he grew personally from the experience:

Group dynamics were really big for me. I have done a lot of study abroad

programs, and they were all different in their own ways. This one was different

in the sense that all the students, even though we live in the United States, we all

come from a different country, and we have different cultural backgrounds. So,

personally it was like trying to navigate the different personalities and ways of

doing things. I know some people were more extroverted and the way they work

is different from how I work. I'm more of an introvert, more independent. So, it

was really challenging for me to sometimes put my own needs aside just to make

the group dynamics work. So, yeah, personally I think how to navigate group

dynamics was really big for me. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Although this was new territory for Samuel, he saw the challenge of navigating

group dynamics as being an important part of his personal growth throughout the

experience. He acknowledged the important fact that all the students were coming from

different cultural backgrounds themselves which contributed to the uniqueness of the

group dynamics.

He went on to explain that despite it being a challenge, he appreciated the

openness of the communication amongst the group:

I mean it's always going to be a challenge because every situation is different,

but it was interesting because everybody was different in their own ways. One

thing I noticed was we had open communication with each other. I remember

one day we were all together. I had the idea to ask the group what they think

about each other and to share our honest opinions. And then everybody was open

to just share their ideas. So, I felt like it was a safe space for us to just say all the

negative things and the positive things that we notice about each other and take

that into consideration to make the team work together. We did a lot of trips

together; we were pretty much together all the time. So, I think asking them to

share their opinions - even though we shouldn't care too much what people think,

but we are humans and people will always have opinions- helped keep the

communication open. It felt like a safe space for everybody to say what they

think, what they like, what they didn't like. I felt like it was a therapy session in a

way. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

As noted in my interview memo, Samuel was smiling as he responded to this

question. He clearly was not expecting to have to navigate the different dynamics of the

group but seemed proud of how open and honest the communication had become,

describing it as a "safe space" to express his feelings and likening it to a therapy session.

He listened, observed and evaluated the group dynamics in order to adjust to differing

personalities and perspectives - an important intercultural skill to minimize

ethnocentrism and seek out cultural clues and meaning (McKinnon, 2012).

Finally, Samuel cited presentation and communication as one of the most

important transferable skills he gained during his experience:

Communication was a big one. And presentation skills. When I had my first

presentation, I was pretty nervous because I didn't really know how the students

were going to react to the lesson. My first lesson was in the philosophy class.

The students were working on different ethical dilemmas. My lesson was a

discussion on whether parents should monitor their children's social media. The

students had a lot of positive feedback for the lesson. They were really engaged,

but it was hard to manage the class because they wanted to talk and just do their own things. So, I had to learn just to take control of the class and to divide the students into different groups to work together. So, presentation and communication skills. I'll also say teamwork because I had to work with my cooperating teacher on the different lessons that I was working on before I presented to the class. So, I would say those three things - communication, teamwork and presentation skills. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

As mentioned, Samuel had little experience in a classroom setting. In his narrative, he recounted moments in which he had to navigate miscommunications, different communication styles and collaborative communication in the context of his classmates and the classroom. It is clear that Samuel considered gaining new communication skills as one of the most important takeaways from his experience and learned how to adjust and adapt to differing cultural communication styles.

Samuel's narrative revealed many aspects of intercultural development. He exhibited an openness and curiosity to experience culture firsthand and suspended criticism as he sought intercultural interactions, he tolerated ambiguity and the uncertainties that come with interacting in unfamiliar contexts, seeing them as learning opportunities, and he demonstrated deeper critical thinking skills as he navigated cultural differences. Finally, as a student of color studying abroad in a country where his ethnicity was not represented, Samuel's perspective was a valuable contribution to the literature and justifies further consideration for future research in this area.

## Case 4 - Bethany

**Table 5**

*Themes, Meaning and Examples from Narrative*

| Themes | Meaning | Examples from Narrative |
|---|---|---|
| "This Experience Was Like Getting My Feet Wet" | Inspiration from experience and cultural immersion to continue to travel and teach abroad | "I think this experience was like getting my feet wet. I was thinking that I wanted to do international teaching and said let me try this out see how I feel, and I did it and loved it." |
| "This Was a Breakthrough for Me" | Felt a personal breakthrough with becoming less selfish and more appreciative after experiencing life in a different country | "Seeing how precious things are to them, it's the little things that count over there. I feel like it was a breakthrough for me." |
| "This is Not What I Had in My Head" | Shift in perspective and preconceived notions after experiencing country firsthand and realizing importance of staying open-minded | "Once I got there, it was more of a relief, like this is not what I had in my head, not the picture I had in my head." |

**Participant Profile**

Bethany's ethnic background is Cuban and Puerto Rican, but, unlike her classmates, she was born and raised in the United States. As an interdisciplinary studies major, Bethany expressed her desire to participate in the IST program to "get her feet wet" and experience teaching English internationally. From an analysis of Bethany's reentry interview, reflective assignments and pre-departure survey, three motifs

emerged. The following section defines these motifs and provides examples from the data to present an interpretive narrative of Bethany's international student teaching experience.

**"This Experience Was Definitely like Getting My Feet Wet"**

Bethany's desire and curiosity to explore international teaching was realized during her experience in the IST program in Ecuador. She expressed how the first-hand teaching experience helped her gain confidence to continue exploring international teaching as a viable post-graduation pursuit. During her reentry interview, Bethany explained how she would utilize her experience in her future career:

So, I think this experience was definitely like getting my feet wet. I was thinking that I wanted to do international teaching, so I said okay, let me try this out to see how I feel. And I did it and loved it! Since I graduate this semester, I want to just cut off school for a little bit and start working. I understand teaching more, like what to do and how to plan a lesson plan. I was thinking about getting my Celta certification. I want to go somewhere else to do it like Buenos Aires or Medellin. I found some really cool stuff while I was over there. I was texting my cooperating teacher because she got her certification in Ecuador. I want to get the certification so I can learn how to better make lesson plans and interact with a class more. Whenever all of this [COVID-19] goes away, that's the goal. And then once I get that I want to start teaching internationally for sure. I don't know if this is something I want to do forever, but I definitely want to do this for maybe the next three years, and then after that I'll start thinking about the next steps. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Bethany utilized her international student teaching experience to research and plan future opportunities to teach abroad. She expressed her desire to receive her Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA), a prestigious certification that would give Bethany additional teaching training she believed was necessary to continue her international teaching journey.

Bethany's IST experience also developed a new appreciation for and awareness of the diligence of the teaching profession. When asked about how the experience had helped her become a better teacher she reflected:

It finally gave me hands-on training to actually see what goes along with all those lessons. like I'm just used to being the student, you know. I'm not used to being the teacher. I sit and I'm listening to you guys and I'm writing my notes. But now I see all of the back work that teachers put into planning. I get it now. It gave me a new appreciation for teachers.

Here, Bethany expressed her newfound respect for the teaching profession, and exhibited a development in her ability to see the experience from a different point of view. She went on explain how she was able to appreciate the perspective of being a teacher and how rewarding it was for her:

I think that was it for me because I saw what teachers go through on a day-to-day basis. I can see now that you actually want us to learn and you want us to be enthusiastic about it. You want us to think for ourselves and not just know what the book says. So, I actually got a feel of that from this experience. My co-teacher was teaching AP English, so they were reading a book and I was asking analytical questions about what they thought the author was trying to say, and to

really get that answer from the students and hear their own thoughts was really

rewarding. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

By experiencing teaching first-hand, Bethany had the opportunity to gain a new appreciation for the teaching profession and explore pathways to become an international teacher in the future. She revealed her openness to move beyond her comfort zone and continue to learn from firsthand experiences, both professionally and personally.

**"It Was a Breakthrough for Me"**

In retelling her story, Bethany highlighted moments in which she felt personally transformed by the experience. Her newfound appreciation not only for the teaching profession, but for the different ways of life she experienced in Ecuador, were like "a breakthrough" for her. Her narrative reflected growth from a ethnocentric worldview where her own culture was central to reality, to a more ethnorelative view where she adapted to cultural differences and developed empathy and the ability to shift into a different perspective (Bennett, 1993). When asked about the transferable skills she gained, she explained:

I hate to admit this, but I'm kind of selfish when it comes to certain things. But while being over there, my selfishness just kind of like, unintentionally, started to go away. I saw a different way life over there and how everyone is so loving and so giving. It made me think about how maybe the society and the culture that I live in has made me more selfish, and going somewhere else and seeing how they live, and seeing how precious the little things are to them - I feel like it was a breakthrough for me. Even the group mentioned that they saw me changing. It

made me so happy because it was something I was working on here at home. I

need to stop being so selfish. I need to stop only thinking about myself. I need to

start thinking about other people. Being over there I actually wanted to change

and for the group to open up and tell me I was changing, I was like oh my gosh,

this is it! (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Bethany described a significant personal change that she went through "unintentionally"

during her experience in Ecuador, implying that it was happening without conscious

effort. The positive reinforcement from her peers further supported her belief that she

had a "breakthrough" and a shift in her perceived self-centered mindset. She said that the

most transformative part of the experience was "being out of my comfort zone" and

explained that in the United States she has everything given to her, but in Ecuador, if she

wanted it she had to get it herself (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). This

development of cultural self-awareness and interpersonal growth reflected a

development in Bethany's intercultural knowledge of her own culture and how it has

shaped her identity and worldview (McKinnon, 2012).

Using the critical reflection framework of What? So What? Now What?, Bethany

reflected on the culture of her host country and demonstrated her respect for the people

working in the community and realized how much she valued businesses run by hard-

working families:

**Figure 5**

*Visual Story #2: The Culture of my Host Community*



Photo courtesy of Bethany.

<u>What?</u>

This photo shows what appears to be three women of the same family. These

women most likely woke up early to make bread to sell at the market that same

day in order to make money to provide for their families. Many places I visited

in Ecuador were family owned and the workers were members of that family.

<u>So What?</u>

After realizing many restaurants and businesses were family owned, I began to

ask locals for advice on places to visit and suggested maybe a business of their

family. It so happened that our waiter at dinner the night before was our tour

guide the next morning when we went ziplining!

After learning and experiencing how close Ecuadorian culture is, it made me

value mom and pop shops. I myself come from a family that owns businesses,

and we always try and keep it in the family. Now that I have gotten this

experience, I am more prone to visiting a local family-owned restaurant or

business rather than a big brand store. This is because I value the sense of

keeping the family together as well as providing for the family together as a unit.

(Bethany, Visual Story #2, March 5, 2020).

By observing and valuing the cultural work practices of Ecuadorians, and comparing

them with her own family's businesses, Bethany exhibited respect and appreciation for

the cultural attributes and diversity she encountered. Through this reflective process,

Bethany was able to have a "breakthrough" with her own sense of selfishness and

develop a stronger sense of empathy and acceptance for a different way of life.

