Cultural Adaptations of American Teachers in International Schools

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CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS OF AMERICAN TEACHERS
IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

by

David J. Alban

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Global competition of academic aptitude between countries has sparked policymakers’ concerns with the performance of the United States educational system leading to many educational reforms that direct educators to diversify their instruction to meet the needs of all students. Advances in technology and travel allow people to interact with other cultures creating more globalized societies. These two converging issues place a greater significance on educators to understand the interplay between culture and their teaching practices.

Literature reveals that the influence of home and community cultures affects the learning behaviors of students (Davis-Kean, 2005; Wang, Beras, & Eberhard, 2005; Sigel, Stinson, & Kim, 1993; Cohen, 1987). Culturally responsive teachers acknowledge and appreciate the diverse cultures and adjust their teaching practices to bridge the differences (Gay, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). While studies describe characteristics of culturally responsive teachers, they often focus on teachers in the United States leaving a void in literature on how teachers respond to diverse classrooms outside of their native countries.
This phenomenological study focuses on the adjustments American teachers make in international schools in the Asian Pacific region. Through an interpretative phenomenological analysis, four superordinate themes and eleven subordinate themes emerged from the data. The superordinate themes, which encapsulated the acculturation process experienced by the teachers, included: (a) encounter of cultural differences, (b) understanding of cultural underpinnings, (c) adaptations in personal and professional lives, and (d) transformation of cultural identities. The findings of the study indicate that when teachers acculturate to new cultural settings, they become teachers and learners of culture. After gaining an understanding of the cultural underpinnings of the expectations and norms of the students and parents, they taught the roles that parents and students play in an American based educational system. They also became learners of their community culture, which increased their understanding of other cultures and built connections with communities. This process of acculturation expanded their worldview and appreciation for diversity in the classroom.
This six-year venture is one of the greatest accomplishments I have achieved. Reaching this milestone was not an individual effort, but rather a team effort. First and foremost, this accomplishment is the explicit work of God in my life who opened the door for this opportunity and helped me through these years. Truly, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

To my wife, Sally, I greatly appreciate your willingness and commitment to seeing me through the program. In the weakest moments, your true grit and determination pulled me through. Being a single parent for six years was one of the many great sacrifices you made to allow me to face a challenge. To Seth and Jack, you have only seen me in dissertation mode your whole life, so to you I say, “Daddy’s home!”

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To my extended family especially Dad, Mom, Mom Brooks, and Don, thank you for your support ranging from prayer to words of encouragement. You invested a lot of time helping Sally and me through this undertaking. Lastly, to the fifteen participants in my study, thank you for spending time sharing your insights on the fascinating world of
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David J. Alban
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Historical Background of Study

Education is in a continuous state of transformation because of the rapid changes in our society socially, economically, and politically. Whether for the intent of strengthening the nation’s economy or improving living conditions in a region, the desire for children to have a quality education fuels the demand for these changes and reforms. Despite the political rhetoric that claims to have the prescriptive measures necessary for effective reform, researchers continue to focus particular attention on the core ingredients of instruction, curriculum, and learning in the educational process.

Background on Culture and Learning

Among the different research fields are investigators who take a particular interest in the sociological factors in the educational process. Although new ideas are shared with educational practitioners, their concepts are not new, but rather cultivated from the earlier works of scholars such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. Piaget who studied sociological factors affecting the learning of children concluded through his study that children develop cognitively through the interaction of their environment (Smith, 2001). Similar to Piaget’s findings, Vygotsky suggested from his study of children’s environments and their cognitive development that culture provides the process for children to acquire the knowledge (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). More recently, Bruner(1996), a large contributor to cognitive learning theory, furthered Vygotsky’s ideas.
in his research on cognitive and language development by suggesting that the social interaction of children contributes greatly to their cognitive development.

Increased focus on educational issues through a cultural lens are raising questions as to if the exclusion of cultural consideration in teaching practices attribute to the lack of student achievement. Supported by an assessment of three decades of teaching practices, Bruner (1996) asserted that Western pedagogy does not focus on the understanding of various cultural components such as the student thought process and learning behavior. His description of Western pedagogy was a one-way process in which the teachers pour their knowledge into the empty minds of the students taking no consideration for their learning needs or behaviors. He concluded from his research that this approach is ineffective and requires a transformation that includes cultural understanding (Bruner, 1999).

Educators invest a significant amount of time and resources in enhancing their students’ potential for success. As studies seek to capture the elements of effective instruction, certain factors surface as being an influential part. For instance in their synthesis of educational productivity, Fraser, Walberg, Welch, and Hattie (1987) concluded that the ideology and behavior of the individuals and community, also known as culture, shape the home environment and influence the dynamics of learning. Likewise, Marzano (2001) synthesized from four decades of research on student achievement that that the home environment plays a vital role in student achievement. The findings from these studies strongly suggest that when examining student learning behaviors and patterns, the student’s home environment must be a consideration as a component.
Emergence of Internationalize Societies

Current demographic and technological changes demand educators to focus attention to the role culture plays in education. The world has become transient because of the improvements in transportation and technology that allow people to interact conveniently with others in different regions of the world. These advances are shuffling demographics leading to more diversity in populations for many countries. The United States is not immune to these changes particularly with the shifts in demographic trends. According to the Census Bureau, the United States continues to grow and become more diverse (Shrestha & Heisler, 2011). In analyzing the population trends from the past censuses, Shrestha and Heisler (2011) projected the steady decline in the white population may drop to 74 percent by 2050. With such a shift, the country continues to drift away from a monoculture to a melting pot of cultures.

As a world power, the United States has been an egocentric society in which people have limited interest in international matters. The American educational system, influenced by this hegemonic ideology, provides programs immersed in American culture. From his research on bilingualism in American education, Ramsey (2010) found that unlike many countries, American secondary institutions have not emphasized learning multiple languages; thereby, creating a small population of American students who are minimally bilingual. At the post-secondary level, Zeichner (1991) who conducted a study on teaching preparation programs suggested that a limited amount of American universities and colleges offer programs that equip graduates to transition into multicultural settings particularly in teacher preparation programs.
Economic and political pressures are bringing a greater awareness of the lack of preparedness for cultural diversity in the American educational system. Policymakers and legislators cite comparisons between American students and those from other developed countries that indicate, not only a general pattern of lower performance on international academic assessments, but significant levels of lower academic performance by specific culturally and/or racially identified subpopulations of U.S. students. For instance, a comparison of the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematic results of fourth and eighth grade students indicated achievement gaps between various ethnic groups (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2008). Seven of the 20 states indicated significantly large achievement gaps in mathematics between white and black students while six of 14 states showed significantly large achievement gaps in mathematics between white and Hispanic students (NECS, 2008). The Center on Educational Policy (2010) also added from their analysis of NAEP trends that there are mathematic and reading achievement gaps between Black, Hispanic, and White students in the United States.

With the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) and other international academic assessment results, political leaders justify their reasons for educational reform by increasing expectations for educational leaders to make the necessary changes in schools that will increase the United States’ standing in the global market. Moreover, reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are setting higher standards for public education in addressing the achievement gaps between subculture populations as a significant
strategy to achieve better overall academic achievement comparisons with other major
developed world economies.

The cultural shifts in U.S. demographics and the increased attention to
international attainment comparisons work together to shape a strong U.S. policy agenda
for improved student outcomes in general, and reduced achievement gaps in particular.
As culturally diverse classrooms become more common, established whole class
instructional strategies are increasingly challenged. The emphasis on the achievement of
individual groups has evolved into the focus on achievement growth of every student
under the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative under the American Recovery and
Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Furthermore, the state
adoptions of legislation regarding the educator effectiveness based on the academic
growth of all students such as Michigan (Revised School Code Act 451 of 1976,
§380.1249 (2011)) and Tennessee (First to the Top Act of 2010) require educators to pay
specific attention to the underachievement of individual students and entire racial,
cultural, or economic subgroups. Under the recent federal policy changes, states are
concerned with evidence of achievement and learning growth of every student in public
schools. As an ultimate level of accountability for individual student achievement,
decisions for evaluation, retention, promotion and, in part, compensation of both teachers
and administrators in schools that distribute Title I and ARRA funding are based on the
growth in learning for each student they serve.

The high stakes accountability for achievement status and learning growth for
each student leads to a greater emphasis on the need for differentiated strategies for
teaching. While there are many learner characteristics that call for differentiated
instructional strategies, cultural differences is one of those characteristics that is ignored in U.S. schools. Cushner (1990) stressed that rarely do schools achieve the main goal of “success for all” because teachers fail to consider the cross-cultural context in which they teach. Johnson and Protheroe (2003) also added from their research on culture and learning that culture affects learning patterns through its influence on cognition, language use, motivation, attitudes, and communication. In essence, the essential preface of assessing and accessing what students already know takes on additional dimensions when a teacher works with students whose cultural backgrounds are diverse and, perhaps, different from that of the teacher. For this reason, acculturating teachers to their students’ cultural backgrounds may bring about greater opportunities for learning by creating more opportunities for students to bring their own cultural background and experiences into the learning process.

Additionally, educating teachers on the cultural diversity may increase both students appreciation for those differences and their ability to attain more globalized aspects of academic achievement and preparation. Spurred by the rising competition with China and India, the United States has an increased awareness of globalization issues. Employers in both the public and private sectors of the U.S. economy have increased interest in hiring employees with multi-cultural backgrounds, experiences, and tools (such as language). This change in mindset has also influenced the U.S. educational system by developing more strategies to accommodate the cultural diversity represented in schools and increase multicultural experiences for students through web-based engagements (Hung & Khine, 2006). Houlihan (2005) stressed that as American educators expand their international knowledge, they must prepare both students and
teachers for the Global Age through the integration of global themes into curriculum and the provision of strategies to implement it. From examining the increased activity between globalization and education, Suarez-Orozco (2005) concluded that global competition coupled with higher levels of migration have dramatically increased the probability for children to face a life of working, networking, and living with others from different national, linguistic, religious, and racial backgrounds. Awareness of the United States’ dependence on other countries places more significance on preparing students to be global citizens.

American International Schools

Although the focal point of education is moving toward cultural awareness and globalization, culturally diverse classrooms are not necessarily a new phenomenon in all types of American schools. The majority of investigations on diversity issues in American education focus on the public and private school sectors in the United States. However, the phenomenon of culturally diverse classrooms has been present in American international schools for decades. Simpson and Duke (2000) investigated the structures of American international schools around the world and found that teachers in international classrooms can have as many as 30 nationalities represented by the student body. While these schools may be extreme cases, diversity is very common among most schools and requires teachers and students to adjust to the cultural differences. For this reason, American international schools may provide a fertile environment to study the process of acculturation that U.S. trained teachers experience as they adapt to teaching
environments where the levels of student cultural diversity are significantly greater than the typical U.S. public school.

While prior to the influence of NCLB and RTTT, U.S. teachers could ignore the need for adapting instruction to the cultural backgrounds of students, teachers hired to teach in American international schools must make adaptations to cultural differences in order to be successful (Mohan, 2009; Hayden & Thompson, 2000). Thus, these teachers must consider the ways in which culture affects teaching practices. In a narrative about her cross-cultural teaching experience with the American Peace Corp, Swezy (1997) captured the phenomenon of cross-cultural adjustments. Despite intensive teacher training, she encountered several challenges while teaching in a Kazakhstani school that transformed her perspective on her teaching practices. She chronicled her experience in the following way:

I could never get used to the students all standing up as I entered the classroom – something they did for all teachers as a sign of respect. And they may not have gotten used to my casual approach, sometimes sitting on my desk and rearranging the tables so that we faced each other…. In my first year, I had difficulty with the whispering and shouting of answers among students, which to my mind bordered on cheating. I soon discovered an unwritten code dictated by the culture – smarter kids were required to help struggling classmates…. In the second year, I realized that I would not be able to change their ways. I allowed them to freely exchange answers – but only during regular class time. During tests, I pushed the students farther apart and kept a watchful eye on them (p. 82).
The American teacher’s account depicts a common conflict between a teacher from an individualistic culture and students from a collectivistic society. This experience is a common phenomenon when educators interact with other cultures. When these moments occur, enriching opportunities of teaching and learning can develop if an educator appropriately responds to the differences. If Swezy (1997) failed to be flexible, she would have risked losing the respect of her students who might have perceived that their teacher considers her “American” conduct as being superior to their own. Making changes in her perceptions and teaching strategies, the teacher enabled students to see her openness to their culture, and this openness opened vital communication channels between teacher and students. Moreover, her willingness to recognize and adapt to the students’ cultural norms, subdued the ethnocentricity that often Americans are noted for displaying in international contexts. This could play a major role in developing the trust and mutual respect that need to occur between student and teacher in order to facilitate learning (Willie, 2000).

Cross-cultural communication scenarios like this are one of many that occur frequently in the world of international education. As teachers encounter these cross-cultural experiences, they have the opportunity to develop strategies in instruction and classroom management that blend the expectations of the teachers and students; thereby, opening the door to mutually constructive educational experiences.

Overview of Study

As the United States responds to multicultural settings, studying international teachers who experience highly diverse situations may give additional insight on teaching
practices in culturally diverse situations. In light of these unexplored cross-cultural phenomena, this study examined the cultural adaptations that American teachers experience in international schools located outside of their home or native country. In this section, an overview of the study will explain the problem statement followed by the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. A description of the study’s methodology as well as the limitations and delimitations will conclude the chapter.

Statement of Problem

With an increasingly diverse society, there is a need for schools to adjust to this change. The heightened awareness of accountability for student achievement has left teachers looking for ways to respond effectively to diversity so that all students’ needs are met. This intensifies the need for not only differentiated instruction, but also greater understanding of the interplay between culture and learning and the appropriate attitudes toward diversity.

Despite current research’s limited focus on the role of culture in the age of accountability, past research provides a framework for educators to consider the cultural factors of learning. Literature indicates that these factors originate in the home and influence the attitudes and behaviors of students at school. From the teacher’s perspective, research suggests that the more knowledge they have about the cultural backgrounds from their students and the community; the better relations and support they receive in educating their students.
Among these studies are significant frameworks for learning styles and culturally responsive pedagogy, which serve as springboards for current research on cultural aspects of education. Although not all scholars embrace learning style research, some researchers use the frameworks generated from prominent studies to add to literature on the learning behaviors of various demographic groups. The findings from these studies assist educators in making informed decisions on strategies that meet the learning needs of all students rather than just certain groups of students. Similarly, culturally responsive pedagogy, introduced by prominent researchers such as Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1992), investigated the practices of teachers in culturally diverse classroom settings. Their studies spurred other researchers to investigate further practices of these teachers in areas such as classroom instruction and management.

Furthermore, international studies enlighten readers on cross-cultural issues surrounding the fields of business, healthcare, and education. Among the areas of research, scholars explored the cultural traits between nationalities, communication styles of intercultural and cultural groups, and acculturation process of expatriates. In education, these studies provide details of the cross-cultural phenomenon as it most commonly applied to teachers and students.

Literature pertaining to cultural issues and education provide relevant data for educators to apply to their teaching practices. However, there remain gaps in the literature that open opportunities for continued research this is field of education. In particular, the majority of studies on culturally informed decision-making in teaching practices give descriptions of effective teaching practices used with various ethnic groups
Located in American public and private schools. These studies reflect experiences where both the teacher and students are acclimated to the culture of the United States.

Literature also explores the conflicts and adjustments that educators experience with students of different cultural heritages than the teacher. Several pieces of non-Western literature describe the cultural adjustments by educators in non-Western institutions. While informative, these studies focus on the descriptions of the cultural adaptations of non-American teachers in non-American school systems. Likewise, several studies describe the accounts of American educators who experience cultural conflict and adjustments in international institutions. However, these studies explore the experiences at the post-secondary level.

Despite the insightful findings of literature on culturally-adaptations of teachers in cross-cultural and ethnic situations, limited research investigates how international teachers respond to their culturally diverse settings in American schools abroad. Specifically, few studies describe the challenges and adjustments to cultural diversity these teachers make in their community and schools when they are teaching abroad. Because of the limited numbers of studies, scholars have not fully harvested the experiences of American international educators as a source of insight into the actual cultural adaptation process. More specifically, researchers have not captured the changes in attitudes and practices that teachers undergo as they adapt to a diverse school environment where their culture is not the dominant culture of the school or community. In the school, failure to make changes conflicts with the expectation for all cultures to be recognized and addressed in shaping classroom instruction.
Purpose of Study

Knowledge draws from experiences. As educators face challenges in their professional lives, they often seek resolutions or advice from those who have prior experiences in dealing with similar challenges. When research systematically captures educators’ lived experiences with specific phenomena, repeated patterns in the findings provide research-based practices that may generate solutions to the issues or phenomena. Teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds is one phenomenon, among many, that teachers experience in today’s growing globalized classrooms. Whether teachers serve significant international student populations or not, diverse cultural backgrounds are increasing phenomena, teachers encounter in classrooms across the United States.

Teachers serving in American international schools can be of particular interest to researchers who wish to study how teachers experience and respond to multicultural teaching environments, because these schools are, by design, multicultural. Furthermore, U.S. trained teachers may experience the phenomenon of teaching in multicultural contexts at a heightened level, since they are often living and teaching in a school with cultural context much different than their own. Thus, U.S trained educators who teach in American international schools could be an instrumental source of understanding the phenomenon of multicultural teaching experience. Most of the existing research literature, however, examines the multicultural teaching experience through the lens of U.S. public and private schools.

This study sought to expand the understanding of teacher’s experience in multicultural settings, by examining the experiences U.S. trained teachers who work as expatriates teaching in American international schools abroad. This study further sought
to determine what can be learned from these teachers’ experiences with multicultural teaching. This new knowledge might add to the broader understanding of how teachers reconcile the differences between their culture and their students’ cultures in order to create a learning environment where cultural differences contribute to rather than detract from students’ success. This phenomenological study was designed to capture the lived experiences of U.S. trained teachers who have migrated to other countries to serve as teachers in American international schools. The study described these teachers’ experiences adapting to their new cultural environment, to their new multi-cultural school, and to the work of teaching a classroom of culturally diverse students. This study also described the cultural challenges and the ways participants describe responding to those challenges and making adjustments in an international school located outside of their native culture with students who have predominately different cultural backgrounds than the teacher.

Research Questions

While emerging research increases knowledge of the role culture plays in education, few studies describe the international teacher accounts of cultural encounters they face in classrooms. This study sought to investigate the overarching question: In what ways do U.S. trained educators teaching in American international schools abroad experience and respond to cultural adjustments? The following sub-questions assisted in achieving a deeper exploration of these teachers’ experiences and the ways they make meaning of those experiences:
1. How do the teachers describe their experiences adjusting to both the culture of the country or region where the school is located and the culture of the school itself after being in that school for at least a year?

2. What adjustments do they describe to living and working in the new country?

3. What adjustments do they describe in adapting to their school?

4. What adjustments do they describe making to the ways in which they structure their classroom and engage with students?

5. How have these teachers’ experiences adapting to new international school cultures impacted the ways they think about and go about their work as teachers?

Significance of Study

The findings from this study may add to the body of literature on culture and education. Johnson and Protheroe (2003) noted in their study, “When cognitive researchers take the additional step of applying their findings to make suggestions for practice and instructional strategies, the resource for educators is even richer” (p. 31). Taking the data from the experiences of specific population of teachers included in this study may lead to a better understanding of the challenges teachers encounter when adapting to cultural differences and the strategies they use to be more effective in multicultural teaching and learning contexts. These understandings may be useful to inform practice for school leaders and teachers in American schools in both the national and international context.
If the United States continues to emphasize globalization, educators must broaden our educational perspectives and techniques to accommodate it. Schools in the U.S. are as diverse as are the communities in which they operate. As a result, one of the prevailing American educational ideals remains the notion of local control even with the proliferation of federal and state policy mandates. “Clearly, one of the most pressing challenges facing the U.S. education system today is to maintain the American ideal of local control while producing a national work force that is prepared for global competition” (Houlihan, 2005, p. 36). Local control, however, does not necessarily mean provincialism about what can be learned about educating students outside the borders of the U.S. and outside of any one dominant culture within the U.S. In fact, some educational practitioners support the idea that the United States can benefit from non-Western pedagogy. Koki (1998), in his study of culture and learning with groups in the Pacific island region, noted that non-Western methods of instruction such as apprenticeships and cooperative learning models are becoming more popular in American schools. There are also formalized systems to assist American schools in pursuing an international approach to education through such programs such as the International Baccalaureate Program (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top mandates and incentives triggered a sense of urgency for educators to examine and pursue instructional practices that lead to improvement in student achievement especially with minority student populations. Through close examination, teachers are discovering that the differences between the teacher and students cultural backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings and ineffective instruction. This reality has caused educators to abandon past teaching practices and
pursue other research-based strategies shown to be effective in diverse situations. One example of this phenomenon occurred when Payne (1996) presented her framework for working with those in poverty, educators quickly digested the principles in hopes to better instruct diverse student groups. The findings of this study may provide educators with relevant principles on identifying and responding to diversity and developing practices that reflect these principles in multicultural settings. Additionally, this study may also provide important insights about what a teacher experiences when adjusting to cultural differences. These insights may be useful in planning professional development to assist teachers in adopting a broader pedagogical repertoire and a more fully developed cultural awareness.

Because of technological advances, globalization is changing countries with one distinct national culture to become one with a hybrid of cultures. This blending of cultures requires educational systems not only to prepare students to be productive citizens, but also global-minded citizens. It also requires educators who teach these students to be global-minded thinkers. The findings of this study may educate teachers on ways to develop and acclimate to an internationalized classroom of global citizens.

The findings also may benefit international school organizations and higher education programs with their teacher preparation programs. This study may provide international school organizations with principles that add to their discernment on evaluating orientation and professional development programs for teachers. Likewise, the findings of this study may provide higher education programs with added direction in preparing more globalized teachers.
Methodology Overview

Selecting the methodological process is foundational in accurately responding to the research questions in this study. Misapplying methodology may not only jeopardize the trustworthiness of the study, but also may violate ethical research practices. The methods and procedures used in the study replicate other similar studies in the educational field.

The focus of this study sought to describe the culturally shaped experiences and culturally guided teaching practices of U.S. trained teachers who serve in American international schools. The researcher used a phenomenological study to capture the accounts of teachers who serve in American international schools as they face challenges and make adjustments in teaching practices when working with students with different cultural heritages. Moreover, this study sought to describe the meaning that the teachers construct from their adjustment to the cultural differences experienced inside and outside of their schools. When the purpose of a study is to examine the lived experiences and the meaning constructed from the experiences, a phenomenology is the most suitable approach to the study (Giorgi, 1997).

The collection of data consisted of interviewing teachers in American international schools and collecting artifacts that provide further descriptions of the participants’ adjustments to multicultural settings. A purposive sampling was the method used in the selection of participants. After collecting the data, the researchers used a hybrid analysis consisting of the recommended stages of Marshall and Rossman (2006) and the interpretative phenomenological analysis of Smith (2011).
Limitations and Delimitations

There were limitations to this research study. Limited funding for this research restricted the researcher’s accessibility to teachers. Therefore, all communication for the interviews took place by phone and Skype. While these methods worked fairly well, a few technological issues required follow up by emails. Furthermore, although the researcher sent invitations to participate in the study to many international school organizations, only teachers from faith-based organizations responded to the invitations.

There were also delimitations to this study. Because culture affects all individuals differently, it is impossible to generalize the responses to cultural conflict that would appropriately fit every country and individual. This study was confined to one region and a small sample size of international schools with similar educational programs. To broaden the sample size, both elementary and secondary teachers were participants in this study. Therefore, this study focuses on international teachers affiliated with faith-based organizations.

Conceptual Framework

In the field of educational research, consideration to various functions is necessary to fully understand the interaction between teachers and students. In this study, the researcher viewed the teacher’s instructional methods, classroom management, and community relations through a cultural lens. The conceptual framework for this study depicts the intent of this study to examine the relationship between cultural dynamics in an international school setting and the teaching practices of the teachers (see Appendix A).
There are several considerations in a research study when exploring a teacher’s cultural experience in an American international school. In the case of this study, the focus is on U.S. trained teachers who serve in an American international school abroad for minimally one year. While American international schools may use an American system of education including curriculum and grade level structures, they also share characteristics of the host country’s culture. Often, areas as diverse as the host country’s governmental regulations on education and labor shape the policies and procedures of the school (Simpson & Duke, 2000). Countries with official national religions may require the international school to follow religious practices such as recognizing religious holidays or implementing religion classes into the day (Simpson & Duke, 2000). Regulations may also require international schools to hire a certain percentage of nationals as part of the instructional and non-instructional staff (Simpson & Duke, 2000). Clearly, an international school is not isolated completely from their host country’s culture.

The cultural composition of students in international schools is complex and unique with each school. Typically, the student population consists of two main groups: nationals and expatriates. The nationals are a group of students who attend most often because parents want their children to get a valued American education. The expatriates constitute a second group of students. Expatriates are students who live outside of their native country often because of parents working abroad. Most often, expatriates are referred to as “Third Culture Kids” (TCKs) because they do not possess the pure cultural heritage of their native country, but rather a blending of multiple cultures creating a third
culture (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). Thus, American expatriate students become more internationalized and less Americanized.

Another part of the cultural fusion in international schools is the culture of the teacher. American international teachers most often receive their education from American colleges or universities, which train them in Western pedagogical practices. New American international teachers bring perceptions and practices that reflect their American cultural heritage. Teachers use many practices in educating their students. Educational researchers and practitioners identify key teaching practices as essential to stimulate student achievement (Pickering, Pollock, & Marzano, 2001; Danielson, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the investigation explored the teaching practices of instruction, classroom management, and parent and community relations.