**"This is Not What I Had in My Head"**

Finally, Bethany's narrative revealed that she had entered into the experience

with many preconceived notions, but that her cultural assumptions were challenged on

multiple occasions. During her reentry interview, Bethany explains how her perspective

had changed because of her experience in Ecuador and how she would approach future

international experiences:

I think I will definitely try and not go in with an idea, and just go with the flow.

Next time I go somewhere, I don't want to assume it is going to be a certain way.

I want to go in with an open mind. Of course, I'm going to do my research, but

this experience has definitely changed my perspective on not going in with

biased thoughts. Maybe next time I won't assume and, instead, just see how it's

going to be. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Bethany admitted to having misconceptions about Ecuador before she arrived and how

her perspective changed once she experienced the culture for herself. One such

misconception was in regard to the town and community where she lived with her host

family. When asked about what she had wished she had known prior to going to

Ecuador, she replied:

> I wish I knew I was going to a nice part of Ecuador. I was under the impression I
>
> was going to the ghetto, so I had all these precautions, and I brought a whole
>
> bunch of locks. I never felt like I was in danger at all. I feel like what everyone
>
> prepared me for made me think that I was going to a horrible place. I wish I
>
> would have known that it wasn't going to be as bad as everyone made it to be.
>
> (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Bethany's use of the word "ghetto" implied that she may have perceived Ecuador as

being poor, dangerous and underdeveloped. It is not clear with whom Bethany spoke

with that incited her caution and preconceptions of the culture and country of Ecuador.

However, as Bethany stated, her assumptions and biases were challenged, and she

emphasized the importance of having an open mind when encountering a new cultural

experience. She explained that it was a "relief" when she realized that her presumptions

were ill-advised. When comparing Ecuador to other international travel experiences,

including a previous trip to Cuba, she explained:

> Once I got there it was more of a relief. Like, this is not the picture I had in my
>
> head. Also, the last time that I left the country it was…[thinking]...when I went

to Cuba. It was really, really tough over there. Before I went over there, I thought

it was going to be so nice. I wish I would have known that it wasn't. I wish I

would have known that it was rundown, not structured. So, from that experience,

I thought Ecuador would be like Cuba. No, they're like way past Cuba.

(Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Bethany again revealed her tendency to have preconceived notions about a culture

before experiencing it first-hand. Her comparison of how both experiences challenged

her cultural assumptions is an indication of Bethany's realization of the importance of

approaching new cultural experiences objectively and without bias.

Bethany's perspective also shifted as it related to Spanish culture. Before going

to Ecuador, she categorized all Spanish people as being the "same." After spending a

few weeks in Ecuador, she started to understand the cultural nuances of different

Spanish ethnicities. When asked about how her perspective on traveling and

experiencing new cultures has changed, she explained:

My perspective has definitely changed. For example, I'm Caribbean Spanish, and

I didn't know that Caribbean Spanish and Central American Spanish and South

American Spanish are different. Now I definitely know that. Dancing was a

cultural difference. I was trying to dance Salsa and bachata with this guy, and I

couldn't dance with him. The way they dance, the way they carry themselves, it's

different and I didn't know that. I guess I just categorized all Spanish people as

being the same. But Spanish cultures are all different. It took me about two

weeks being in Ecuador to realize that. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13,

2020)

During her experience, Bethany had an important realization that there are multiple cultural differences amongst Spanish-speaking regions of the world, whether it is "the way they dance" or "how they carry themselves" (Bethany, reentry interview, 4/13/20). She analyzed, interpreted and related to the nuances in Spanish culture, reflecting an important intercultural skill as it relates to interacting with cultural diversity.

In Bethany's first video log, she reflected on the things she was not expecting when she arrived in Ecuador, and how some of her cultural assumptions had been challenged:

> Today I'm going to talk to you about some things I wasn't expecting in Ecuador. So, one of the first things I wasn't really expecting was my host family. Her house was, like, amazing. Her view is super, super nice and she pretty much has all the amenities I have in the United States: she has a washer machine, she has a dryer, and she has five bathrooms! I only have three bathrooms! So that was something I wasn't expecting at all. I was expecting...[pause]...I guess something more rural, maybe? I don't know if that's bad. I'm also really excited about my weekends to really experience the culture because I'm living in the [quotation fingers] "rich area," so it will give me the opportunity to explore the rural areas. (Bethany, Video Log, March 1, 2020)

Bethany's hesitation to say what she was expecting from her host family, as well as her enthusiasm when describing what she encountered, implied that she may have had negative or low expectations. Again, Bethany's reservations were confronted and contradicted when she experienced the culture herself, and she started to suspend previously held criticism of Ecuadorian culture.

Finally, in Bethany's retelling of the incident faced with Samuel, she expressed her surprise in encountering such a discriminatory interaction in Ecuador:

Samuel and I were hanging out a lot more than the rest of the group. We would go out, get something to eat, go get something to drink, and the whole time I was getting dirty looks from people. Like, people look at me here at home because I guess the way I dress, or just my appearance in general. So, I don't really pay much attention to it. But there was this other guy, I guess he was an indigenous man, and he walked up to me and said, you don't need to be hanging out with these Black guys, you need to come with me, you're not safe. And I was like, what? What are you saying? It was crazy. He followed us the whole night and had a security walk up to me and ask me if I was okay and if they were bothering me. That was probably my worst experience because that was something I didn't even think about before going. Like, I didn't think racism was a thing over there, but it definitely is. It seemed like indigenous people were discriminative towards darker people and I'm like… [shakes head]. Crazy. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Unlike Gabby, Bethany did not expect to encounter a racist situation in Ecuador, saying she didn't think "it was a thing over there" (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Unfortunately, this presumption was confronted after her negative interaction with the indigenous man, describing it as "the worst experience" of the trip.

Although the preparation course intended to break down misconceptions of Ecuador for participants, it is challenging to eliminate all bias before encountering a new cultural experience. In Bethany's case, her preconceived notion of Ecuador being similar

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to her experience of Cuba, and her worry that the country would be dangerous and underdeveloped were all challenged, positively shifting her perspective on multiple occasions. Not only did Bethany have a personal breakthrough with her perceived sense of selfishness, but her experience with the IST program also allowed her the opportunity to appreciate the teaching profession and inspired her to continue to teach internationally.

**Table 5**

*Motifs, Meaning and Examples from Narrative*

| Motifs | Meaning | Examples from Narrative |
|---|---|---|
| "I'm Home" | Cultural connections with people, food and family that were familiar and felt like "home" | "We were raised in a humble way, you could say. It wasn't as extravagant I guess [laughs]. But I kind of got that feeling of being back home, at least with them. Like, they reminded me a lot of my time being back in Colombia." |
| "Once you See Something, You Can't Unsee it" | Shift in perspective and new awareness of the importance of cultural identity | "Taking into account culture when you're traveling is different now. Honestly, now I'm more aware of it. So, traveling is not going to be the same. I don't know, since it's kind of like something that once you see it you can't unsee it. |
| "I'm the Type of Person That Learns by Doing" | Open and positive attitude to learn, adapt, and be flexible and prepared for anything through hands-on experience | "The first day I woke up and asked, how do I use the kitchen, do you want me to help you every time? I'm used to cooking and doing stuff around the house so let me know what I need to do, or what you mind me doing." |

**Participant Profile**

Mateo was born and raised in Colombia. He moved to the United States to attend high school after his father emigrated to the country twenty years prior. Mateo graduated with a degree in Exceptional Student Education and decided to embark on the IST program in Ecuador to gain additional teaching experience in an international context. From an analysis of Mateo's reentry interview, reflective assignments and pre-departure survey, three motifs emerged. The following section defines these motifs and provides

examples from the data to present an interpretive narrative of Mateo's international student teaching experience.

**"I'm Home"**

Much of Mateo's narrative drew cultural comparisons between Ecuador and his home country of Colombia. He shared deep insights into how he felt about the connections he was making throughout his experience:

> It's interesting. Many of the people that I met at my placement school and my host mom and dad, because they have traveled a lot, you could say that they're part of this social sphere that's more international. My co-teacher has traveled to a lot of places, so I had a connection in the sense that we've both traveled before. It's a really specific sphere of society because not everybody travels internationally. Not everybody has had the chance to live abroad, to work abroad, and all that kind of stuff. That was definitely good because we were able to understand each other. But also talking to the other family of my host family - I was also living with their niece and nephew - they had come from a different town and they were raised completely differently. It was interesting because interacting with them, they reminded me a lot of how I was brought up. We were raised in a humble way, you could say. It wasn't as extravagant I guess [laughs], but I kind of got that feeling of being back home, at least with them. Like, they reminded me a lot of my time being back in Colombia. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Mateo expressed how he connected with his co-teacher and host family through their shared experiences of traveling internationally. He referred to this connection as

exclusive to a "specific sphere of society," implying that international travel is uncommon and reserved for a privileged few. He then shared a more deep-rooted connection with his host family's extended family, saying that they "reminded me of how I was brought up." He slightly hesitated as he mentioned his humble upbringing and how interacting with the niece and nephew of his host family gave him "that feeling of being back home" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020).

Another interaction that reminded Mateo of his humble upbringing was during a trip to the town of Otavalo. During his reentry interview, he shared a photo of a man working in a local market, and retold the story of why that photo was significant to him:

**Figure 6**

*Reentry Interview - Significant Photo*



Photo courtesy of Mateo.

> So, this is a picture that I took in Otavalo. That day, the group ended up going
> first and I caught up to them. I overslept. But when we were walking around the
> market, we found this guy. Random dude. We were talking with him. And I

bought a dreamcatcher. I was talking to the guy and he was telling me that he

was from the Amazons. He had just arrived in Otavalo and he was trying to get

some money to get by. As I was talking and bargaining with him, he offered a

ring to the girls and he was making it right there. It was weird though. Like,

many of the places we went felt incredibly close to home. Even the vibe and

energy this guy gave off I was like, man, I'm home. (Mateo, reentry interview,

April 13, 2020)

Mateo's interactions with the local man at the market gave him a sense of home and

revealed his cultural self-awareness as he related his own culture, his "home," to that of

this man in the market. He continued to explain the significance of this interaction:

This is very similar to me in a way. These types of markets, artisanal markets, I

see when I go back home. But also, the way this guy was interacting with us. It's

not the first time that I've seen someone come from the countryside to the bigger

cities to try and get by. And many people that I've met from the countryside are

from different rural areas and are incredibly friendly and humble. So, talking to

him was refreshing. Even though he was working and trying to get by, it was

incredibly refreshing to talk to him and listen to what he had to say. (Mateo,

reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Mateo's critical reflection about his interaction with the man at the market, describing it

as "refreshing," exemplified his deep connection with his home country of Colombia.