As international teachers adjust their teaching practices according to the cultures represented in their classrooms, they model forms of culturally-guided teaching practices vital in international education. A failure to adjust their practices to the cultures within the classroom results in cultural discontinuity and ineffectiveness. This study examined how American international teachers respond to multiculturalism and how it reflected in their teaching practices.

Definition of Terms

In order for readers and researcher to share the same conceptualization of key terms, the following section provides a list of key terms and definitions used in this study:
Acculturation. The phenomenon that occurs when two groups from different cultures come into continuous contact resulting in subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of one or both groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936).

Culture. Culture is defined as “the system of beliefs, values, and ways of knowing that guide communities of people in their daily lives” (Trumbell, 2005, p. 35). It addresses how an individual learns, not what an individual learns (Johnson & Protheroe, 2003).

Culturally competence. The ability to understand how culture influences an individual’s beliefs and behavior and to effectively interact with other cultural groups through adjustments personally and professionally. Specifically in education, cultural competence is the ability of a teacher to effectively instruct students with cultural backgrounds different than his or her own. Student cultures are considered in their teaching practices.

Cultural dimension. A trait of culture that is measurable. Hofstede (2001) introduced cultural dimensions in an extensive study on cultural traits of various countries.

Expatriate students. Students who live in a culture outside of their native culture.

Individualism and Collectivism. This cultural dimension measures the degree of which individuals look after themselves or stays integrated in groups (Hofstede, 2001).

Indulgence. The cultural dimension of indulgence describes the extent that a culture views gratification of needs. Cultures with high indulgence allow gratification of human drive while cultures with low indulgence suppress gratification with strict social norms (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).
International schools. International schools developed after World War II when trade and commerce extended into other countries. This growth required families to move abroad without adequate educational systems for their children leading to the establishment of international schools. Although the concept of international schools historically is simplistic, defining them is complex because of the diverse composition (Cambridge, 2002). To complicate defining international schools, there are no guidelines or requirements to be international school. For this study, American international schools are schools outside of the United States that host national and expatriate students. Additionally, their structure consists of an American program of study consisting of an American curriculum.

Long and short-term orientation. This cultural dimension refers to the degree that a culture accepts delayed gratification of their social, emotion, and physical needs (Hofstede, 2001). In short-term orientation cultures, leisure time is important and persistence is not.

Masculinity and femininity. In this cultural dimension, masculinity refers to “the distribution of emotional roles between genders” (Hofstede, 2001, p. xx). Hofstede noted that while women’s values minimally vary between societies, men’s values differed from country to country. On the spectrum, cultures with a high masculinity indices are assertive and competitive while cultures with low masculinity indices are similar to the women’s values of modest and caring.

Monochronic and polychronic. This cultural trait describes a culture’s perception of time. Monochronic cultures are time-oriented and structured while polychromic cultures are not bound to time and prefer less structure.
**National students.** In cross-cultural educational settings, students from the school’s host country are national students. They attend international schools to broaden their knowledge of different educational systems.

**Power distance.** The power distance cultural dimension describes the degree of which lower levels in a hierarchy expect inequality to exist between them and those higher in the hierarchy (Hofstede, 2001). Countries with lower power distance indices accept an egalitarian society while those with higher power distance indices accept a hierarchy system.

**Third Culture Kids (TCKs).** In this study, third-culture kids are defines as individuals who, having spent a significant part of the developmental years in a culture other than the parents' culture, develop a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001). Pollock and VanReken (2001) studied TCKs and found that they do not fit in with their host country or native cultures. Their sense of belonging came from other TCKs.

**Uncertainty avoidance.** Hofstede (2001) described the uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension as the degree that cultures feel comfortable with unstructured situations. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance attempt to avoid uncertain situations by having rigid laws and policies. On the other hand, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance tend to be more open about differing opinions and beliefs.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cultural Research

Beyond the intrigue of anthropologists, culture, as a concept, now sparks the interest of educational practitioners because of its function as a potential variable in student achievement. As society increasingly diversifies, so does the demographics of student populations in elementary, secondary, and higher education settings in the United States. This phenomenon spurs educational scholars to explore culture as a formative force in education.

As cultural research emerges from its anthropological roots to influence other fields like education, scholars developed definitions of culture that are appropriate for their respective fields of study. In the field of business, Hofstede (1984) defined culture as a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes groups in society from others. A noted sociological scholar, Parson (1949), described culture as patterns relative to human action and behavior passed on from generation to generation. From his comprehensive work in conflict resolution, Lederach (1995) defined culture as knowledge and schemes shared by groups of people used for interpreting and perceiving things around them. From their study of the utilization of culture in mental health programs, Guarnaccia and Rodriguez (1996) concisely defined culture as a composite of group values, norms, beliefs, and experiences as well as individual experiences. Even in the field of education, scholars contribute to the attempts to define this complex term. Banks and Banks-McGee (1989) worked over forty years researched multiculturalism in
education. From their work, they described culture as the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives of people about tangible elements (Banks & Banks-McGee, 1989).

On a small scale, culture develops through interactions of individuals in small groups such as the family structure. When Johnson and Protheroe (2003) studied culture and learning, they defined culture from an individual’s perspective. In their definition, culture is how an individual learns, not what an individual learns (Johnson and Protheroe, 2003). On a larger scale, culture also develops through the interaction of large group structures such as regions and countries. Some researchers defined culture from this broader context. For example, Trumbell (2005), who researched the relationship between language and learning described culture as “the system of beliefs, values, and ways of knowing that guide communities of people in their daily lives” (p. 35).

When approaching culture, researchers must consider the role of culture in both the small and large contexts. Beliefs, values, and norms develop in the home environment between family members. The home environment is often the first stage of socialization that children experience through their interactions with family members. Siblings develop norms and codes of conduct as they communicate and play with each other. Eventually, children broaden their social group to include others outside of their families. The broadened interaction with others generates new norms for each respective group. This process of developing cultures at different socialization levels expand and eventually lead to regional and national cultures.

Over the last few decades, literature answers many questions about the role of culture in areas such as health care, business, and education. This review of literature
describes the studies of culture at the home, school, and community levels as it relates to education. The first section of the review will describe what research studies say about the home culture and its relation to student achievement. The second section details what research reveals about cultural issues at the school level including learning styles, cultural dimensions in schools, and teaching practices. Following the cultural factors at the school level, the review will describe the research work that addresses communal factors of culture in education. In the concluding section, a description of existing research studies on cross-cultural experiences of students and teachers will explain the challenges and meanings derived from their cross-cultural interactions.

Home-Related Cultural Variables in Learning

Educational researchers increasingly contribute new data to literature about sociological factors in education. One area that researchers explore is how the home environment affects student success in school. Literature reveals that various home-related variables correlate to student achievement and ambitions.

Home Environment Variable

Many prominent studies indicate correlations between home influences with the academic success of students. In one particular study by Marzano (2001a), he compared several studies that focused on factors leading to student achievement at the school, teacher, and student levels. In the meta-analysis, several student, teacher, and school factors overlapped between studies that indicated positive correlations with student achievement. Marzano (2001a) found that one particular factor common among several
studies was the home environment in which he concluded as “a more powerful predictor of student achievement than other socioeconomic status factors” (p. 77).

Marzano’s conclusion was not the first time that researchers indicated strong correlations between the home environment and student achievement. Prior to Marzano’s meta-analysis, two prominent large-scaled studies explored what factors contribute to student achievement in the United States and the United Kingdom. Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield, and York (1966) surveyed nearly 600,000 students and 60,000 teachers in U.S. schools about their perceptions of education and student achievement. The summary of their findings indicated that student achievement was strongly associated with the social dynamics of school, student perception of control over their life, the verbal skills of teachers, and the influence of the home environment (Coleman et al., 1966). They specifically noted that the student’s background and socioeconomic status greatly influenced student achievement more so than the school expenditures on students (Coleman et. al., 1966). The study indicated that the home culture had a greater impact on children’s academic success than the quality of their school.

During the development of the Coleman Report (1966), the Central Advisory Council of England conducted a large-scaled study exploring the student achievement factors in the British school system (Plowden, 1967). The Plowden Report surveyed 3000 British students on their perceptions of what contributed to student achievement. Contrary to the national belief, the study indicated that focusing on the needs of the children was more significant to their success than the educational process. Plowden (1967) went on to note that the influences of the home environment correlated with
Parental Variables

The Coleman Report (1966) and the Plowden Report (1967) led the way for other studies in exploring specific variables in the home environment that correlate to student achievement. As researchers continued to dig further, studies focused on the kinds of home environment factors with specific attention to parental variables. Literature describes how parental variables such as educational background, academic expectations, and socioeconomic status affect children’s perceptions of education, career aspirations, and academic performances in school.

Parental Role in Student Learning

In one particular study, Cohen (1987) focused on the parental influences, referred to as modelers and definers, on educational attainment and student achievement. Cohen (1987) explained that as a modeler, parents lead by example when they achieve certain levels of education. He also described a definer to be parents that set the expectation for what level their children should reach (Cohen, 1987). Using I.Q. scores and grade point averages to define student achievement, the findings of this 15-year study showed definers as having a stronger correlation with their children’s educational aspirations and attainment (Cohen, 1987). However, data also suggested that parental modeling had a greater association with educational aspirations and attainment with females than males.
Additionally, there were stronger correlations with white-collar families than with blue-collar with student achievement (Cohen, 1987).

Parental Teaching Styles

Parents use a variety of teaching strategies especially in the formidable years of their children. In a study on distancing teaching strategies, the researchers examined parental actions ranging from demonstration to evaluation and generalization on a child’s ability to construct mental images of concrete objects (Sigel, Stinson, & Kim, 1993). Sigel et al. (1993) concluded in their findings that when higher levels of distancing strategies such as generalizations are used with children, they tend to be better in representational thinking than the children whose parents used lower levels of distance strategies.

Wang, Bernas, and Eberhard (2005) examined the relationship between the maternal teaching styles and their children’s representational competence in four communities in the United States and China where parenting styles and educational attitudes are vastly different. The study showed that American children do better with representational skills from high distance teaching strategies compared to the Chinese while Hutterite children benefit from low distance teaching styles compared to Native American children (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005). Thus, the development of children’s representational competence is not as dependent on the distancing teaching styles as it is on the amount of interaction between the parents and their children (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005). Furthermore, the researchers concluded from the study that teachers should familiarize themselves with the cultural beliefs of childrearing and
education and adjust the teaching styles to suit the needs of the students (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005).

Parental Expectations

Most often, parents have ambitions for their child’s educational and career pursuits. This phenomenon spurred researchers to examine the relationship between parental expectations and student achievement between various demographic variables. Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997) investigated the parental beliefs and behaviors of economically disadvantaged African American students to determine if it related to their children’s academic achievement. The overall findings of the study showed that when parents believed their children can go to college and provided the supportive behavior such as assisting with homework and reading to their child, the children showed higher success on math and reading scores (Halle et al., 1997). Several additional studies indicated strong correlations between high student achievement and high parental expectations (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994; Marjoribanks, 1988; Scott-Jones, 1984).

Parental Educational History

Along with teaching styles and expectations, parents also influence their child academic progress through variables such as educational background. When Fraser, Walberg, Welch, and Hattie (1987) investigated factors that affect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning specifically in the area of science, they found the higher the level of education of the parent; the better their children performed in science.
Similarly, Wang, Haertel, & Walberg (1993) conducted a meta-analysis of several studies focusing on the elements of student learning. In the analysis, Wang et al. (1993) found that each study indicated a strong correlation between parents’ educational backgrounds with increased academic achievement of their children. Likewise, Davis-Kean (2005) found in a study of over 850 preteens that their parents’ years of education had a positive association with their children’s literacy rate.

Parenting Styles

In addition to the parental influences of educational expectations and background, studies suggest that parenting styles used with children affect student learning. Parenting style research explores student achievement using several variables including nationalities, socioeconomic status, and gender. Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraileigh (1987) conducted a study of 7836 high school students in San Francisco to find if there were some correlations between the permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles with student performance. The study suggested that the authoritarian parenting style was negatively associated with grades while authoritative parenting styles had a more positive association with higher grades (Dornbusch et al., 1987). The students whose parents practiced a pure authoritative parenting style had the highest mean scores while students whose parents blended of parenting styles had the lowest mean scores (Dornbusch et al., 1987).

Conversely, Lam, Lau, and Leung (1998) conducted a comparative study that suggested that authoritative parenting styles had negative correlations to student achievement. The study categorized authoritative and authoritarian parent styles in to the
areas of general matters and academic matters. The researchers focused on American, Chinese, and Australian students and their self-reported grades. Lam, Lau, and Leung (1998) reported that increased achievement was positively associated with the general authoritarian parenting style of the Chinese students as well as American and Australian students whose parents had no college education. In comparing the academic styles of parenting, academic authoritarian styles for all three groups had negative correlations with academic achievement (Lam, Lau, & Leung, 1998). Similarly, Chen, Dong, and Zhou (1997) found that the authoritarian parenting style negatively associated with student achievement of their 304 Chinese students.