He exhibited the intercultural skill of analyzing, interpreting and relating in order to seek

out causality and relationships with his own cultural identity and background. Also, by

saying "it's not the first time that I've seen someone come from the countryside to the

bigger cities to try and get by," Mateo revealed his deep empathy and understanding for the man as he was "working and trying to get by" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). This empathic response reflects a key internal outcome of intercultural development (McKinnon, 2012).

Mateo continued to reveal his strong family ties and his appreciation for his upbringing in his eloquently written I Am From poem:

I am from barred windows and multi-lock doors,

From boring uniforms and interesting books.

I am from the cold and dark mornings I would wake up to everyday.

(Chilly, refreshing and full of energy).

I am from dandelions,

whose seeds danced with grace in the air.

I am from midnight Christmas gatherings and unpunctuality,

From Peñaloza and Gomez.

I am from the competitive and quarrelsome,

From soldado advertido no muere en guerra y respeta a tus mayores.

I am from a place that lacks real faith yet wants to be saved by it.

I am from La Nevera,

From magical Ajiacos and caldos levantamuertos.

From the father who went away to create a better future,

The long-lost lands of my grandfather.

Grandmas' libraries are filled with pictures and journals that describe

Our short but long story.

I am from a history left behind,

From a history that continues in a land full of strangers and exotic

languages.

I am from the experiences marked in my skin that continue to guide me.

(Mateo, I Am From poem, January 15, 2020).

There are parts of Mateo's poem that relate to some of the revelations made in his reentry interview. Being "brought up in a humble way" is illustrated in the first line of his poem, describing his home as having "barred windows" and "multilock doors." He alluded to his father moving to the United States to "create a better future" and how he then found himself in "a land full of strangers and exotic languages." The final line of the poem, much like his interview, revealed his deep connection to his home country and culture, and how his upbringing continues to guide him throughout his life.

Mateo's narrative is replete with recognition of moments that felt like home to him. From living with his host family to interactions with locals, the similarities Mateo discovered in Ecuador were a refreshing reminder of his Colombian roots and humble upbringing.

**"Once You See Something, You Can't Unsee It"**

The second motif that emerged from Mateo's stories of his new awareness of the importance of cultural identity and how that affected the way he approached new cultural experiences. He described some of these experiences as being irreversible, i.e., "once you see something, you can't unsee it" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). During his reentry interview, he was asked how he thought he had grown personally. He responded:

Good question. I guess overall I'm more perceptive now to how different people are. Like I said, the working part was fine, but it's not anything new that I haven't done before since I have worked from an early age. But with the prep work and then with all the activities that we did as well, I guess that I have become more perceptive of how different we are in general and that plays a role in whatever community we're working or living in. So, overall, I guess my perception has increased. Once you've seen something you can't unsee it, type of thing. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Mateo continued to explain how his change in perspective made him more aware and appreciative of an individual's cultural identity, and how he would approach experiencing a new culture in the future:

Well, we talked a lot about cultural identity, so I'm more aware of it. For me, that's something in my mind now whenever I'm meeting people from different countries. So, in a way it has made me more observant about how people interact with their surroundings. Definitely now, traveling is going to be different. Before, I would just launch myself into wherever I was going and figure it out later. But, taking into account culture when I'm traveling is going to be different now. And not just the culture of the country, but the individual culture of people. Because even if we're from the same place or similar places, how people are raised totally changes how they see and experience the world. Those are the differences that really make people's culture interesting. Even if they're from the same place, religion, language, whatever. You get me? (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

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Again, Mateo mentioned the importance of an individual's upbringing in shaping who they are and how they interact with the world saying, "those are the differences that really make people's culture interesting" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Mateo's awareness of the importance of the individual culture of a person, and his willingness to consider multiple viewpoints when approaching future cultural experiences, reflected critical thinking skills indicative of intercultural development.

Similar to his classmates, Mateo mentioned group dynamics as an interesting and new territory to navigate. When asked to compare his experience in Ecuador with other travel experiences he had, he reflected:

It was different because of the group that I was traveling with. Other times that I've traveled, I either go by myself or I go with my group of friends. And we're very similar, like whatever we do we go full out Hispanic. So, going with this group was different. Something as simple as having to speak English in public that was completely weird at first, then I just got used to it. I did not expect them to be so down-to-earth in a way. That was definitely different. Like we went to Mindo, for example, we got off the bus like in the middle of nowhere we had to walk. At a certain point it looked sketchy, which I'm fine with because it's not the first time that I've been in a situation like that. But they were chill with it, so I'm like OK, they can do stuff too. I'm surprised. That's good. They're not the typical American stereotype I guess, quote unquote. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Mateo's response revealed several things. First, he described the group of friends he usually travels with as being similar to him, going "full out Hispanic" and being familiar

with and unafraid of "sketchy" situations. He was surprised to find that the group was also able to handle these situations and described them as being "down to earth" and "chill with it" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). He revealed why he was surprised by admitting he had a preconceived notion of the way Americans were. When I probed further about what he believed a "stereotypical American" was, he explained:

> Not being able to go places because it's not fancy. I don't know, it's a weird misconception that we have in Latin America. When I first got here [America], everything looked so nice, so pretty. You know everything is like, I don't know, everything looked nice. Then, from the concept I had growing up, it was usually like foreigners or people from different countries, like European countries or the United States, when they go to our countries, they're amazed by everything like, Oh how different! Look how Third World it is! But the group wasn't surprised at all, they weren't fazed by it. Like, chill, nice, let's walk around. What I'm saying is that they were capable of going around without any issues. It's a broader concept, but I guess I can summarize it that way. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Mateo's critical observations of the group dynamics revealed his preconceived notions of Americans and other European foreigners. Mateo's use of the word "our" when talking about the countries that foreigners travel to and remark on how "Third World it is," implied he may have an "us versus them" mindset. His experience with moving to the United States and describing everything as being so "nice" and "pretty" likely contributed to this perspective. What is interesting is that Mateo didn't seem to acknowledge that most of the group members come from different countries and cultural

backgrounds and that they were not just Americans. When I reminded him of this, he agreed that could be why he perceived them as being "capable of going around without any issues" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020).

Finally, in Mateo's first visual story during his practicum course, he described how his cultural assumptions were challenged within the first week of being in Ecuador [photo has been omitted due to inclusion of participants in photo]:

> My first week in Ecuador definitely had me reassessing my own cultural assumptions. Having to stop for a minute and trace back my own thinking has been quite interesting. The story for this picture is for the first trip we did in Ecuador. We went to a town called Mindo, which is about two hours away from Quito. My own cultural values have taught me the importance of adapting and being able to think on your feet. You could call it the "spark" that allows you to understand different circumstances and act upon them; or in a similar context we call it malicia indígena (indigenous malice), which regardless of its connotation can be encompassed to be "astute."

Mateo described the very interesting cultural concept of "malicia indígena" which has taught him how to be adaptable and think on his feet when confronted with unfamiliar situations. Here he is demonstrating how his cultural identity plays an important role in how he interacts in other cultural contexts. He continued to explain how, by listening, observing and evaluating, he was able to seek out cultural meaning in his interactions with both Ecuadorians and his peers:

> I did not have any type of problem when going around or interacting with locals, after all Spanish is my first language and Ecuadorian and Colombian cultures are

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similar in many aspects. Even though I was a foreigner myself—and people could tell right away because of my accent—, I will be honest to admit that I did assume that my peers would not go around that easily or that everybody would be as welcoming; fortunately enough, I was wrong. Through my own cultural lens, I had assumed that in my own culture, not being part of the same place makes the difference, and that the so called malicia indígena I grew up hearing about was something unique to us. Even if my peers sometimes struggled, and we certainly stood out, in our own unique way we made a good fit to which people were always welcoming. In a certain way we all possessed that "spark" regardless of the differences in how we were raised - that even a simple thing like travelling became a memorable experience. (Mateo, Visual Story #1, March 5, 2020)

Mateo eloquently expressed his first impressions of his experience in Ecuador and again mentioned his recurring notions of cultural familiarity, importance of cultural identity, emphasis on how one is raised, and the unexpected cultural astuteness of his peers. His perspective started shifting early on as he interacted with locals and observed his classmates doing the same. He used the Colombian axiom of malicia indígena to describe the "spark" that "allows you to understand different circumstances and act upon them" and realized that this is a universal trait that can be experienced beyond his own culture.

**"I'm the Type of Person That Learns by Doing"**

The final motif from Mateo's narrative emerged from his stories of learning by experiencing. During his reentry interview, he was asked how his teaching experience

helped him become a better teacher:

> How did it help? Well, I spent more time working. I don't know how to describe it, but I'm the type of person that learns by doing stuff. So, how did it help me? I definitely feel more prepared. In a certain sense I have increased my repertoire of activities, little tips, stuff in the classroom. Like I said, the first couple of days when I was trying to get to know the students, that was difficult. But once I stood up there and I started my lessons, you know, it became easier, little by little. How did it help me? I guess I will be less nervous once I start working by myself. That's the way I see it. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Mateo's response is not unlike his peers. The beginning of the student teaching experience seemed to be somewhat difficult for most participants. However, as the student teachers became more familiar with the students and started to feel more comfortable in the classroom, their efficacy started to develop, and the teaching component of their experience became less daunting.

Mateo continued to explain how the experience helped him gain transferable skills that he believes as valuable for his future teaching career:

> So, we talked about thinking on your feet, but I definitely learned how to take time to prepare materials. Before, I didn't really take as much time to prepare, so that was definitely a challenge. So, a skill I slowly worked on back in Ecuador was preparing lessons. Every day after work, I would get home and I would go on my computer and start doing research so I could structure my ideas. I definitely took more time preparing my lessons this time, as opposed to my previous teaching experiences. It's a skill, kind of like having a big arsenal of

lesson plans to apply depending on whatever happens in the classroom. You

should be able to adapt; you should be prepared for everything. (Mateo, reentry

interview, April 13, 2020)

By experiencing the functioning of the classroom, Mateo learned to appreciate both the

importance of being flexible as a teacher and the essential teaching skill of planning,

structuring and being prepared.

Finally, by helping his host mom around the house, particularly in the kitchen,

Mateo connected more deeply not only with his host family, but the Ecuadorian culture.

When asked to describe an assignment that he appreciated, he reflected:

Definitely Breaking Bread. I love eating! The first day that I got to my host

family, I woke up and asked, how do I use the kitchen? Do you want me to help

you every time? How do you guys manage it here? I'm used to cooking and

doing stuff around the house, so let me know what I need to do, or what you

mind me doing. We had already had food, and I wanted to learn about different

dishes. So, I told them, if you're cooking let me know so I can give you a hand

and I can learn the process. And a couple of days before I left and I was free, we

were cooking, and I actually made a video, a time-lapse, where everything goes

really fast. I really enjoyed that, because I myself enjoy cooking and getting to

learn different recipes from different places. That's exciting to me.

This cultural cooking experience is further detailed in Mateo's Breaking Bread

Visual Story reflective assignment:

**Figure 7**

*Visual Story #4: Breaking Bread: The Sharing of Food as Culture*



Courtesy of Mateo.

> For my Breaking Bread story, I had the chance to cook a plate with my host
> mom that originated in the town of Ambato, traditionally known as
> Llapingachos, which are a mass of fried potatoes filled with cheese. Although it
> is not the plate in its totality - it is usually served with avocado, eggs and
> sausages or fried pork- the first variation is the one that we cooked and shown in
> the picture. I had tried this dish initially within my first days in Ecuador at a local
> restaurant, which tasted amazingly good. Once I had settled in with my host
> family, my host mom told me about where the dish originated from, which is
> from her hometown (Ambato), and that whenever we had a chance, she would
> teach me how to prepare them. Fortunately, before my untimely departure from
> Ecuador, we found some time to sit down and prepare the dish and we made
> lunch for the whole family. (Mateo, Visual story #4, March 10, 2020)

Mateo's willingness to help out around the house reflected his own upbringing and
predisposition to supporting a household. He also reiterated his propensity to learn by
doing through his eagerness to cook with his host mom. Mateo again demonstrated his

deeper understanding of the importance of an individual's culture, this time in the context of food and cooking.

Mateo's narrative reflected his deep-rooted connection to his Colombian culture and upbringing, his change in perspective as it related to cultural identity and preconceived notions, and his propensity to learn through first-hand experiences. His thoughtful stories of cultural connections and group dynamics demonstrated Mateo's willingness and desire to approach new cultural experiences with a more focused lens. In particular, Mateo reiterated his appreciation for the culture of individuals, as well as his own cultural identity, stating that "those are the differences that really make people's culture interesting" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). As Mateo stated in his pre-departure survey, before he embarked on his student teaching abroad journey, he believed the most important lesson he learned during his preparation course was "to be culturally open. Most importantly, to apply what I have learned in terms of teaching in a different setting" (Mateo, pre-departure survey, February 27, 2020). This, perhaps, being the most valuable lesson for a future educator seeking to engage in culturally responsive practices.

# Cross-Case Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that conducting a cross-case analysis enhances both generalizability and deepens understanding and explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. During the data analysis phase for each case study, many themes, similarities and differences emerged across cases, particularly as it relates to student teaching, host families, navigating group dynamics and overall program feedback and recommendations. These four cross-case themes are explored in this chapter.

**Figure 8**

*Cross-Case Themes and Sub-themes Diagram*
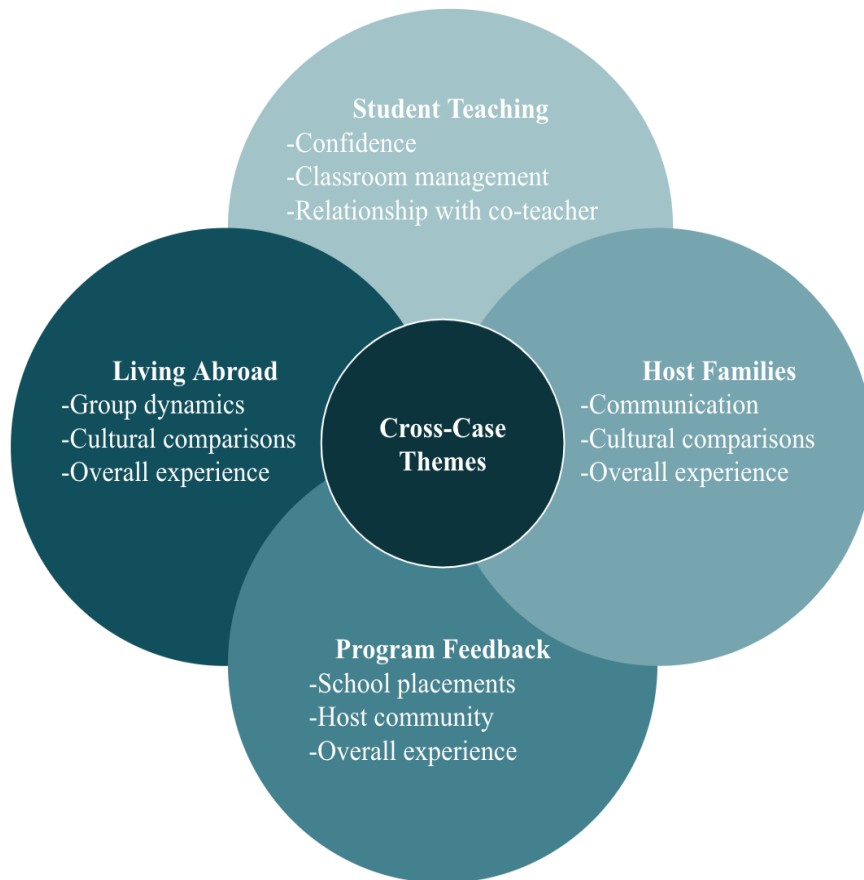
**Student Teaching**

As student teaching was one of the main objectives of the IST program, participants had much to say on the topic. A cross-cases analysis revealed many similarities in student narratives, and subcategories started to emerge. These subcategories include the participants' self-efficacy and confidence as it related to teaching, classroom management and their relationship with their cooperating teachers.

**Confidence**

Before the IST program, each participant had varying levels of classroom teaching experience. For example, Bethany and Samuel were not education majors and had no prior experience with lesson planning or classroom teaching. However, most of the student teachers reported facing challenges in the beginning of their student teaching experience but reported developing self-efficacy and confidence over the course of their 3-week teaching placement.

Sofia recalled how she used to be shy in the classroom before her experience helped her gain confidence in front of the class:

> Personally, I've grown in my confidence. I wasn't confident before, especially when it came to the classroom. I would always be behind the scenes if the co-teacher needed help. But, feeling appreciated by the students and other teachers, that meant a lot and my confidence really grew. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

Similarly, Bethany and Mateo described ice breakers that they used in the classroom to get to know their students better and feel more comfortable and confident in their teaching. Mateo explained how he overcame his initial struggles:

I didn't know my students at first, so I was kind of just walking into the unknown. When I was teaching by myself, it was like dipping my feet in the water, to see how they would react. And then after the first week I had a better idea of how to transition my lessons. Of course, every student learns differently but I found ways to catch their attention. Once I stood up there and I started my lessons, you know, it became easier, little by little. I think I'll be less nervous once I start working and teaching on my own. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Not all student teachers reported being nervous in the beginning of their student teaching experience. When asked whether she felt prepared to teach in Ecuador, Gabby said she felt "more excited than nervous" and explained that even though Ecuador is a different country, students of that age "go through the same things and act very similar" (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020).

**Classroom Management**

For most teachers, classroom management is a skill that takes many years to master. For the student teachers in Ecuador, most were confronted with the difficulties of teaching on their own and managing the behaviors of students. Samuel recalled how he did not feel prepared to controlling a classroom:

I was not ready in terms of how to deal with the students in the classroom when it comes to classroom management which is hard for everybody, even actual teachers. So, I would say classroom management was something that I was not fully ready for. But the only way you can be ready is to get the experience in the actual class! (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Similarly, Sofia described the first few days of student teaching as extremely challenging and overwhelming because she was placed in one of the "toughest classrooms" where students needed "a lot of help" (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020). However, when asked what she was the most disappointed about when she had to end the IST program early, she explained how she felt like she was just starting to get the hang of classroom management but still had a lot to learn:

I was looking forward to seeing the kids each day. It was the best thing ever. Those kids remind me why I wanted to be a teacher. But I felt like I still had a lot to learn from the teachers, especially with classroom management. I did take control of the classroom at some parts, but I still had a lot to learn. I was gaining the students' respect. I was kind of getting the hang of it and I kind of got stuck. Like, you know when you're almost going to the top of the hill? I got stuck right there and didn't get to the top. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

Gabby believed that her experience student teaching in Ecuador helped to her become a better teacher through honing her classroom management skills:

I was able to practice my classroom management skills because it was a flipped classroom. I got to spend more time one-on-one with the students, which I don't get to do in my student teaching back home where I'm mostly observing. It was nice to gradually get into a teaching space and then run the classroom on my own. It was a great experience. (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

**Relationship with Cooperating Teacher**

Finally, each participant spoke at length about their relationship with their cooperating teachers at their placement school. All participants reported overall positive

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experiences working with their cooperating teachers and appreciated the openness and guidance their cooperating teachers provided.

Bethany described how her first impressions were challenged as she got to know her cooperating teacher:

> When I first met my cooperating teacher, it wasn't what I expected. She was an older, Black woman from Colorado. She had cool, hippie vibes, and she wore baggy clothes and cool shirts all the time. So, when I first met her, I was like, what is this? And when I got to know her more, I started getting a lot more comfortable with her. It was really easy for me to transition teaching with her. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Participants also mentioned their appreciation for the freedom their cooperating teachers gave to them to teach their own lessons. Samuel felt like he had a similar, easy-going personality as his cooperating teacher who allowed him the freedom to work on different presentations that he wanted to do in class. Samuel said, "he was really open anytime I had any questions, he was there to answer them and work with me. He was really laid back, which I am too" (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020).

Finally, Sofia reflected on how important her experience working with her cooperating teacher was to her:

> I was thankful for my cooperating teacher. She's amazing! She taught me from the beginning like if you need anything, let me know. She told me which students were a handful, but that she was there to help me. I also got to work with the English teacher, and they helped me develop my lesson plan so I could teach it. I thought that was amazing. (Sofia, reentry interview, 4/14/20)

Although there were some miscommunications and overwhelming moments, the participants' narratives reflected an overall meaningful and positive student teaching experience. In fact, most participants noted that the biggest disappointment with having the program cut short was that they would not be able to continue teaching just as they were starting to feel confident and comfortable in the classroom.

## Host Families

Another important aspect of the IST program was participants' experience living with host families. The opportunity to live with and learn from families native to the host country allow students to connect more deeply with the culture of the host community and can have a more valuable impact on students' experience. Overall, the participants reported positive experiences living with their host families in Ecuador. Subthemes that emerged from their narratives included communication, cultural comparisons and their overall experience living with their host families.