**Parental Economic Status**

While many studies describe the impact that a parent’s expectations and modeling have on their child’s academic success, additional studies show other influential factors that relate to the home environment and student success in school. From her research on generational poverty, Payne (2006) identified beliefs and norms shared within this socioeconomic group. These characteristics tend to conflict with the norms of schools, which are based often on middle socioeconomic beliefs (Payne, 2006).

While many educators are familiar with the generational poverty framework developed by Payne (2006), other studies exist that indicate other socioeconomic factors that attribute to student achievement. For instance, Alexander, Entwisle, and Bedinger (1994) explored a child’s ability to recall their grades from the previous year and to project their grades for the end of their current marking period using elementary students in Baltimore. In the study, they considered several demographic factors that potentially
influenced grade recall and projections. From the findings, Alexander et al. (1994) indicated that lower socioeconomic students whose parents had less education showed greater discrepancies between their recalled and actual grade from the previous year. Data also suggested that as parental incomes increased, so did the academic achievement of their children (Alexander et al., 1994). Likewise, children of parents with lower income earnings and educational levels had weaker correlations with high academic achievement (Alexander et al., 1994).

In a study on cognitive development, Yeung, Linver, and Brooks-Gunn (2002) analyzed data sets from the longitudinal studies, Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the Child Development Supplement. The study looked at the income level and stability of the parent and the academic achievement of their children ranging in ages from three to five years old. From the study, data suggested that children coming from higher income earning families scored higher cognitive tests (Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). When analyzing the data, they attributed this association to the family’s ability to provide a stimulating learning environment at home (Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002).

Conducting a longitudinal study of 174 children over several years, Jimerson, Egelan, and Teo (1999) examined the effects of certain variables such as socioeconomic status, home environment, parent involvement, and special education services on student performance over a span of years. In the study, the findings suggested that the quality of home environment, parent involvement, and socioeconomic status were positively associated with improved student achievement. Similarly, other studies indicated a positive association between parental income and successful student performance of
African American elementary students (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997) and African American and Latino elementary students (Mistry, Vandewater, Houston, & McLoyd, 2002).

On the smallest level, culture forms within the home environment. Parents or caregivers play an influential role in preparing children for education. Literature supports this assertion with many studies that investigate student achievement and its relation to different home variables such as parental teaching styles and educational expectations. Studies also indicate that the income level of parents also correlate with children’s academic performance. These studies along with many other studies describe the factors at the most basic level of cultural development that molds the learning behaviors of students.

School-Related Cultural Variables in Learning

Schools are the center of community culture and socialization. Often, they are the first places where children experience socialization in large group settings. As students enter the classroom, they bring their perceptions and attitudes about education and, more specifically, about learning. This conglomeration of beliefs, norms, and values make it a fertile area for exploring how group cultures affect student achievement and behavior. In educational research, many investigators construct theories of the adult and child learning processes. Further studies apply these principles to formulate instructional and learning frameworks. Although some literature describes learning behaviors and effective instructional practices, few studies examine these elements through a cultural lens. The first section will describe existing learning style research. In the second section, a
description will be given of studies that explore the learning behaviors of various national and ethnic cultures. In the third section, a review of studies will detail research, which explore major cultural characteristics within the student-teacher interaction. The last section will present studies that examine the culturally responsive or relevant research, which describe effective teaching practices of teachers in culturally diverse settings.

Learning Styles

Understanding the leaner is a vital component in differentiated instruction (Smutney, 2003). Part of knowing the learner requires teachers to understand the learning behaviors of their students and design instructional strategies that align with the learning styles. While unique to individuals, cognitive strategies, which develop through socialization, may be similar among various groups based on variables such as age, gender, and nationality (Barmeyer, 2004). These unique learning patterns inspire researchers to examine the way people acquire and retain information. Dunn and Dunn (1979) noted from their learning styles research that if educators apply instructional strategies that complement their students’ learning styles, it motivates students and increase the opportunities for student success.

Learning Style Models

Kolb (1976), a leading researcher with learning styles, developed a model based on four types of learners: convergent learners, divergent learners, assimilators, and accommodators. While convergent learners benefit from abstract concepts and active experimenting, divergent learners find success with concrete concepts and reflective
observation. In addition, accommodators benefit from concrete concepts and active experimenting while assimilators find success with abstract concepts and reflective observation. Using these types of learners, Kolb (1976) developed the Learning Styles Inventory that many use in learning style research.

Other researchers developed models based on their work with learning styles. From their research, Honey and Mumford (1982) developed the Learning Style Questionnaire that categorized learners as activists, reflectors, theorists, or pragmatists. Canfield (1992) also created a learning style instrument that he named the Canfield Learning Style, which identifies four learning dimensions: conditions for learning, area of interest, mode of learning, and performance expectations. Just as Kolb, these instruments are widely used among researchers today.

Cross-Cultural Learning Behaviors

Literature on cognitive styles often disaggregates learning behaviors by gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. However, other studies suggest that learning behaviors vary among national cultures. These studies bring additional insight on the cognitive patterns of acquiring and processing concepts by people from various regions.

Surveying college students, Chu and Nakamura (2010) investigated the similarities and differences of learning styles of Japanese and Taiwanese students at the same academic proficiency level. From the study, the findings indicated several distinctions in learning styles of the two national groups. Taiwanese students preferred their teachers to point out errors for them while Japanese students preferred their teachers giving them the opportunity to find errors (Chu & Nakamura, 2010). The researchers
also found that Japanese students preferred to learn individually while Taiwanese preferred to group learning (Chu & Nakamura, 2010). On the other hand, both groups expected teachers to teach them every detail leaving no room for ambiguity (Chu & Nakamura, 2010). From this study, it suggests both Taiwanese and Japanese students possess learning characteristics that are different from Western students’ learning styles (Chu & Nakamura, 2010).

Similarly, De Vita (2001) surveyed business students on the learning dimensions of active-reflexive, sensing-intuitive, visual-verbal, and sequential-global. British and international students comprised the two groups surveyed. The findings suggested that the international students had a greater variety of learning strategies than the British students (De Vita, 2001). More specifically, international students preferred a visual style of information perception while British students preferred verbal (De Vita, 2001).

Using the Honey and Mumford (1982) instrument for learning styles, Hayes and Allinson (1988) tested their hypothesis that learning styles differ between cultural groups. Using 95 managers from the United Kingdom, India, and East Africa, Hayes and Allinson (1988) in the categorical learning styles of action and analysis. To ensure that these regions were culturally diverse from each other, Hayes and Allinson (1988) applied the cultural dimensions work of Hofstede (2001). Data suggested that participants from India showed a higher preference for theory building and testing as opposed to intuitive-based exploration while participants from the United Kingdom showed the higher preference for trial and error approaches (Hayes & Allinson, 1988).

Auyeung and Sands (1996) focused on the learning styles of Australian, Taiwanese, and Chinese (Hong Kong) accounting students. Applying the learning style
model developed by Kolb (1976), the groups showed differences in several areas. The data indicated that the Chinese students prefer more abstraction and reflection than the Australian students (Auyeung & Sands, 1996). Additionally, the Taiwanese and Chinese students showed assimilation learning characteristics while the Australian students reflected accommodation traits (Auyeung & Sands, 1996). From the findings, Auyeung and Sands (1996) concluded that the learning styles of the students from Taiwan and Hong Kong reflected that of their collectivist culture while the Australian students showed the behaviors of their individualistic culture.

Similar to Auyeung and Sands, Nguyen (2011) explored Vietnamese, Thai, and Indonesian students who studied English in an Australian university. Through interviewing nine students and two language teachers, Nguyen (2001) indicated that the Thai and Indonesian students preferred working in groups rather than individually. The contrast between the learning styles of the students and professors were the primary concern of the participants (Nguyen, 2011).

Other literature reveals distinct learning style differences between national cultures. Some studies include managers from the United Kingdom, Poland, and Finland (Hill, Puurula, Sitko-Lutek, & Rakowska, 2000), Japanese and American managers (Yazamaki & Kayes, 2004), and German, French, and Canadian business students (Barmeyer, 2004). These studies build support for researchers to continue the exploration of the cross-cultural learning styles.
Cross-Ethnic Learning Behavior

The comparative study of cognitive styles is not bound to national cultures. Rather, educational research indicates distinctive learning traits between subcultures within particular countries. Specifically, some studies conducted in the United States suggest that there are unique learning behaviors found in the American ethnic groups including Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and African American.

Searching for ways to improve counseling programs with Mexican American students, Dunn, Griggs, and Price (1993) compared learning styles of two groups of students in a Texas school district. The first group consisted of 687 immigrants that were first generation elementary students with Mexican American decent. The second group consisted of 70,000 randomly selected Anglo-American elementary students. Each group completed the Learning Style Inventory (Dunn, Dunn, & Price, 1985). From the analysis, Dunn, Dunn, and Price (1985) discovered several areas of significant distinctions with the groups:

- The Mexican American males preferred tactile learning to any other group.
- Mexican American females preferred to learn using different approaches.
- Both the male and female Mexican Americans preferred to learn with peers rather than individually.
- Overall, the Mexican Americans preferred learning in the afternoon and in cool environments to the Anglo Americans.

Irvine and York (2001), prominent researchers in the field of cultural diversity, conducted a comprehensive review of literature on learning styles. Their specific concentration was on literature that focused on the learning characteristics of African,
Hispanic, and Native American studies. From their meta-analysis, Irvine and York (2001) noted the following distinctive learning behaviors of Hispanic students:

- Tendency to be sensitive to other’s opinions;
- Preference group learning and working with others;
- Preference active learning;
- Motivation by extrinsic things;
- Preference of concrete representations.

A limited amount of studies examines the learning styles of Asian American. One study conducted by Park (1997) investigated the auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile learning styles of American students of Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino descents. Students from several secondary schools in Los Angeles completed a questionnaire that focused on the four categorical learning styles by group and individually. The data from the study suggested that the longer the students from Asian descent immersed in the American culture; the more they favored kinesthetic learning. Park (1997) also suggested that Asian American students favored using more hands-on and visual learning strategies. The study also showed that Vietnamese and Filipino Americans prefer small group activities unlike Korean and Chinese Americans (Park, 1997).

One of the largest bodies of learning style literature of American ethnic groups exists with African American students. Over the last four decades, the focus on the learning of African American students has increased significantly resulting in a plethora of information on learning and instruction as it applies to African Americans. From their
Irvine and York (2001) found the following learning characteristics present in African American students:

- Tendency to be field dependent or relational learners;
- Tendency to respond to issues holistically;
- Preference to make inferences;
- Approximation of numbers and space;
- Preference of kinesthetic/active learning activities;
- Preference of social cues over non-social cues.

Willis (1989) found through a synthesis of literature that certain traits exist in African American children learning styles. She grouped the learning style traits from these empirical studies in the categories of social/affective, harmonious, expressive creative, and non-verbal. From the analysis, Willis (1989) extracted the following learning behaviors of African American students:

- Tendency to thrive on social interaction and learning;
- Seek knowledge for practical and utilitarian purposes;
- Preference for a holistic approach to learning experiences;
- Tendency to be adaptive, stylistic, novel, and intuitive;
- Preference for oral expression;
- Preference of nonverbal communication, rhythm, and movement.

Shade (1986) conducted a learning style study that compared the perceptual, intellectual, and social domains of 178 African and Euro American ninth graders. In the study, the researcher noted that the African American students tended to be more
spontaneous, open-minded, and flexible in their perceptions of people, events, and ideas (Shade, 1986). On the other hand, the findings indicated that the Euro-Americans tended to be self-regulating, more independent, and less open-minded (Shade, 1986).

Research provides insightful data about the unique learning characteristics of students. Among this literature, there are studies that make comparisons with the learning styles of national cultures. In addition to cross-cultural groups, there are also student that examine cross-ethnic cultures. Both sets of literature provide insightful data about the distinctiveness of cultural and ethnic groups. However, learning style researchers caution readers to avoid over-generalizing or stereotyping groups (Irvine & York, 2001; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Johnson & Protheroe, 2003). While learning patterns among demographic groups surface in research, findings only suggest learning tendencies among groups, rather than set rules for these groups.

Cultural Dimensions

People share beliefs, values, and norms within communities, regions, and countries. Not only have studies in culture given sociologists a greater understanding of the world, it also benefits educational research. Several significant cultural studies served as springboards for researchers to conduct additional cultural studies in the fields of business, healthcare, and education. Two significant contributors to cultural research are Hofstede (2001) and Hall (1990) who identified behavioral traits common among various nationalities. These traits also known as cultural dimensions are widely used in many cross-cultural studies.
Hofstede (2001) collected data for his cultural dimensions research over several years from individuals surveyed by International Business Machines (IBM). In all, he analyzed over 100,000 responses from people representing 40 different nationalities. Hofstede (2001) found that groups of participants from the same countries shared similar beliefs and behaviors. In the initial study, Hofstede (2001) categorically placed these shared values into four cultural dimensions: (a) individualism and collectivism: (b) power distance; (c) uncertainty avoidance and acceptance; (d) and masculinity and femininity. Later, he surveyed people from 15 additional countries using the same instrument. Although an additional dimension emerged that he identified as long and short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2010), the first four had direct implications on behaviors in school.