### Communication

Most participants reported having open and honest communication with their host families. As most participants fluently spoke Spanish, language barriers were not often an issue. Samuel, who does not speak Spanish, appreciated the opportunity to practice the language with his host family:

It was amazing that I got to interact with my host family and practice my

Spanish. When I went out with my friends, it was mostly interactions in English,

so I didn't really get a lot of practice. But, when I got home, I was able to

practice with my host mom and she was really patient. She would take her time

and translate for me and repeat the words so I could understand better. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020).

Gabby and Bethany told stories about sitting around the table with their host families and talking about the day. Bethany recounted:

My host mom and I would sit down at the table she would cook for me. We would talk about anything. Whatever I felt like I needed to get off my chest, she was there for me. She understood. She gave me her best input and she made me feel so at home. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

**Cultural comparisons**

As most of the participants come from a Hispanic background, there were many comparisons made to their own family customs and traditions. Mateo realized that his daily lunch routine with his host family felt very much like home:

I found a lot of similarities with my own culture. For example, I would have lunch at school but when I got back home, my host mom would also make lunch. Once we were done, we would have coffee and talk about the day. That definitely felt like home to me because we do that in my family. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020).

There were also some cultural differences noted by participants. Gabby and Samuel shared stories of how they had to adjust to some of the foods they were not used to. Similarly, most participants mentioned the Ecuadorian tradition of eating a large lunch and a smaller meal at dinner, which they were not accustomed to. Being from Ecuador, Sofia often reflected on how important this tradition is in her country. In her Visual Story #2 – The Culture of My Host Community, she explained the concept of

"sobre mesa" and the cultural significance of this tradition:

**Figure 9**

*Visual Story #2: The Culture of my Host Community*



Photo courtesy of Sofia.

> For Ecuadorians, the table is a sacred place. Not only is it the source of energy
> that fuels the body but is where we share our emotions and get to share with the
> people around us. Also, a big part is alcohol to accompany a good meal. This has
> a name and is called "sobre mesa". When you go out to eat you will notice that
> once the meal is done the families or friends tend to stay an hour more just
> talking after one has finished the meal. Talking about their days/weeks and
> reminiscing about the past and talking about the future. This strengthens bonds
> between one another. And it's a big part of Ecuadorian culture. (Sofia, Visual
> Story #2, March 5, 2020)

Finally, Bethany shared a very humorous story about a cultural
misunderstanding with her undergarments:

When I first arrived, my host mom told me that she wanted me to wash my

undergarments in the shower. I felt a little weird and disrespectful, but I told her

I was sorry, but this is not something I do at home, and my undergarments

needed to go in the washer and dryer. She had a maid that would come every

week, so I don't know if she felt disrespectful to ask her to do it. Anyway, I had

put my undergarments in a little bag in the hamper, and the maid removed it. I

was like, what the heck? And then I noticed that the clothes were in the washer

to start to wash but they hadn't been washed, so I kind of just went in there and

threw them in. I don't know. I think it's a Latin cultural thing because I

remember my grandma used to do that. (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13,

2020)

Inevitably, participants encountered cultural similarities and differences living

with their host families, but all appeared to be respectful, open-minded and flexible to

making adjustments.

**Overall Experience**

Participants' narratives on the overall experience living with host families was

overwhelmingly positive. Although most students admitted to their initial reservations

and worries about living with a host family, they ultimately had a very valuable and

positive experience.  From feeling comfortable and at home, to being cared for when

they were sick, the participants recounted their experiences with great appreciation and

relief. Of all the participants, Sofia seemed to be the most apprehensive about living

with a host family, as she is accustomed to staying with her own family in Ecuador.

However, she described how her host family made her feel welcomed and right at home:

I was really scared to meet my host family in the beginning. I'm used to living

with my family when I'm over there. But the moment my host family picked me

up, they welcomed me with open arms, and I felt right at home. I just felt like

another member of the family. It made me feel welcomed even though I was in

my country. They became my other family. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14,

2020)

Although all participants reported positive experiences with their host families,

none were more impassioned than Samuel's:

Whenever I talk about my experience during my internship in Ecuador, I first

talk about my host family and how they welcomed me. They really treated me

like I was their own child. They took care of me when I was sick. They fed me.

They asked me if I was OK. During dinner and breakfast, I usually talked to my

host mom, and she would make sure she asked me how my day was and if I

needed help with anything. So, I would say my host family situation was really

amazing. It gave me a new perspective of how to live like a local and experience

the different foods, the language. I was able to practice my Spanish. So that was

amazing. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

It is clear that the experience living with host families in Ecuador was an

important and valuable part of participants' international student teaching experience.

Their narratives reflected their ability to connect with and adjust to the cultural nuances

of their host families and a willingness to learn from and engage with them to make their

experience more meaningful.

**Living Abroad**

Although all of the participants had previous international travel experiences
before the IST program, most had never experienced living and working abroad for an
extended period of time. This is reflected in their stories of navigating group dynamics,
their cultural comparisons with their host community and their overall experience living
abroad.

**Group Dynamics**

Having to navigate group dynamics was one of the most unexpected challenges
for the participants. Spending most of their time together, the students were confronted
with differences in personality, preferences and particularities. However, their narratives
reflected a willingness to adapt and a bond that was formed through the process of
understanding each other. For most of the participants, navigating group dynamics
became an important skill learned during their experience, and became closer to one
another as a result. As previously mentioned, Bethany described her personal
"breakthrough" and appreciated the positive feedback her peers gave as she grew closer
in friendship with them (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Mateo was
surprised at how easy-going and "chill" the group was to explore different places.
(Mateo reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Samuel felt the group was a "safe space for
everybody to say what they think" (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020). And
Gabby was able to employ her "go with the flow" personality trait and "roll with the
punches" when the group planned last-minute trips (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10,
2020).

However, Sofia ostracized herself from the group early on. She felt that some of

their behaviors did not reflect her values. Being in her own country, she did not want to be associated with behavior that might affect the reputation of her family. As a result, Sofia disassociated herself with the group and did not participate in group trips or activities.

Although the preparation course covered many aspects of studying abroad, the complexities of navigating group dynamics is a topic that can be easily overlooked; but, as evidenced by the narratives of the participants, a very important subject to address prior to embarking on an international student teaching experience.

**Cultural Comparisons**

Comparing cultures is an innate part of the studying abroad process. It is inevitable that participants compare and contrast their own cultural customs and traditions to those of the host country in which they are interacting with. This was true throughout the narratives of all the participants. For example, Bethany, Samuel and Sofia emphasized the warmth and openness of Ecuadorians. Through these friendly interactions, Samuel actually realized a part of his Haitian culture he lost as a result of moving to the United States:

> One thing I noticed was that saying hi to people in Ecuador is really important. I think it's something that I don't really do in the U.S. Like, in my own culture, when you see an elder, you have to say hi. When you visit somebody's house, you have to say hi to everybody that's there. I think it's something that I kind of lost when I moved to the United States and think living here is really different. It's more about individualized society which I love because we're all different individuals. But in Ecuador, I realize that I lost it because I was kind of forced to

say hi to everybody that I was meeting, even though I didn't know who they were. Personal space was not a thing in Ecuador. So, I noticed a lot of similarities between my culture and Ecuadorian culture. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020).

Another important cultural comparison that participants did not anticipate making was the confrontation with discrimination. As mentioned in Gabby, Samuel and Bethany's cases, the students were confronted with an unfortunate situation in which they realized that injustices such as racism occur all over the world, even by those who are not the majority ethnicity. This incident is another common, often inevitable, occurrence when studying abroad. However, through the narratives of the students who experienced the incident, it is clear that it was a challenging, but valuable insight into how to approach a similar situation in the future. Equally, program developers can incorporate this incident into preparation course curriculum and pre-departure orientations to better prepare participants before they study abroad.

**Overall Experience**

Student stories indicated that the overall study abroad experience was meaningful and positive. Many participants had new experiences that are indicative of studying abroad. For example, in Bethany's final PechaKucha presentation, she shared the story of staying in a hostel for the first time and meeting new friends from Germany and England. She said, "it was definitely different, but I enjoyed it a lot. It was a great opportunity to meet new people from around the world" (Bethany, PechaKucha presentation, April 15, 2020). Traveling to neighboring towns together was also noted by participants as one of the highlights of studying abroad. Mateo said that before the

experience, he hadn't considered working and traveling internationally, but noted that his experience "has definitely encouraged me to keep on traveling" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). But it was the working component of his studying abroad experience that Mateo believed was the most transformative for him:

> When you work in a country, you're taking on the routine of the locals every single day. So, definitely having to work shifts your mentality and approach to anything. Working puts the whole cultural aspect into a different perspective. Engaging in the daily activities is the most transformative part because you really get to understand and get a feel of how to live there, which not everybody does. (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Studying abroad can be a very meaningful, high-impact intercultural learning experience. From their stories of navigating group dynamics, to making thoughtful cultural comparisons and encountering new experiences indicative to studying and living abroad, it is clear that the student teaching experience had a powerful and meaningful impact on participants.

## Program Feedback

Finally, all the participants offered programmatic feedback including recommendations on future school placements, comments about the host community and overall experience throughout the program.

### School Placements

Much of the program feedback pertained to the participants' teaching experience and school placements. For example, when asked to discuss their preparedness to student teach abroad, many agreed that knowing their cooperation teacher, as well as the

subject they would be teaching beforehand, would have helped them prepare more effectively. Samuel said:

> For me I like knowing before I step into something. When I know beforehand, I feel more comfortable, even though there's always going to be uncertainties. But for me to have a general knowledge of what I'm going to step into would be great. So, if I would have known the subject I would be teaching and the teacher I was going to be working with, I think would have felt more prepared. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Mateo mentioned his interest in teaching in a public school, saying "hopefully for future programs, you can incorporate a placement at a public school because it was a whole different experience where I came from and what I know. It's a whole different thing" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020).

Most participants appreciated the placement school's pedagogy which utilized a student-centered, project-based approach to learning, with a strong focus on environmental sustainability. In Sofia's PechaKucha presentation, she shared a photo of her and her students feeding animals at the school, saying "one of my favorite things about the school was that they had a farm so children could actually learn how to take care of their environment." (Sofia, PechaKucha presentation, April 15, 2020)

**Host Community**

The IST program was located in Cumbayá, Ecuador, an affluent area east of the capital of Quito. Although the preparation course discussed the host community of Cumbayá, students still commented on how they were not expecting the community to be so developed and upscale. Bethany was under the impression that she was going to

"the ghetto" and wished she had known that she was going to "the nicer part of Ecuador" (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Samuel and Gabby expressed their desire to explore more rural areas outside of their host community. Samuel shared:

> I wanted to explore the not so fancy, maybe not the safest, part of Quito just to see how people are really living there. We didn't get the chance to do that. I think if I had the chance to do it, based on the people I talked to and what I saw online, I think I would see a lot of inequality when it comes to wealth and housing. I think I would see a lot of similarities in that aspect. Like throughout the world there's a lot of inequality. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

Although the host community challenged the cultural assumptions of many of the participants, their desire to explore less developed, more rural areas of the country demonstrated their willingness to experience the country from multiple perspectives and move out of their comfort zone to engage with unfamiliar cultural territory.