Hofstede (2001, 2010) assigned index scores on a spectrum for each dimension to describe the degree a national culture possesses a specific trait. In the research, Hofstede (2001) emphasized that national cultures are not at one end of the spectrum or the other, but rather fall somewhere in between the extremes because countries possess a blend of characteristics. In other words, no national culture possesses the most extreme or pure form of a train.

Power Distance

Hofstede (2001) suggested in his findings that countries perceived power both negatively and positively depending on the culture. He described the power distance dimension as the extent that cultures accepted inequitable power structures in their society (Hofstede, 2001). For the high power distance countries such as Malaysia, China,
Mexico, and India, hierarchical structures were more prevalent. People lower in the hierarchy structure viewed inequity of power as normal and acceptable (Hofstede, 2001). On the other hand, people from low power distance countries such as Austria, United States, Australia, and Israel viewed egalitarian structures as acceptable and normal (Hofstede, 2001).

The educational systems of the countries also reflected the power distance dimension in several ways. From the study’s findings, Hofstede (2001) suggested that low power distance cultures viewed teachers and students as equals. Education in these countries centered on the student (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, these cultures find it acceptable for students to initiate discussion in the classrooms (Hofstede, 2001). In this educational setting, learning is a collaborative process between the teacher and student.

Conversely, Hofstede (2001) indicated that high power distance countries viewed teachers as the experts and the center of education. Teachers in high power distance cultures initiated all communication in the classroom (Hofstede, 2001). It is the responsibility of the teacher to disseminate information to the student and the student to accept it without collaboration. High power cultures consider student-initiated questions to the teacher as offensive (Hofstede, 2001).

The traits found in high and low power distance cultures are found in several studies. In one study of the cross-cultural encounters of American teachers in Hong Kong, Bodycott and Walker (2000) described misunderstandings between the teachers and students linked to power distance characteristics. The American teachers were acculturated to a low power distance culture while the students were accustomed to a high power distance culture. As the American teachers taught in a Chinese university,
they noticed that students from lower levels of hierarchy in their society would not speak. Rather, these students reserved the right to speak to those from higher levels of the hierarchy. When teachers established an English only requirement in their classes, students perceived the action as arrogant (Bodycott & Walker, 2000). However, the researchers found that students would not challenge or question the professor’s knowledge and policies because in their culture it was an offensive act (Bodycott & Walker, 2000).

Similar to the findings of Bodycott and Walker (2000), Park and Kim (2008) investigated the cultural values and communication styles of Asian and European American college students. After surveying 210 Asian Americans and 136 European Americans, Park and Kim (2008) found that Asian American students, who were influenced by parents of high power distance cultures, used indirect communication that would express negativism or assertiveness with the professors to avoid the appearance of embarrassing or challenging the teachers. On the other hand, the European Americans, who were from low power distance cultures, embraced open and assertive communication with their professors (Park & Kim, 2008).

Exploring the effects that the power distance dimension has on an individual’s perception of empowerment, Eylon and Au (1999) conducted a study of international and national business students in a Canadian university. In the findings, data suggested that students from high power distance cultures performed better under an autocratic leader while the low power distance cultures expected to be consulted by their superiors (Eylon & Au, 1999). The study also suggested that high power distance cultures perform better
in disempowered situations where there is more structure and a controllable amount of information (Eylon & Au, 1999).

Hofstede (2001) identified the power distance as a dimension describing the degree a culture accepts hierarchal power. Findings from other studies addressing high and low power distance cultures describe the environments that people from each side of the spectrum indicate as normal. Learning in high power distance cultures is a two-way process. Studies show that people of low power distance cultures prefer less structured situations where collaboration between teacher and student is an expectation. Conversely, high power distance cultures consist of a one-way learning process. In this situation, people embrace a highly structured system in which the teacher’s role is to disseminate information and the students gather it. Several studies describe the traits of high and low power distance cultures as it applies to teacher and student interaction.

Uncertainty Avoidance and Acceptance

In the uncertainty avoidance dimension, Hofstede (2001) found that countries experience some degree of comfort or discomfort with uncertainties of life. When countries had high uncertainty avoidance such as Germany, Spain, Greece, and Japan, they created strict rules and laws to limit the possibilities of uncertainty (Hofstede, 2001). Countries on the other end of the spectrum including the United States, Singapore, and the United Kingdom accepted the uncertainty of the future and possessed a phlegmatic approach to life (Hofstede, 2001). From the study, Hostede (2001) found that from an educational context, high and low uncertainty avoidance cultures influenced student and teacher behaviors. In uncertainty acceptance cultures, students preferred open-ended
learning situations and explanations in plain terms (Hofstede, 2001). Conversely, Hofstede (2001) explained that the students in cultures with uncertainty avoidance preferred structure and objectivity.

While few studies beyond Hofstede (2001) explore how the uncertainty avoidance or acceptance dimension affects the teacher-student interaction, several studies allude to traits found in uncertainty avoidance or acceptance cultures. When Chen and Isa (2003) interviewed several Japanese exchange students visiting the United States, the findings indicated that the Japanese college students, who are accustomed to an uncertainty avoidance culture, experienced levels of anxiety when negative surprises occurred in their visit. In their culture, uncertainty is an undesirable situation. In a study of Japanese and Taiwanese English language learners, Chu and Nakamara (2010) also found that the students expected the teacher to explain everything to avoid ambiguity. This trait characterized the uncertainty avoidance culture, which is common in Taiwan and Japan.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension describes a culture’s response to uncertainty. Hofstede (2001) found that in uncertainty acceptance cultures that people prefer open-ended questioning and relativism while uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer structured instruction such as lecturing with all details articulated. Although limited studies focus on the traits of this cultural dimension in educational settings, several studies describe learning preferences for low and high structured learning, which characterize these cultures.
Collectivism and Individualism

An additional dimension Hofstede (2001) described from his findings pertained to the social integration of people. Hofstede (2001) identified the extremes on the spectrum as individualism and collectivism. People in individualistic cultures act independently of each other and make decisions that best suit their individual needs (Hofstede, 2001). He also found that countries with high individualism such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Italy think and act independently of others in their societies. He also noted that people from individualistic societies encouraged and accepted competition as a normal part of life.

Collectivistic cultures approach daily living with their society in mind. Hofstede (2001) suggested collectivistic countries such as Ecuador, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China focus on the well-being of their immediate and extended family rather than themselves. Personal ambitions take less of a priority than their loyalty is to a larger group of people (Hofstede, 2001).

From an educational context, teachers working in collectivistic cultures find students prefer group learning rather than individual learning (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001) also noted that students do not speak up in classroom settings and expect teachers to show preferential treatment based on the student’s membership in certain groups. Contrary to collectivist cultures, teachers in individualistic cultures encourage individuality and expect students to express their opinions in discussions (Hofstede, 2001).

Other studies describe the traits found in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In one such study, Crabtree and Sapp (2004) described an American teacher’s experience
with Brazilian students. The findings showed several misunderstandings between the teaching practices grounded in individualism and the learning behaviors of the students grounded in collectivism. In the study, the teacher indicated several differences between the behaviors from her students in the United States and those in Brazil. Specifically, the Brazilian students changed seats without prompting to work on assignments together and discussed topics together as a means to support each other (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004).

Bodycott and Walker (2000) also shared their teaching experience with Chinese students in a Hong Kong university. One contrast between their individualistic culture and the collectivist culture of Hong Kong was that their Asian students found greater satisfaction and comfort working in group situations (Bodycott & Walker, 2000). Additionally, the researchers found that their students were more likely to challenge ideas in group activities rather than as individual assignments (Bodycott & Walker, 2000).

The dimension of collectivism and individualism describes the culture’s view on the interaction of an individual with his or her society. Hofstede (2001) found several traits that represent the contrasting cultures in this dimension. Literature describes several studies that identify these characteristics in classroom situations and link learning behaviors to the collectivist and individualist dimensions (Boland, Sugahara, Opdecam, Everaert, 2011; Chen & Isa, 2003; Ayeung & Sands, 1996).

Masculinity and Femininity

A fourth cultural dimension Hofstede (2001) found in his study was with masculine and feminine cultures. The researcher indicated that people from particular countries were performance-driven while other countries focused on their quality of life
(Hofstede, 2001). The study found that in masculine cultures, males were more assertive in their behaviors than women (Hofstede, 2001). He also indicated that the masculine cultures found in countries such as the United States, Japan, Germany, and Italy valued competition and believed it to be a societal norm.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the feminine culture, which includes countries such as Denmark, Chile, and Thailand (Hofstede, 2001). In feminine cultures, the study found that people viewed both genders’ values as being nearly equal translating to a culture where competition was not encouraged and average student performance was acceptable (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001) found that teachers gave equal attention to both genders in a feminine culture.

In education, high masculine cultures value student performance and the best student is the norm (Hofstede, 2001). Masculine societies also emphasize rewards and praise for good students and teachers. Feminine cultures place a greater importance in the socialization of students rather than performance (Hofstede, 2001). Additionally, Hofstede (2001) suggested that failing in school is a minor occurrence rather than a major disaster.

While some literature discusses cultural perceptions of gender roles in society, no studies directly addressed the traits found in masculine and feminine cultures. One study that addresses gender traits from a cultural context in education, investigated the American and Taiwanese students’ perceptions on gender roles in the classroom (Chia, Moore, Lam, Chuang, and Cheng, 1994). Chia et al. (1994) found that while female Taiwanese students who come from a feminine culture desire more equality between males and females, they continue to prefer male dominance in and out of the classroom.
Polychronicity and Monochronicity

Along with Hofstede, other researchers have contributed to cultural dimension studies. Hall (1990) studied perceptions of time management across many cultures and found two groups emerge from the research that he identified as polychronic and monochronic. In polychronic cultures, people were not bound to time schedules and valued socialization over tasks (Hall & Hall, 1990). On the other hand, monochronic cultures held to time schedules with people and prioritized task accomplishments over socializing (Hall & Hall, 1990).

Time management may appear to be a simple or obsolete issue, but it creates significant misunderstandings in cross-cultural experiences. Hall and Hall (1990) interviewed top executives from German, French, and American businesses to describe cross-cultural experiences in intercultural business. In the findings, the researchers summarized the significance of understanding this cultural dimension by stating, "It is impossible to know how many millions of dollars have been lost in international business because monochronic and polychronic people do not understand each other or even realize that two such different time systems exist" (p. 16).

Just as in business, monochronic and polychromic issues occur in educational settings. When educators are unaware of the different perspectives on time, it leads to frustration for both the teacher and students. Crabtree and Sapp (2004) illustrated this point in their observation of an American teacher instructing nationals in a class in Brazil. The researchers identified tension between the professor and students because of misperceptions developed from different perspectives on time management (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004). Coming from a monochronic culture where time is managed to allow for
the completion of all tasks, the teacher gave little time to build relationships with the class (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004). The researchers found that the students perceived the teacher’s approach as rude and arrogant leading to stressful moments and dissatisfaction by the teacher and students (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004).

Lindquist, Knieling, and Kauffman-Scarborough (2001) investigated the polychronicity of Japanese and American students at a university in the United States. The study suggested that Japanese students tended to be more monochronic than the American participants (Lindquist, Kneiling, & Kauffman-Scarborough, 2001). They also found the Japanese participants had a stronger preference to complete one task before starting another one (Lindquist et al., 2001).

Time management is a significant part of instruction. If a teacher’s perception of time management does not align with the students’ perceptions, it leads to conflicts and counterproductive moments in the classroom. Hall (1990) introduced the dimension of polychronic and monochronic cultures that describe the different perspectives of time management among various societies. Many researchers have used this dimension to conduct studies in fields such as marketing and international business. However, some studies in education also describe traits of this dimension that occur in intercultural settings. Polychronic and monochronic studies provide greater insight for teachers as they gain understanding of their students’ backgrounds.

Culturally Responsive or Relevant Teaching Practices

Research on cognitive styles provides support to the assertion of Bruner (1996) that understanding the learning process is significant in providing an effective pedagogy.
While culturally guided teaching practices involve knowing the differences in learning behaviors of students, it also requires a transformation of instructional practices that transcends the various cultures and ethnicities represented in the classroom. Barmeyer (2004) emphasized that when teachers ignore the cultural differences and learning styles of their students, it brings about negative results. Ultimately, the alignment of the students’ learning traits with the teacher’s pedagogical practices strengthens student-learning opportunities (Jordan, 1985; Felder & Brent, 2005). A growing field of literature describes the measures that educators take to ensure that culture guides their instructional practices in classrooms. These studies occur in cross-cultural and cross-ethnic situations.