**COVID-19 Pandemic Reaction**

Due to the growing concern of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the program had to be cut short by two weeks and students had to return to their homes in the United States immediately. I asked each participant to discuss their reactions to the news about the pandemic and their untimely departure from the program. All participants expressed their disappointment in leaving their host families, not being able to take their planned weekend trips and not being able to teach their planned lessons. When asked what he was most disappointed about when the program had to be cut short, Mateo said, "not being able to travel inside the country which I was looking forward to since we're working throughout the week, so on the weekends we could get away and experience the

country in a different way" (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Bethany's biggest disappointment was not being able to teach, saying, "I was supposed to teach that whole week, that was supposed to be my week. So, I didn't really get to have my own teaching session with the kids, and that was something I was a little disappointed that I couldn't do" (Bethany, reentry interview, April 13, 2020).

Sofia had a difficult choice to either stay in Ecuador with her aunt or return home to Florida to join the rest of her family. She said:

I had to make a choice and it wasn't an easy choice to make. I shed a lot of tears that Saturday. It was the worst day for me. But eventually I had to come back and put my safety first. It was sad because I wanted to complete the program because I did want to do a lot more and I had a lot to learn, and I still have a lot to learn. So, it was a little sad to see that it got cut short. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 13, 2020)

Despite the disappointments shared by the participants, their understanding about the situation and the importance of their safety was evident in their narratives. Mateo was "relieved" that he was not going to put his host family at risk due to their older age (Mateo, reentry interview, April 13, 2020). Most of the students recalled that they were on a weekend trip when they received a call from the program director about coming home immediately. As the students called their host families and cooperating teachers to tell them the news and make plans to leave the next day, they stayed calm and focused on getting home safely. Samuel said:

I'm really glad that we made the decision to leave the same night and postpone the stay. My host family was really sad. I texted my cooperating teacher when I

was getting ready to go to the airport, and he wasn't surprised because the

pandemic was getting worse. He wished me good luck and to have a safe flight. I

would say everyone was shocked to see that the experience was going to be over

before the time. (Samuel, reentry interview, April 10, 2020)

**Overall experience**

Finally, all the participants shared their thoughts on their overall experience

teaching and living abroad. As the veteran of study abroad, Samuel was able to compare

his experience with other study abroad programs:

In Ecuador, it was different because we had a preparation class that helped us

learn about the culture. I think all programs should have a class like that so you

can be prepared and not show up thinking you know about the culture. And to

have time to do research before the trip. So, I think that was really important for

this program. And then the visual stories were really helpful to reflect back on

the experiences. It's interesting to see that, even though it's study abroad or

intern abroad, there are many approaches to it. (Samuel, reentry interview, April

10, 2020)

Sofia believed student teaching in Ecuador helped her shift her perspective on

approaches to teaching that she believed the United States educational system could

learn from:

For me this was an amazing program. It's a great way to shape teachers and to

get another perspective of teaching outside of US education. I guess being able to

fight more for your students and getting the perspective of what it is to be a

student-centered institution. Being able to have the freedom to run your

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classroom the way you want. It just puts into perspective how much we really need to make progress with the educational system here. (Sofia, reentry interview, April 14, 2020)

In Mateo's final reflection, he thoughtfully reflected on what his student teaching abroad experience meant to him:

The third week that we spent in Ecuador, unfortunately, was the last since we had an untimely departure because of the world situation (COVID-19). By this week, I had taken over the middle school classes (History and Civics), and I was spending some extra time with my co-teacher in order to review some discipline approaches and techniques that I had learned while in college. It was an overall great experience in Ecuador, I met some amazing people, traveled to beautiful places and ate some delicious food, something I will never forget. Moreover, as this internship concluded, I took back home with me all the experiences and moments I lived there to improve my own teaching skills. (Mateo, reflection #3, March 10, 2020)

**Summary**

This chapter presented the rich narratives of each participant, as well as a cross-case analysis to reveal valuable insights into what students experienced during the IST program in Ecuador. It brought to light not only the similarities of experience that students encountered, but also the nuances that can only be revealed through an in-depth analysis of the critical reflections of each individual participant. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the following, final chapter of this study.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents conclusions and a discussion based on the findings from this study. It will review the purpose of the study, the research question, and the findings from the research. It will then present conclusions and a discussion based on the findings, followed by recommendations for practice, theory and future research.

### Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which pre-service teachers experienced a semester-long, international student teaching program. This study was conducted to contribute to the literature on teacher preparation and gain valuable insight on students' individual and shared experiences as they lived, worked and studied within a different cultural context. It also presented the unique and missing perspective of ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically diverse students and their experiences studying abroad.

This study sought to answer the following research question: How do preservice teachers describe their experiences during an international student teaching program? Five students who participated in a pilot IST program at Florida International University during the 2020 spring semester were interviewed. A one-hour, semi-structured interview took place after participants returned home from their international student teaching placements in Ecuador. Participants were asked to describe their overall experience of the program and share stories about their teaching experiences, living with host families and engagement with the host community. Reflective assignments completed throughout the semester were also collected as primary data sources. These

included visual stories, written and video reflections, pre-departure surveys and other cultural identity assignments. Data collected from both the reentry interviews and reflective assignments were explored on an individual case basis and then across cases to comparatively analyze emergent themes.

The findings from this collective case study revealed both the similarities of student experiences across cases, as well as the nuances that make an experience like international student teaching unique to each participant. The following section will draw conclusions based on the findings and present a discussion of the findings.

## Conclusions and Discussion

This section will present the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of this study, as well as a discussion of the findings. These conclusions relate to the experience of international student teaching for each participant and across cases, and the connection between critical reflection and intercultural development.

### Comparing International Student Teaching Experiences

Much of the research on study abroad and intercultural development has utilized assessment tools such as self-reports and surveys to present findings on student learning and program evaluation. Similarly, the research presents overwhelmingly positive outcomes. A key objective of this study was to explore more deeply the experiences of students who had participated in an international student teaching in order to reveal nuances that are not typically found through these surface-level assessments. Through an analysis of student narratives and reflections, conclusions can be drawn based on the differences and similarities of participants' experiences.

**IST is a Personal Experience**

The distinctions found in the student reflections of this study support the counter-narrative provided by Vande Berg et al. (2012) regarding the learning that takes place abroad. The authors assert that metrics such as data on increasing numbers of students abroad and self-reports are unreliable in determining the effectiveness of a study abroad program. They emphasize an experiential/constructivist paradigm which posits that an individual creates their world both individually and with others, and learning occurs through the individual's transactions with a culture and with others. The critical reflections of students in this study support the assertions made by this experiential/constructivist worldview. By investigating the experiences of each participant on a case-by-case basis, it can be concluded that the learning that takes place abroad is very distinct and personal. The nuances found in participants' stories of student teaching and interactions with their host community are valuable in understanding how and what students learn abroad, and challenges the assumptions and generalizations often made about student learning abroad; namely, that learning occurs simply by being immersed in another culture. Instead, the findings from this study revealed that through connecting cultural identity with consistent critical reflection, students were able to articulate and relate to their experiences in a more meaningful way.

These findings are important when considering the design and development of international student teaching programs. Continuous research on the individual student experience, that goes beyond self-reports, will serve to guide global program developers and faculty to intentionally design curriculum with cultural identity, critical reflection and student voice at its core.

**IST is a Shared Experience**

An experiential/constructivist worldview also holds that individuals create their world with others, and learning occurs through interactions with both a culture and with others (Vande Berg et al., 2012). This assertion that learning can also be a shared experience was supported throughout the reflections of participants. For example, most participants spoke at length about navigating group dynamics and how this was a positive experience that brought the group closer together. Similarly, the stories of traveling together on weekend trips and having new experiences, such as staying at hostels, revealed that participants were processing these experiences together. Open communication within the group and during weekly meetings with the on-site coordinator provided a space for students to share their experiences and connect with each other within a common learning community. Further, many participants shared the same concerns about their experiences. During their reentry interview, for example, all of the participants expressed their desire to connect with their cooperating teachers in order to develop a relationship and better prepare their lessons prior to student teaching abroad.

The shared experiences that were evident throughout the findings of this study served to reiterate commonalities of IST experiences and revealed unexpected similarities. In this case, it was the interactions and shared experiences within the participating group - and not with the host community - that were the most unanticipated. For instance, navigating group dynamics was not considered when designing the preparation course. Instead, a strong emphasis was placed on the intercultural learning of the host country of Ecuador. However, in the literature on study

abroad and ethnically diverse students, the diversity of the group within the cohort can actually serve to enhance the students' experiences by providing opportunities for further cross-cultural engagement (Blake et al., 2020). These insights into the ways in which a group experiences studying abroad together can be used to create a common learning community amongst peers and serve as a valuable guide in delivering intentionally designed global programming, particularly for a diverse audience.

## Student Learning Abroad

Findings from this study revealed the ways in which students experienced global and intercultural learning during their IST program. Although this study did not formally assess the intercultural development of participants, there are multiple instances where students exhibited the knowledge, skills and attitudes often associated with intercultural competence and desired global learning outcomes. These instances are discussed in the following section.

### Intercultural Learning

Intercultural learning is regularly cited as a desired learning process for students who study abroad. Bennett defines intercultural learning as "acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (world view), including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange" (Bennett, 2009). The narratives of students from this study revealed the ways in which intercultural learning was taking place, and how students demonstrated the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with intercultural competence. Selected constituent elements of intercultural

competence, adapted from Deardorff (2006) and interpreted by McKinnon (2012) are discussed below.

**Knowledge**

*Cultural self-awareness*

Curriculum for the preparation course of this study was centered around the development of cultural identity. As such, students had multiple opportunities to critically reflect on how their own culture has shaped their worldview and how that connects to culturally responsive teaching and navigating cultural diversity. In their reentry interviews and reflective assignments, students articulated how their cultural identity related to the experiences they were having abroad. Sofia, for example, mentioned multiple times how important her culture and upbringing was for shaping her identity, saying "I think that my culture makes me who I am. I represent my culture every day" (Sofia, Cultural Autobiography, January 13, 2020). Similarly, Mateo frequently referenced how his humble upbringing and his "malicia indígena," as well as his newfound appreciation for cultural identity has not only shaped the way he views the world, but how important it is to take into consideration the individual culture of others when you are engaging in a different cultural context. The findings from this study indicated the importance of preparing students to teach abroad by first developing cultural self-awareness in order to build the capacities to better serve culturally diverse students and effectively engage in a new cultural environment.