Cross-Cultural Teaching Practices

While many studies describe the cultural differences between national students and their professors, few explicitly explore the adaptations the teachers make in cross-cultural educational settings. These studies are more commonly located in higher education settings. Additionally, several learning style studies highlight certain instructional practices that accommodate specific learners.

Based on a study of learning styles between national and international business students, De Vita (2001) suggested diverse teaching strategies are necessary to accommodate learners. When working with active learners, teachers should provide learning-by-doing activities (De Vita, 2001). Combining group and individual tasks in classrooms ensures that those from both collectivist and individualist backgrounds are able to learn (De Vita, 2001). Lessons should incorporate time to allow reflective
thinkers time to digest the material (De Vita, 2001). Based on the results from the study of French and German students, Barmeyer (2004) asserted that trainers in cross-cultural settings incorporate cultural awareness and discussion. His recommendation was that the use of intercultural training pedagogy should infuse all learning styles (Barmeyer, 2004). In a study that observed a British teacher’s experience in an international school, Joslin (2002) found that the successful international teachers possessed characteristics such as mental flexibility, cultural sensitivity, respect for their culture as well as others, and an understanding of international education.

Cross-Ethnic Teaching Practices

Among literature on effective teaching practices in classrooms stems research that focuses cross-ethnic classrooms particularly in the United States. From their study of the pedagogical practices with Hawaiian students, Au and Jordan (1981) identified key principles necessary to provide culturally appropriate instruction. To meet the criteria, an activity must be comfortable to both the teacher and student as well as address basic skill attainment (Au & Jordan, 1981). Au (1980) also noted an increase reading achievement when these principles were applied in the form of talk stories, which was common in their culture.

Another important aspect of culturally guided instruction is to consider cultural congruency, which occurs when the teacher, student, and school’s cultures are similar to each other. Mohatt and Erickson (1981) conducted a study on the cultural congruency of a Native American and a non-Native American teacher and their interaction with students. The studies suggested that language and cultural incompatibilities resulted in
poor student achievement (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981). Awareness of the cultural congruency allows a teacher to make instructional and classroom management decisions to improve the alignment. Lipka (1991) corroborated this in his work with teachers and Yup’ik students in Alaska as he studied the underlying cultural themes of art lessons. The findings suggested that relationships are vital to indigenous education (Lipka, 1991). Using the findings from the study, Lipka (1991) found that culturally-based pedagogy occurred when culturally compatible social relationships and Yup’ik group values were blended together.

Literature in the last few decades addresses similar principles, but with a greater focus on the relationships and expectations between the teacher and students. From extensive research on urban education, Ladson-Billings (1992) found several elements of successful teaching practices with urban youth. She emphasized that to have a culturally relevant pedagogy, three criteria must be met: (a) students must experience success; (b) students must develop and maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must have the ability to critique cultural norms and values (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Later, Ladson-Billings (1995a,1995b) conducted a three-year study on successful teachers who work with African American students. In the study, Ladson-Billings (1995b) found that the participants met the criteria in their instruction for culturally relevant pedagogy. In addition, the teachers demonstrated the following characteristics (Ladson-Billings, 1995b):

- Teachers were energetic and spontaneous in their instruction and relationships with students.
• They showed high levels of caring and encouraged a community of learners rather than individual competiveness.
• They saw themselves as learners as much as teachers.

From her findings on multicultural research, Gay (2002) defined effective culturally responsive teaching practices as “using cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). While Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1992) defined successful effective pedagogical practices in multicultural settings differently, both frameworks shared the principle that incorporating students’ cultures into teaching practices was essential when teaching in multicultural settings.

Other literature describes effective instructional practices with other ethnic and national groups. Osborne (1994) reviewed 70 ethnographic studies on North American and Australian cross-cultural and interethnic classrooms. From the synthesis, Osborne (1994) found that culturally relevant teachers:

• Do not have to be from the same ethnic background as their teachers;
• Understand the historical and sociological backgrounds of their students;
• Teach content that is relevant to their students’ previous experiences;
• Involve parents of marginalized students;
• Include students’ primary languages in the classroom;
• Treat students with warmth and respect;
• Challenge students academically;
• Define cultural assumptions on which the classroom functions;
• Avoid calling out students and use group work, indirect controlling, unhurried pace, and home participation structures in their classroom management;

• Acknowledge racism exists and addresses the issue.

Although not directly indicated in the study, the observations reflected traits from the cultural dimensions of collectivism, low power distance, and uncertainty acceptance.

Jackson (1993) also identified similar characteristics found in other culturally responsive teaching research. After interviewing teachers attending several multicultural workshops, Jackson (1993) found several effective pedagogical practices commonly used in multicultural classrooms. She indicated that effective practices include: (a) building trust; (b) becoming culturally literate; (c) building a repertoire of instructional strategies; (d) using effective questioning techniques; (e) providing effective feedback; (f) analyzing instructional materials; and (g) establishing positive home-school relations (Jackson, 1993).

Dill and Boykin (2000) researched effective instructional strategies with African American fifth grade students. The researchers placed 72 students into communal learning, peer tutoring criterion, and individual criterion learning sessions. After each phase, the students completed a recalled task. The findings indicated that the participants recalled more information in a communal learning situation than in a peer tutoring or individual criterion learning session.

Other research literature describes successful instructional practices of teachers working with marginalized ethnic groups. After conducting a case study of two teachers who worked with African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Ware (2006) found several practices that supported culturally relevant and warm
demander pedagogies. While the teachers acted as disciplinarians with high expectations for their students to learn, they nurtured their students according to their level of needs (Ware, 2006). Common to culturally responsive pedagogy, the teachers incorporated their student’s culture in lessons (Ware, 2006). The study indicated that both teachers were involved in community life and connected with their children’s family (Ware, 2006).

Studies in culturally responsive practices are not limited to instruction, but also include classroom management in culturally diverse situations. Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) studied classroom management strategies used by culturally responsive teachers. From their observations, Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) found several shared practices that developed into a culturally responsive classroom management model including: (a) the acknowledgement of one’s own cultural biases and beliefs; (b) recognition of other cultures; and (c) the awareness of the discriminatory practices in schools that are reflective of society.

Using the culturally responsive classroom management framework, Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) conducted a study of seven teachers working with Latino students in the United States. In the study, the teachers gained an awareness and understanding of the educational impact that the cultural dimension of collectivism from workshop trainings. As they accepted the differences, they developed strategies to work in a collectivistic setting including: (a) working collectively to encourage participation; (b) incorporating student stories in their instruction to make topics relevant; (c) generalizing rules to encapsulate many appropriate behaviors; and (d) increasing volunteers to improve parent-teacher relations (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).
In a similar study, Brown (2003) studied 13 teachers who incorporated culturally responsive classroom management strategies. The findings of the study indicated that the teachers established a caring and nonthreatening climate through taking interest in their students (Brown, 2003). Through communicating high expectations explicitly to their students, they created a mutual respect with their students.

Other research adds additional information from the studies about culturally responsive classroom management. When observing two teachers in culturally diverse middle schools, Milner and Tenore (2010) found that culturally responsive classroom managers immersed themselves into their students’ worlds to understand their power structures. Not only did the teachers enter the world of the students, but they also let their students enter their world (Milner & Tenor, 2010). Milner and Tenor (2010) also found that these teachers were active with the student’s communities.

Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, and Hambacher (2007) conducted a study of three novice teachers working in low socioeconomic schools with high African American populations in a small American town. The researchers found that the teachers developed good relationships with their students (Bondy et al., 2007). The teachers also set high expectations that led to caring and respectful environments (Bondy et al., 2007).

Knowing the cultural differences between students is not enough when developing a culturally relevant pedagogy. Adjusting instructional and classroom management decisions is necessary to maximize learning in multicultural settings. Culturally relevant and responsive literature continues to generate strategies that teachers in diverse setting incorporate in their classes to establish a trusting and respectful environment. A large portion of literature describes these practices in cross-ethnic
situations in the United States. Few studies explore these practices in an international context particularly in the elementary and secondary school settings.

**Community-Related Cultural Variables in Learning**

Communities play a significant role in shaping their schools’ culture. Whatever a community values is what they will support most in schools. In order to move a district forward, educators must know the norms and values that the community shares. Ignoring the culture will bring great dissension and unhealthy school and community relations. In educational research, some studies examine various aspects of school and community relations with some looking specifically through a cultural lens.

A significant contribution to educational sociology came from the works of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). From their research, these sociologists developed the idea that schools develop from the social and cultural resources of society (Laureau, 1987). Bourdieu (1986) introduced the idea of cultural capital, which involved the societally transmitting of skills and knowledge to individuals. This transmission affected the content taught in educational systems. According to Bourdieu, the dominating race, gender, and class controlled educational decisions creating inequity situations (Apple, 1986). Further investigation of the societal influences on education has led to added knowledge to research.

Teachers begin their post-secondary training with different backgrounds shaped by experiences. As they complete their training, they start their educational careers in schools with communities that, in some cases, are very different from their own. This disparity brings different perspectives as to what the purpose of educating children should
be. Realizing this disparity, Foster (1993) conducted two ethnographies of African-American teachers who taught in an urban educational setting. From the findings, she suggested that with varying backgrounds between teachers and community, there are different perspectives on the function of schools and purpose of education (Foster, 1993). As teachers adapted pedagogies similar to the community norms, engaging learning experiences occurred more often with students (Foster, 1993).

Applying the cultural capital framework to parent involvement, Lareau (1987) conducted a qualitative study of parents, teachers, and principals in working and upper-middle class communities. The findings suggested that there were higher attendance rates at school events and deeper interactions between parents and teachers in the upper-middle class school (Lareau, 1987). The researcher also found in the study that parents in the working class community viewed teachers as the educational experts and, therefore, were responsible for the educational side of their children’s development (Lareau, 1987). Further findings suggested that schools better informed the middle class parents than the working class (Lareau, 1987).

Also looking at the school and community relations, Meyer and Mann (2006) investigated teachers’ perceptions of conducting home visits in a rural school district. Among the study findings, data suggested that the practice of home visits strengthened teacher-parent relationships (Meyer & Mann, 2006). Moreover, home visits helped teachers increased understanding of the academic and behavioral performance of their students (Meyer & Mann, 2006).

Reed (2009) conducted a study of teachers living in the same urban location as their schools. Using a combination of interviews, observations, and surveys from the
teachers and parents, Reed (2009) found that the local teachers had a greater knowledge of cultural and historical background of their students. He also suggested that the parents in the study had a greater respect with the local teachers because they had not abandoned their communities when opportunities came. Along with several other studies, the research suggested that local teachers more often advocated for students and the community, thereby, opening opportunities for parents to seek them out for assistance with school matters (Reed, 2009; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005).

The studies on the cultural dynamics between schools and community are limited compared to other school-community studies. However, the existing literature supports the value of educators considering the community culture in their teaching practices. As schools connect with their communities, they open the opportunities for stronger school and community relations and greater support for student achievement (Reed, 2009).

Meaning of Cross-Cultural Educational Experiences

Education involves social interaction of students, teachers, and parents. As different norms, beliefs, and values converge, it creates enriching opportunities for researchers to dissect these cross-cultural phenomena to gain understanding of the sociological factors in education. Not only does extant literature describe cross-cultural experiences of teachers and students, but some studies also describe the meanings that the stakeholders gain from the phenomena.

In a self-analysis of her cross-cultural teaching experience in Egypt, Garson (2005) described the cultural conflict with her students as she taught. The study indicated
that Egyptian students who were accustomed to rote memorization perceived her empowerment teaching style as a weakness (Garson, 2005). Through the acculturation process, the teacher bridged the cultural gap through compromising formal practices, such as lecture, and informal strategies, such as student-led discussion (Garson, 2005). She concluded from the study that her cultural experience took her from an inflexible style of living to one that adjusted to the cultural “temperature.” This transformation also instilled confidence and open-mindedness in her professional and personal life (Garson, 2005).

Exploring the cross-cultural experiences and meanings of occupational therapy students, Humbert, Burket, Deveney, and Kennedy (2012) conducted interviews of nine students who studied in different countries for a time-period ranging from three weeks to three months. Three themes emerged from the interviews including connectedness, cultural awareness, and complexity (Humbert et al., 2012). The participants indicated that through activities they developed a bond with their colleagues and communities (Humbert et al., 2012). Common areas of cultural conflict included: (a) polychronic versus monochronic time; (b) individualism versus collectivism; and (c) their professional role (Humbert et al., 2012). These differences developed a greater sense of cultural awareness with the students (Humbert et al., 2012). Their experiences created a belief that culture is a complex phenomenon requiring them to identify their needs and resolutions for them (Humbert et al., 2012).