*Culture specific knowledge*

Students' also demonstrated their culturally specific knowledge throughout the IST program. Although the preparation course facilitated this learning, students

expressed the knowledge they acquired on their own accord as they interacted with the culture of Ecuador. This is evident in Samuel's retelling of his experience at the Catholic mass on Ash Wednesday and in Gabby's narrative about the meaning of the alpaca sweaters. Seeking this knowledge beyond the required curriculum demonstrated a higher level of appreciation for the host country and a key intercultural skill associated with intercultural development.

### *Sociolinguistic awareness*

Sociolinguistic awareness refers to acquiring the basic local language skills and being able to articulate and adjust one's speech to the verbal and nonverbal communication of other cultures (McKinnon, 2012). This particular group was unique in that most fluently spoke the host language of Spanish. However, English was the language spoken within the cohort, and many of the student narratives reflected how they felt like outsiders in Ecuador because of this. Similarly, as the placement school required that the student teachers spoke English to their students, there was a sociolinguistic negotiation within the classroom as the student teachers adjusted to not speaking Spanish so the students could improve their English. Further, the two students who did not speak Spanish fluently actively practiced their Spanish with people in their host community and acquired basic local language skills to more effectively communicate. All of these negotiations with language reflected a development in sociolinguistic awareness associated with a key knowledge component of intercultural competence. It also illustrated the complexities of linguistically diverse students who speak the host country language, but still must make adjustments to accommodate different cultural circumstances; in this case, within the context of teaching and speaking

with each other as a group. This interesting dynamic could be investigated in future research on linguistically diverse students abroad.

**Skills**

***Listening, observing, evaluating***

There were several instances where students listened, observed and evaluated different cultural interactions in order to minimize their ethnocentrism and seek out cultural clues and meaning (McKinnon, 2012). Mateo, for example, eloquently explained how, through patience and perseverance, he observed the differences between himself and his peers but came to understand that they also possessed the astuteness, the malicia indígena, he thought was only indicative of his culture and upbringing. Similarly, Samuel spoke at length about how he was personally challenged to navigate group dynamics, but through open communication and evaluation of group needs, he made accommodations in order to make the group dynamics work. Again, this process of listening, observing and evaluating aligns with key skills associated with a development in intercultural competence (McKinnon, 2012).

**Attitudes**

***Respect, openness, curiosity and discovery***

The narratives of the students were replete with examples of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery for the new culture that they were navigating. Bethany attributed her personal breakthrough to her respect for the way Ecuadorians appreciated the small things in life and exhibited openness to be proven wrong about her cultural assumptions of the country. Samuel constantly sought out intercultural interactions and saw the cultural differences that he encountered as a learning opportunity to move out of his

comfort zone and engage with his host community more deeply, even if it meant being confronted with prejudice and discrimination. Through Gabby's stories, it was evident that she actively suspended her criticism of cultural differences and was open to collecting evidence that garnered a better understanding and deeper respect for the culture of Ecuador. Mateo's openness and respect were evident not only with his encounters with the locals of his host community, but also with his peers as he thought comparatively without prejudice about the cultural differences he was navigating. All of these expressions of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery exemplify attitudes necessary to effectively interact with other cultures and demonstrate a development in the intercultural competence of the participants.

**Global Learning**

As discussed, global learning is an educational process in which "diverse people collaboratively analyze and address complex problems that transcend borders" (Landorf and Doscher, 2015, p. 24). IST programs have become a viable way to engage students with high impact, global learning experiences that seek to develop students' global perspective, awareness and engagement. As the IST program investigated in this study took place at FIU, where global learning is a valued initiative, it was not a surprise that findings revealed the ways in which students demonstrated attributes of these key global learning outcomes which supported other studies on global learning outcomes of study abroad.

*Global Perspective*

Global perspective is defined as "the ability to discern the distinctive and common qualities between one's own viewpoint and those of others" (Landorf et al.,

2018, p. 38), and "how one's place in the world both informs and limits one's knowledge" (AAC&U, 2014). Many studies on student learning abroad have sought to measure a development in participants' global perspective (Braskamp et al., 2011; Core, 2017; Mathews, 2017; Sharma et al., 2011; Smith & Wang, 2017). Student narratives from this study illustrated the ways in which participants conducted a multi-perspective analysis to compare, interpret and better understand their cultural interactions. Mateo drew connections between the man at the market in Ecuador "just trying to get by" with his experiences growing up in Colombia and acknowledged how important it is to consider other's cultural identity when making meaning of new cultural experiences. Bethany observed the ways of life in Ecuador that changed her perspective on her lifestyle in the United States, calling it a personal "breakthrough." These instances of being able to discern commonalities between one's own viewpoint and those of others' supports the findings from other studies which have found an increase in the development of a global perspective through study abroad.

### Global Awareness

Global awareness is defined as "the knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems" (Landorf & Doscher, 2015, p. 24). Many of the students made global connections and exhibited an awareness of the interrelatedness of what they were experiencing abroad to other parts of the world. Gabby, for example, analyzed the current issues in Venezuela as it related to her experience in Ecuador and her life in the United States. She thoughtfully analyzed the complexities of governmental differences in each country and how it affected current issues on a global scale. Sofia often compared the educational systems of Ecuador and

the United States, noting the ways in which she believed the education system in the United States could improve through integrating teaching and learning methodologies found in Ecuador. Bethany compared her experiences in Ecuador to those in other countries she had previously visited, critically analyzing differences and commonalities and exhibiting an awareness of how those differences could be interrelated. These global comparisons illustrated how students thought critically about their experiences in Ecuador to those of other countries they were familiar with and demonstrated attributes of global awareness.

### *Global Engagement*

Global engagement is also cited as a desired student learning outcome of global learning. It is defined as a willingness to engage in local and global problem solving (Landorf & Doscher, 2015). There were a few instances where students expressed their desire to engage in their local community after experiencing global issues during their IST program. As mentioned, Gabby's willingness to help the stray dog problem in her local community after witnessing the problem in Ecuador, was reflective of a development in her global engagement. Similarly, after experiencing the educational and governmental focus on environmental sustainability in Ecuador, many of the students acknowledged that they would like to do more in terms of protecting the environment of their local community. Again, Gabby emphasized that, although she considers herself to be environmentally conscious, she "could be and should be doing more" after experiencing the deep sustainability practices in Ecuador (Gabby, reentry interview, April 10, 2020).

**The Role of Critical Reflection in Student Learning**

Although the findings of this study illustrate instances of students' global and intercultural learning and development, it is unlikely that this learning would have been as evident without the participants consistently engaging in critical reflection. The findings from this study support the literature on student learning abroad which emphasizes the crucial role of critical reflection in the meaning-making and learning process. Critical reflection "brings about awareness of the self by calling into question one's prior knowledge or taken-for-granted frames of references which include beliefs, assumptions, values and cultural norms of thinking and acting" (Banks & Mcgee-Banks, 2009). The IST program was designed with critical reflection at its core. From class discussions on the process of critical reflection, to projects involving deeply exploring cultural identity, to digital storytelling guiding students to challenge their cultural assumptions, the IST program facilitated student learning through providing multiple opportunities to critically reflect on their experiences. Without nurturing this process throughout the study abroad cycle, students would have struggled to make deeper meaning of their experiences.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations that arose during the time of this study which revolve around researcher bias, gaps in the literature on underrepresented student populations and study abroad, generalizability, and the unforeseen consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Firstly, as noted in Chapter 3, I acknowledged that my positionality as a White, female educator who has traveled, lived and worked extensively throughout the world

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may cause researcher bias towards a positive perspective on student learning outcomes abroad. Additionally, my involvement as a teaching assistant for the IST program under investigation, and my subsequent interactions with the sample group, may have altered the participants' behavior when conducting interviews and completing reflective assignments. However, a strong effort was made to minimize researcher bias. This included self-monitoring, reflecting and memoing throughout the research process, and not being involved with grading assignments. Further, reentry interviews were structured as open-ended questions so participants could answer more openly and honestly. Finally, participants took part in member-checking through follow-up questions clarifying my interpretations of their experiences.

Another limitation of the study was due to the gap in the literature on the experiences of underrepresented students and study abroad. Most studies on international student teaching experiences reflect the demographics of the teacher populations in the United States, i.e., White, middle-class female students. This posed a limitation when I was conducting a literature review in order to better understand the unique experiences of ethnically diverse students studying abroad. Conversely, the findings of this study may help contribute to the lack of literature in this area.

There are also a few limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings from this study. Although student narratives provide a rich, qualitative description of participants' experiences, they are unique to each participant and lack generalizability and external criterion with which to evaluate them (Paige & Vanden Berg, 2012). The study is also limited to the context of the host country of Ecuador, and, therefore, cannot be generalized to other IST program locations. Many findings from this study, however,

may be useful in multiple contexts including the similarities found across cases regarding experiences in the classroom, host family interactions and common travel issues shared by many study abroad participants.

The final, major limitation of this study was caused by the unexpected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IST practicum course was scheduled to take place for five weeks in Ecuador. However, as the then novel coronavirus spread across the globe, the university made the difficult decision to bring all students abroad back home immediately. This cut the program length in half, and students returned home after only three weeks of international student teaching. Additionally, I was scheduled to conduct on-site interviews and classroom observations in Ecuador as part of my data collection, but this was made impossible due to the growing global pandemic. Although the consequences of the COVID-19 virus could not have been predicted, it nonetheless altered the initial plan and procedure of this study. However, it also gave rise to a unique perspective from returning students on how they handled the situation. Similarly, the narratives from participants indicated that, although they were disappointed that the program was cut short, their experience was well-rounded and valuable.

### Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the experiences of preservice teachers during an international student teaching program in order to better understand the individual and shared experiences of participants. It is intended that the findings of this study will serve as valuable insights for stakeholders to develop international programming more intentionally, with critical reflection cultural learning as a design framework. As such, recommendations for schools of education, program

developers and faculty involved in the design and delivery of international student

teaching are outlined in the following section.

**Design Programs with Intention**

Most of the literature on student learning outcomes in study abroad emphasizes

the importance of intentionally designing programs to meet a clear set of objectives.

These objectives may include institutional and departmental objectives, intended

academic learning outcomes, and the personal objectives of participants. Further, if

student learning outcomes are based on developing intercultural competencies, an

assessment method should be defined and implemented at the onset of the program, and

curriculum should be intentionally designed to meet this objective. Assignments that

focus on cultural identity, awareness, perspective and engagement, and are underpinned

by continuous critical reflection, can serve to more effectively meet intercultural and

global learning outcomes.