Ross and Krider (1993) examined the cross-cultural experiences of international teaching assistants in an American university. Several themes emerged from the interviews that described their teaching experience. The first theme, teaching difficulties,
derived from the teacher assistants’ challenges with situations such as providing
interactive classroom activities and accepting less formal classroom procedures (Ross and
Krider, 1993). Many found they experienced fewer difficulties as they sought advice
from other teacher assistants who had a greater understanding of the role of an American
teacher assistant (Ross & Krider, 1993). From the interviews, the researchers also
distilled an intercultural difficulty theme. Teaching interpersonal communication from
an American lens proved to be a challenge for the teacher assistants who were not
familiar with the topic (Ross & Krider, 1993).

Edmonds (2010) conducted a phenomenological study of the cross-cultural
experiences of nursing students from a southeastern university in the United States. After
interviewing 18 nursing students, the researcher extracted several themes from their
experiences in Dominica and England. From the findings, the participants believed they
gained more compassion for patients especially who encounter cultural barriers
(Edmonds, 2010). Along with a gained appreciation for their own culture, the nursing
students indicated the necessity to adjust to the cultures (Edmonds, 2010).

Coming from the perspective of a teacher’s cross-cultural experience, Summers
and Lovorn (2012) conducted a qualitative study of 33 teachers in two South American
international schools. In the study, Summers and Lovorn (2012) found that two themes
emerged from the discussions: (a) the empowerment of students in culturally rich
classrooms and (b) the inseparability between culture and language. The participants
characterized their classrooms as culturally diverse that gave opportunities for students to
share their cultural backgrounds with others (Summers & Lovorn, 2012). In addition, the
teachers indicated that they could not teach without considering the cultural backgrounds of the students (Summers & Lovorn, 2012).

Research discussions on the cross-cultural experiences of students and teachers indicate inevitable challenges when people from different cultures interact. Qualitative studies describe the meaning that students and teachers gain from this phenomenon. To cultivate the rich descriptions of teachers in multicultural settings, more studies are needed in the field of qualitative research.

**Conclusion**

Because culture comprises the beliefs, values, and norms of people, various socialization levels reflect attitudes and behaviors about education. Recognizing this, Bruner (1996) emphasized that pedagogy should reflect the cultures represented in the classroom. Over the last few decades, various studies address cultural factors in different fields including, psychology, business, health care, and education. Literature discusses cultural factors in education on three different levels: home, school, and community.

Current educational researchers recognize that among the factors that lead to student achievement is the home environment. Studies show that parental involvement in their child’s education correlates with higher achievement (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997). In addition to involvement, other studies indicate that the parent’s educational background, parenting styles, and educational expectations for their child also are associated with high student performance in academics (Lam, Lau, & Leung, 1998; Alexander, Entwisle & Bedinger,
Not only does existing literature describe associations between cultural factors and student achievement, but it also describes how culture relates to learning and instruction. Several studies indicated similar learning patterns and preferences among cultural and ethnic groups (Chu, Nakamura, 2010; Barmeyer, 2004; De Vita, 2001; Auyeung & Sands, 1996; Hayes & Allison, 1988). The cultural dimension studies of Hofstede (2010, 2001) and Hall (1990) provided frameworks for other researchers to investigate the student and teacher behaviors in different cultures. These studies bring insightful data about different mindsets toward learning in different regions of the world. A clearer understanding of cultural conflicts within the classroom emerges from the studies on the different cultural dimensions. Understanding these learning styles and cultural mindsets fostered studies that investigated teaching practices that produced successful results with various cultural and ethnic groups. Findings led to the construction of pedagogical frameworks such as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002), culturally relevant teaching (Ladsen-Billings, 1992), and culturally based teaching (Lipka, 1991). Studies on classroom management practices with various demographic groups have led to additional theories and frameworks such as culturally responsive classroom management (Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlison-Clarke, 2003).

Researchers also look at the practices that build stronger school and community culture. While few studies view these practices through a cultural lens, some studies note the importance of schools understanding the culture of the community to build stronger community support for student learning (Reed, 2009; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Foster,
1993). These studies provided insightful practices that teachers use to acculturate into the community culture. This acculturation deepens the trust and respect between the teacher, students, and community members in diverse settings.

When people encounter cross-cultural experiences, they gain enriching opportunities that deepen their understanding of the world around them. Research has captured some of these moments in educational settings. In these studies, teachers explain the change in their philosophy and pedagogy after adjusting to their international classrooms (Summers & Lovom, 2012; Garson, 2005; Ross & Krider, 1993). Students also describe changes in their personal cultural identities as well as their views of other cultures (Edmonds, 2010).

While these sources of literature provide compelling support for considering cultural impact on learning and instruction, it cultivates opportunities for further research. Many studies describe the accounts of teachers who experienced cross-cultural and cross-ethnic situations in education. However, many of the cross-cultural studies captured the experiences in higher education settings while the cross-ethnic experiences occurred in elementary and secondary setting. Moreover, the cross-ethnic studies occurred in the home countries of the teacher and, in many cases, the students. Other less explored settings may provide rich information to educational research.

Unlike other studies, this study seeks to expand the understanding of teachers in multicultural settings by examining the experiences of U.S. trained teachers who teach in American international schools abroad. This study may add new knowledge to the broader understanding of how teachers establish cultural congruency with their students in an international context.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Developing research describes the cultural phenomena teachers encounter in their classrooms. This study sought to describe the lived cross-cultural experiences of American teachers and the meaning constructed from the experiences. The participants in the study currently teach or formerly taught in international schools in the Asian Pacific Rim region. The research question that guided this study is, in what ways do American educators teaching in international schools abroad experience cultural adjustments? Specifically, the study explored the following questions:

1. How do the teachers describe their experiences adjusting to both the culture of the country or region where the school is located and the culture of the school itself after being in that school for at least a year?

2. What adjustments do they describe to living and working in the new country?

3. What adjustments do they describe in adapting to their school?

4. What adjustments do they describe making to the ways in which they structure their classroom and engage with students?

5. How have these teachers experiences adapting to new international school cultures impacted the ways they think about and go about their work as teachers?

To answer research questions accurately, the researcher determined the appropriate methodology for conducting the study. Without alignment between the
research questions and methodology, the study was susceptible to insufficient data, invalidation of the findings, or inadequacy of addressing the research questions. In this chapter, a description of the methodology will detail the rationale for selecting the research tradition and methods for the study. The first section will highlight the characteristics of qualitative research with a specific focus on the phenomenological tradition, which was the basis for this study. In the second section, a description of data collection process will indicate the instrumentation and source used to gather the information. The next section will detail the data analysis process and the measures taken to establish the trustworthiness of the study. In the last section of the chapter, an explanation of the limitations and delimitations of the study will be given that defined the boundaries for this study.

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Since qualitative methods serve a specific purpose in research, it is necessary for a researcher to align the approach with the research questions of the study. Determining the appropriate method does not negate the significance of the other approach, but rather justifies the method that best supports the study. With the focus of this study on the exploration of the cultural experiences of and responses to those experiences in the form of adaptive action by American teachers in international schools, a phenomenological qualitative research approach was used for several reasons.

A researcher’s paradigm has implications on the research decisions including the method used (Mertens, 2010). In the study, a constructivist view was the basis for the inquiry and held to the assumption that people construct meaning through social and
historical means from the world they live. Their experiences are subjective leading researchers to explore their complex meaning rather than simplify it (Creswell, 2003). Generally, phenomenological qualitative methods often use a constructivist approach to conduct research.

Generally, qualitative researchers attempt to describe or understand the context of the study and avoid preconceived ideas characteristic of quantitative studies (Dobrovolny & Fuentes, 2008). The intricacies of the culture direct a study toward an approach that conjures details and meaning to enrich understanding, which is most suitable in qualitative studies. This study worked within the natural settings of the teacher, which is also characteristic of qualitative research.

Qualitative methods provide opportunities for researchers to investigate unexplored areas where the variables are unknown (Creswell, 2003). While research on international education exists, it predominately centers on cultures outside of the United States. There are many research studies on classroom management and instruction by British sociologists, but little conducted by Americans (Metz, 2000). Using qualitative research on American international school practices provided the opportunity for exploration of this relatively unchartered area of educational research where the variables had yet to be determined.

Descriptive and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Within qualitative research are several traditions for conducting studies including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study. Aligning a research tradition with the study’s purpose builds a strong research design. Norlyk and Harder
(2010) stated that with various traditions available, it challenges researchers to consider the goals of their study and the method of achieving them. For this study, the purpose was to describe the lived cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in international schools abroad and the meaning constructed from it. A phenomenology was most suitable for the study because it captured the rich thick descriptions of a phenomenon experienced by the participants.

When selecting a phenomenology, a researcher must also consider the philosophical roots of the tradition. Phenomenological studies stem from the different philosophies, which guide researchers in their exploration of a phenomenon. When researchers understand the philosophical underpinnings of different types of phenomenology that they can make informed decisions on which aligns with the research’s beliefs (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Although several types of phenomenology have developed over the last century, their origins primarily derive from the works of Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl’s core belief was that consciousness was the condition to all human experience and led to the development of descriptive phenomenology (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The basis for descriptive phenomenology is that people’s perceptions of reality guide their behavior. Therefore, Husserl asserted that it was necessary to have a scientific method of study that explored the lived experiences of certain groups and the meanings they construct from them (Flood, 2010).

Descriptive phenomenology assists researchers in understanding the lived experiences of individuals from the first person perspective. To accomplish this, a phenomenologist must make great efforts to listen and observe the subject as they share
their experience. Husserl (2001) emphasized that to capture the purest meaning of a lived experience requires transcendental subjectivity, which occurs when a descriptive phenomenologist removes his or her assumptions, ideas, and biases from the process. As this bracketing process happens, the description of the subject’s lived experience moves from an amalgamation of the researcher and subject’s perspective to a distilled description based solely on the subject’s perspective. The role of the researcher in descriptive phenomenology is to create meaning of the subject’s lived experience through listening, interacting, and observing (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Throughout the process, the researcher self-regulates for bias and opinion to avoid contaminating the true meaning of the experience.

When certain conditions exist for a study, a descriptive phenomenology may be the suitable method for the investigation. Descriptive phenomenology is often appropriate when prior literature does not clearly conceptualize universal aspects of a phenomenon (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Additionally, this phenomenology can assist a researcher in finding patterns and commonalities in the lived experiences of their subjects.

Although Heidegger built on Husserl’s principles of phenomenology, he differed in fundamental principles that led to the development of hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology. Unlike Husserl who believed that context was peripheral, Heidegger believed that individuals are capable of constructing meaning of their own lives resulting in context being the central focus (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). For Heidegger, individuals and their worlds are inseparable making it impossible to remove subjectivity from their life experiences. Rather than attempting to filter cultural and social influences
from lived experiences, interpretive phenomenologists accepted it as part of making meaning of the experiences.

Similar to descriptive phenomenology, the role of the interpretive phenomenologist is to create meaning of the subject’s lived experience and identify their personal bias and experience with the phenomenon. However, one key distinction from descriptive phenomenology is with how researchers use their personal bias and experience. Rather than isolating and removing their experience from the study, they incorporate it into the meaning-making process with the subject. When constructing meaning, hermeneutic phenomenologists collaboratively work with their subjects in creating the meaning from their lived experiences. While interpretive phenomenology does not support the bracketing process presented by Husserl, acknowledging preconceptions are valuable guides to what lead a researcher to a needed area of research (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Along with the role the researcher’s bias plays in the meaning-making process, Wojnar and Swanson (2007) indicated that an interpretive phenomenologist values the uniqueness of each subject’s experience rather than looking for similarities and patterns between experiences.

With the focus of this study on the lived cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in international schools, the researcher must consider the cultural and societal factors as a necessary part of the study. With the uniqueness of each teacher’s cultural experience, the investigator should recognize the distinctiveness of the participants’ accounts rather than general patterns. For these reasons, the researcher conducted the study from an interpretative phenomenological approach (Smith, 2011).
Data Collection

In this section, a description will detail the data collection process conducted for the study. The first section will explain the instrument and its implementation in the study followed by the description of the source for the data collection including the sampling size, procedures, and setting of the study. As a measure to reinforce the trustworthiness of the study, the last section details the role of the researcher.

Data Collection Strategy and Protocol

Since the purpose of the study was to capture the participant’s cross-cultural experience and the constructed meaning from it, the researcher used interviewing as the data collection strategy. Interviews provided an opportunity for researchers to enter the world of the participants and understand their perspectives (Patton, 1987). Therefore, interviewing was a method of data collection suitable for the purpose of this phenomenological study.

Leading researchers such as Creswell and Patton categorize interviews into three formats: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In a structured format, interviewers hold to a set of questions and avoid straying from the questions. While it maintains consistency with the data received from each participant, it limits the richness of information. Unstructured interviewing provides opportunities for openness by the participant to share information, but it may be subject to inconsistent topics of discussion between participants. This study sought to give freedom for participants to describe their experiences, but also to address similar issues shared by all of the participants. Therefore, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The
A semi-structured interview format allowed consistency and focus, yet freedom for the interviewee to elaborate on the topics presented in the interviews.

After recruiting participants for the study, the researcher conducted interviews with each participant over a three-month period. The researcher arranged interview times with each participant. While the use of Skype was the most preferred method for this study, the researcher also used telephone communication for participants choosing that form of communication.