**Prepare Students and Faculty**

The program under investigation was unique in that it provided students with a

7-week preparation course before their international student teaching placements in

Ecuador. This allowed for sufficient time to cover stated learning objectives and prepare

students to teach abroad. This preparation course was an essential component of the

international student teaching program. As such, it is recommended that a pre-departure

preparation course be embedded in the study abroad program agenda, particularly

programs that include student teaching. Preparation curriculum should include topics on

culturally responsive teaching, critical reflection, culturally-specific knowledge, and a

critical approach to digital storytelling. Similarly, faculty and staff that are involved in

leading global programs should also be trained to deliver instruction that meets intercultural learning objectives. This can be accomplished through institutional and departmental seminars, workshops, etc., that specifically train faculty and staff to facilitate intercultural and global learning.

**Provide On-going Support**

On-going academic and personal support for participants in IST programs is an essential component in facilitating student learning abroad. This includes support during the entire study abroad cycle - before, during and after students return to their home countries. The on-going support for participants in this study included faculty and staff support during the pre-departure preparation course, weekly meetings with the on-site coordinator in Ecuador as well as online support from faculty on their home campus, and reentry orientations to provide a facilitated space to process and reflect on their experiences abroad. Without this structure of support, students may struggle to make meaning of their experiences and learning objectives will be challenging to achieve.

<div align="center"><b>Recommendations for Theory</b></div>

Although this study did not seek to examine the findings through a specific theoretical framework, the constituent elements of Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence as well as FIU's Global Learning Student Learning Outcomes were used to highlight the ways in which participants demonstrated the specific characteristics associated with both of these conceptual frameworks. Findings from this study revealed how both frameworks could be expanded upon to consdier the unique cultural identities of participants and how this affects the ways in which students learn abroad. For example, Sofia's narrative stood out as being more ethnocentric than her

peers, resulting in less instances where she demonstrated global and intercultural learning as per the two utilized frameworks. This is likely due to the fact that she is from the host country and did not experience the same cultural interactions as her peers. However, this does not mean cultural development and learning did not occur. Although many pre-tests associated with global and intercultural learning assessments consider factors such as previous travel and study abroad experiences, it is recommended current theories on student learning abroad expand to include the cultural identities of participants as an important factor in how and what students learn abroad.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research in the areas of teacher training, intercultural development and study abroad. Recommendations include investigating the unique experiences of underrepresented students who study and teach abroad, longitudinal research on how IST experiences affect the classroom practices of previous participants, exploring the implications of group dynamics, and formally assessing student learning using a mixed methods approach.

As mentioned, there is little research into the unique experiences of ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically diverse students who study abroad, and even less research on those who teach abroad. Although this study presented the narratives of diverse student teachers, it did not exclusively investigate these narratives through the framework of diversity, equity and inclusion in study abroad. As such, there is much room to explore this area further and elevate this missing perspective in the study abroad and IST literature. A future research recommendation includes utilizing Critical Race

Theory as a framework in researching the experiences of diverse students abroad. Critical Race Theory (CRT) applies the critical analysis of culture and society to the intersection of race, racism, law, and power (Goldini, 2017). In the context of diverse students and their unique experiences abroad, CRT can provide a powerful lens through which to investigate how race, ethnicity and class affect their cultural interactions and learning abroad and offer valuable insights for program developers to address potential discrimination or conflict this underrepresented demographic of students might face when studying abroad.

Additionally, there are few longitudinal studies exploring the effects of IST experiences on the current teaching practices of previous participants. Mathews (2017) investigated the holistic global perspectives of participants who had studied abroad 5 years earlier and found that "by providing multiple opportunities to debrief over time, past participants can critically examine previous perspectives, recognizing how they have grown as a result of their overseas experience" (p. 409). Similarly, Duke (2016) suggests that additional research is needed to determine the "staying power" of students' intercultural development after student teaching abroad. Conducting longitudinal studies is crucial in understanding how participants process and implement previous cultural experiences in their current teaching practices and restructuring programs to provide reflective opportunities to participants over time.

Further, this study pointed to the importance of group dynamics to the experiences of students abroad. Each participant talked extensively about navigating dynamics within their peer group, and how they grew personally from the experience.

Future research may explore this topic further to gain deeper insights into how students navigate group dynamics in the context of international student teaching.

Finally, formally assessing the relationship between critical reflection and intercultural development should continue to be an area of investigation. Indeed, many teacher education scholars have positioned their research within these dimensions (see, Braskamp et al., 2011; Marcus & Moss, 2017; Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Smith & Wang, 2017; Vandermaas-Peeler et. al, 2018). Although these concepts served to inform this study, a formal assessment of their relationship was not conducted. Future empirical research that employs both quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment and utilizes reliable assessment tools such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is recommended to investigate the relationship critical reflection has on intercultural development in pre-service teachers.

### Final Thoughts

There is no doubt that 21st century education requires culturally competent teachers. It is therefore imperative that schools of education offer high impact learning opportunities that seek to develop these key competencies in pre-service teachers. International student teaching is one such offering that has the potential to provide a unique and enriching learning experience for participants to cultivate the critical skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to teach effectively in diverse classrooms. However, in order to meet these learning objectives, IST programs should be intentionally designed to include ample preparation for both participants and faculty, a structure of support that facilitates learning throughout the study abroad cycle, and curriculum that is centered around student voice, critical reflection and intercultural and global learning. It

was the intention of this study to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers as they lived, worked and engaged with a new culture and community during an international student teaching program. By presenting these rich student narratives, study abroad stakeholders can gain valuable insights into how to design and deliver programs that more deeply engage students in intercultural and global learning, and more effectively develop the dispositions necessary to prepare culturally responsive educators that will better serve their diverse students.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

**Re-entry Interview Questions**

1. Now that you have had some time to reflect on your experience in Ecuador, what have you taken away from this opportunity?

2. How did you feel when you heard that there was a global pandemic happening and the program needed to be cut short?

3. How did your host family/other Ecuadorians react to the news?

4. What were you most disappointed about/what were you most looking forward to that you were unable to do because of the program being cut short?

5. In terms of your teaching, in what ways did you feel prepared or not prepared to student teach in Ecuador?

6. What do you wish you would have learned before you taught in Ecuador?

7. Describe your interactions with your students and cooperating teacher.

8. If there were any cultural differences/issues, how did you overcome those?

9. What is the most important lesson you learned about student teaching in Ecuador?

10. How do you think your student teaching experience has helped you become a better teacher?

11. How do you plan on utilizing your experiences throughout this program in your future classroom or career?

12. What other transferable skills do you think this experience has helped you gain?

13. Describe interactions you had with other individuals from your host country.

14. How about your host family? Describe your interactions.

15. Were there any cultural differences between you and your host family that you weren't expecting? How did you handle these differences? And similarities?

16. Overall, what do you wish you had known prior to going to your host country?

17. Was this experience similar or different to other travel experiences you've had?

18. In what ways do you think this experience has changed your perspective on other countries and cultures?

19. After this experience, did you find any connections between your own cultural identity and those of your classmates and/or of Ecuadorians you interacted with?

20. What about global connections? Did you find any relationships between systems (school, government, society) in Ecuador and the ones you are familiar with?

21. What part of your experience do you feel was the most significant?

22. In what ways do you think you've grown personally from this experience?

23. I asked you to share some photos from your prep course and your time in Ecuador, as well as an assignment from the semester that was significant to you. You can share those now.

24. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience overall?

- Students will choose a photo from prep course and practicum course, and assignment from the semester to share its significance during the interview.

## Appendix B

| Week | Visual Story Themes – Preparation Course |
|------|------------------------------------------|
| 1 | **My Cultural Identity:** Choose a question from you cultural autobiography and capture a photo/video that represents your response. Then write a 1-page story to explain why that photo represents an important aspect of your culture. |
| 2 | **The Culture of My Community:** Capture a photo/video the represents an important cultural aspect of the community in which you live. Then, using the critical reflection method of "What?, So What?, Now What?, critically reflect on the significance of the photo you captured. |
| 3 | **Life on Campus:** After the session on City as Text, students will have the opportunity to explore FIU and capture 3 photos/videos that represents life on campus, focusing on the 3 CAT strategies - Mapping, Observing and Listening. |
| 4 | **Breaking Bread - The Sharing of Food as Culture:** Food, and rituals/traditions around it, plays a significant role in most cultures. Capture a video/photo that represents how food connects to your culture and tell the story of why. |
| 5 | **The Culture of Students:** After understanding the process of culturally-responsive teaching, find a school-aged student(s) to discuss how their culture relates to their school life (teachers, peers, admin, etc). Capture a photo/video of student(s). |
| 6 | **Traditional Gender Roles:** Every society, ethnic group and culture has gender role expectations that play a significant part in defining cultural norms. Capture 2 videos/photos (male / female) that represent traditional gender roles in your culture and write a story to explain. |
| 7 | **Quintessential America:** When teaching abroad, students will be very curious about life in America. Capture a video/photo that is quintessentially American and write a story to explain why that video/photo represents American life to you. |

**Appendix C**

| Week | Visual Story Themes – Practicum Course |
|------|----------------------------------------|
| 1 | **Challenging my Cultural Assumptions:** After your first week in your host country, you have probably encountered a few moments that have challenged your assumptions and perceptions about your own culture, or the culture of your host country. Capture something that has made you question your own cultural biases or assumptions and tell the story. |
| 2 | **The Culture of My Host Community:** Capture a photo/video the represents an important cultural aspect of the host community in which you live. Then, using the critical reflection method of "What? So What? Now What? critically reflect on the significance of the photo you captured to your host community. |
| 3 | **Life at School:** As you explore life as a teacher in a new country, capture what life is like on campus at your placement school. How are the students different? How is teaching different? What are the other teachers like? What do you notice about the classroom or school itself? |
| 4 | **Breaking Bread - The Sharing of Food as Culture:** Food, and rituals/traditions around it, plays a significant role in most cultures. Capture a video/photo that represents how food connects to your host country's culture and tell the story of why. |
| 5 | **The Culture of Students:** After understanding the process of culturally responsive teaching, find a school-aged student(s) from your host community to discuss how their culture connects to their school life (teachers, peers, admin, etc). Capture a photo/video of student(s) and tell their story. |
| 6 | **Traditional Gender Roles:** Every society, ethnic group and culture has gender role expectations that play a significant part in defining cultural norms. Capture 2 videos/photos (male / female) that represent traditional gender roles in your host country and write a story to explain. |
| 7 | **Life in Host Country:** You have now lived and worked in your host community for several weeks. Capture a photo/video that you think represents daily life in your host country that you have observed throughout your experience. Write a story to explain. |

VITA

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| | |
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PRESENTATIONS

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