The researcher provided each participant with an interview outline that listed the key topics discussed in the interview. Using an interview outline is useful in situations when time is limited for interviews (Patton, 1987). During the interview, the investigator asked key questions and followed up with other questions that clarified and developed the interviewees’ ideas when needed. The interview questions addressed four key elements (see Appendix B): (a) prior knowledge of cross-cultural experiences, (b) cultural challenges in school and community, (c) adjustments in teaching practices to cultural differences, and (d) personal meanings from the participant’s cross-cultural experience. The questions selected to guide the discussions included:

- What led you to international teaching?
- What cross-cultural experiences or training did you have prior to your international teaching experience?
- What did you expect professionally and personally as you planned to go to your international school?
- When you reflect over the time you have been at your school, what cultural differences did you encounter in the community? school? classroom?
• What are some of the most significant cultural moments you can recall? funniest moments? frustrating moments? surprising moments?

• What feelings and thoughts did you experience as you encountered these cultural experiences? How did these feelings change over time (if they did)?

• Thinking about these experiences, what adjustments did they cause you to make in how you interacted with the community? with the school community?

• Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?

• When looking at your teaching practices, what adaptations did you make in instruction, classroom management, and parent/community relations?

• Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?

• How do you know if you are connecting culturally with your students and their parents?

• What has helped you the most in facing cross-cultural experiences as an international teacher?

• What advice would you give an aspiring teacher who is considering teaching internationally?

As the researcher conducted the interviews, the conversations were recorded using audio recording software to ensure that there were no omissions of details in the dialogue. Another advantage of recording interviews was that it allowed the researcher to memo personal thoughts that arose during the sessions. Also recording conversations, in this manner, captured the tones, moods, and voice inflections of the participants, which would have been much more difficult to convey if the researcher had solely taken notes.
(Weiss, 1994). Following each interview session, the researcher transcribed the recordings for analysis.

In addition to the interviews, the investigator invited participants to submit artifacts that assisted in describing their personal and professional adjustments to cultural differences. The collected artifacts included pictures and descriptions of school events as well as a master’s thesis of a participant on international teaching. The researcher used these artifacts to further investigate meanings of the teachers’ cross-cultural experiences.

Data Sampling and Setting

This study was designed to be a phenomenological engagement conducted with 15 teachers who teach in American international schools in the Asian Pacific Rim region of the world. The researcher recruited American international schools from this region using several international school organizations headquartered in the United States. The following section explains the sampling size and method for the selection of participants for the study. It also will describe the setting, researcher’s role, and ethical considerations for the study.

Sampling Size and Method

Sampling sizes of qualitative research generally are smaller than quantitative studies. A few researchers suggest ranges of acceptable sample sizes for phenomenology. Dukes (1984) suggested that an acceptable range for a phenomenology is between 3 and 10. However, Creswell (2007) noted that one phenomenological study included 325 participants (Polkinghorn, 1989). Despite differing opinions, qualitative
researchers agree that there is not a set standard for determining the acceptable sample size. When data no longer provide new knowledge, a qualitative researcher determines that the study reached data saturation, which is the ultimate goal. Therefore, sample sizes in phenomenological studies fluctuate depending on the researchers’ decision on when they reach data saturation. For this study, the researcher interviewed 15 participants, which achieved data saturation.

Since the purpose of the study focused on U.S. trained teachers who either currently served a period no less than one year teaching in an American international school, a purposive, rather than random, sampling approach was used to identify potential participants from schools that agree to participate in the study. As stated earlier, literature addresses cross-cultural experiences of teachers and students in a variety of ways. However, it fails to explore the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in international schools with K-12 structures. The criteria for this study filtered the pool of participants to those who may provide data that filled this gap in research.

The study focused on teachers with minimally one year of international teaching experience. Culture shock is a common phenomenon in the initial stages of cross-cultural experiences. In his research on culture shock, Oberg (1960) suggested that individuals go through four stages of culture shock including incubation, hostility, adjustment, and biculturalism. In the study, he found that it might take up to six months before a person moves out of the incubation period and into the hostility phase (Oberg, 1960). For an international teacher, it can take the majority of their first year of international teaching before they begin to make the necessary adjustments to the cultural differences. For this
reason, selecting teachers who had passed through the initial cultural shock stage was necessary to capture their reflections from culture shock.

Participants for the study were currently teaching in a participating American international school or taught in such a school within the last two years of the time of the data collection. Current or recent cross-cultural experiences provided the richest details for the study. The researcher determined that if a length of time lapses, a participant would not remember the vivid details that are significant to their story.

The researcher contacted administrators from international school organizations that provided assistance in inviting teachers to participate in the study. The invitation to participate in the study was submitted to these points of contact who distributed the flier to teachers in their organizations in the Asian Pacific region. According to the point of contacts, over 200 invitations were sent to teachers in their organizations of which 25 responded. When the interested candidates responded, the researcher contacted them to further discuss the study and consent form. In all, fifteen teachers submitted an electronically signed consent form to participate. Upon the receipt of their consent forms, the researcher arranged times with the participants for the interviews. The interviews ranged from one to two hours in length.

Setting

Since there are no regulations for international schools to follow, the definition is nebulous creating many variations in structure. In this study, the researcher used international organizations to filter international schools down to those with similar curricular programs. While the headquarters for the international organizations are
located in the United States, they provide supportive services for over 40 American international schools throughout the world that host over 2000 students of various nationalities. The organizations most often require recruited teachers to participate in an orientation before they go to their assigned international schools. The orientation provides information about issues that occur in cross-cultural situations professionally and personally including medicine, clothing, and social codes of conduct.

For this study, the researcher selected teachers from schools in the Asian Pacific Rim region. While international schools are increasing in numbers around the world, the Asian region has seen considerable growth over the last few years with international schools. ICS Research, a private organization dedicated to international school research, reported 238 new international schools started in Asian countries in 2011 (Nagrath, 2011). China, the greatest contributor toward the growth, continues to blossom with business growth creating a need for international schools for expatriate children and national students interested in English-speaking schools. In the past last decade, India’s perspective on international schools changed from being available to high caste society members to also include people from lower cast systems (Mukherji, 2009). Because of this accelerated growth of international schools in the Asian Pacific Rim, this study focused on this region.

Recruitment Process for Participating Teachers

Upon the confirmation of school participation, the researcher prepared and distributed the recruitment flier to administrative point of contacts in three international school organizations who, in turn, distributed it to their teachers. The recruitment flier
described the criteria for participants and asked qualifying teachers who had interest in participating in the study to respond directly to the researcher. With each interested candidate, the researcher responded with further information about the study and reviewed the consent form.

If the number of interested and qualifying candidates exceeded 15, the researcher planned a random selection process from the pool of candidates. The random selection process entailed the researcher randomly drawing 15 potential participants. After analyzing the data from the first 15 participants, the researcher would have determined if the study sufficiently achieved saturation. If so, the researcher would have informed the remaining potential participants that the study had concluded and their participation would not be necessary. If the researcher determined more participants were necessary for saturation, he would randomly draw two more participants at a time, analyze the data from those interviews, and continue until he determined sufficient saturation had occurred. Because the number of interested candidates never exceeded the data saturation of 15 participants, the researcher did not use the random selection process in the study.

Role of Researcher

When conducting qualitative research, investigators must be conscious of their personal experience and bias with the phenomenon. This conscious effort of setting aside personal experiences allows the researcher to focus on the participants in the study (Creswell, 2007). This section will provide a description of the role of the researcher in this study.
One of the memorable experiences for many teachers in their first year of teaching is their independence in making decisions. The researcher’s first year was very similar to most teachers when developing his own teaching and classroom management styles. However, there was one notable distinction from the majority of his peers. While they stood in front of classrooms of American students on the first day of school, the researcher stood in front of an Arabic student population in a Middle East country steeped in its history and traditions.

Working in an American international school in a city with a population of over 17 million people, the researcher encountered the typical challenges of a first year teacher as well as typical acculturation process of an international teacher. This experience provided greater insight on the significance of culture in all aspects of his personal and professional life. The investigator was not the only teacher going through this experience. Instead, his team of colleagues encountered many cultural challenges that created positive and negative feelings about their international teaching experiences.

With this international experience, the researcher brings a personal bias to the study. In an interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher should be conscious of the biases when interpreting the data. Furthermore in interpretive phenomenology, the researcher interprets using personal knowledge to expound upon the meaning of the participant’s text that may be difficult to articulate (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The investigator’s perspective includes the belief that American international school educators encounter great challenges with culture often because of their limited global awareness of culture prior to teaching abroad. The investigator also believes that there
are significant adjustments to the cross-cultural situations, which develop a broader view of education.

Ethical Conduct

Maintaining ethical conduct throughout the study takes high priority. The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) reviewed the protocol for the field test and research study. The researcher did not initiate research until he received the written approval of the HSIRB. Upon the approval of the study, the researcher provided a consent form to interested candidates that described the details of the study including the time commitment, risks and benefits, participant’s role, and confidentiality procedures.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, there is no specific point at which data collection stops and data analysis begins, nor is there a point in which analysis stops and interpretation begins (Patton, 1987). Carefully developing a plan for analyzing data reduces the inefficacy of the findings while increases the trustworthiness of the study. In this section, a description will detail the analysis process and the measures taken to increase the trustworthiness of the study. The final section will provide the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Analysis Process

Qualitative research generates considerable amounts of data, which requires a carefully planned strategy to analyze the information. Several research scholars suggest strategies that help guide researchers through the analysis process. Patton (1987)
proposed that analysis should follow the process of: (a) reviewing notes, (b) organizing the data, (c) developing themes or patterns, (d) categorizing themes or patterns, and (e) seeking alternate meanings. Similarly, Creswell (2007) suggested that the key steps in analysis should include: (a) data management, (b) reading and memoing, (c) describing, (d) classifying, (e) interpreting, and (f) representing.

Despite some variations between these proposed sets of strategies, they share key principles. In the analysis process, the researcher should consider: (a) how to organize the data, (b) how to know the data, (c) how to connect the data, and (d) how to refine the data. In order to address these points, this study used a hybrid process from recommendations from Rossman and Marshall (2006) and Smith (2011). A detailed description of the process will be provided in Chapter 4.

In the first phase, data management required attentiveness to details and organization. In order to maintain the accurate accounts of the participants, the researcher transcribed the recorded data for analysis using the computer software, Dragon Naturally Speaking. Digital copies of the transcripts were stored in files on the researcher’s secured laptop. The researcher used word processing and spreadsheet computer applications to add notes, highlight, and other organization skills to help develop themes and coding.

The second phase involved the researcher’s immersion into the data. Initially, the researcher transcribed the data by listening to the interviews and repeating the conversation to a computer that convert the audio into a written form (Park & Zeanah, 2005). Listening and repeating the interview dialogue using voice-recognition computer software provided digital transcripts and multiple reading opportunities of the transcripts,
which was part of the data immersion process. After the completion of the transcription process, the researcher read the documents multiple times to become increasing familiar with the data (Rossman & Marshall, 2006).

During the third phase, the researcher generated codes and themes from the study using an interpretative phenomenological analysis. This inductive analysis entailed the discovery of patterns, themes, and categories pulled from the data (Patton, 1987). The researcher considered two typologies for developing the themes. If an adequate amount of jargon had surfaced in the participants’ dialogues, the researcher would have used an indigenous typology that develops themes and categories by the participants using their own words or phrases used by the participants (Patton, 1987). However, when the researcher discovered that common words or phrases were minimal, he determined to use an analyst-constructed typology that creates themes and categories constructed by the researcher (Patton, 1987).

Capturing thoughts is not an activity limited to the data collection phase. Rather as thoughts emerge from the analysis of data, the researcher captured them through notes and memos. Explaining the significance of analytic writing, Marshall and Rossman (2007) noted that it “generates unusual insights that move analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative” (p. 161). The researcher recorded the analytic writings in a log documenting the activity taken during the collection and analysis stages of the study.

In the final phase, the researcher sought possible alternate explanations of findings in the study. As categories and themes emerged, the researcher critically challenged obvious patterns and looked for other explanations for the linkages (Marshall
& Rossman, 2006). Interpretations were subjective and required looking at all possibilities and determining the most conceivable explanation.

Measures of Trustworthiness

Researchers challenge qualitative research as a method that is highly subjective and lacks the rigor necessary in valid and reliable studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Despite these criticisms, the acceptance of qualitative research continues to grow in the field of research. Proponents of qualitative research assert that the focus on trustworthiness is more appropriate for this type of study than attempting to establish validity and reliability. While similarities between the terms exist, there is also a distinction between them. Lincoln & Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as a conceptual plausibility established on the components of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In order to establish trustworthiness of this study, the researcher took specific measures to meet the criteria for each element.

Credibility

Khiat (2010) explained credibility as the intent to describe accurately the reality of a phenomenon that an interpretive study seeks to represent within the context. A researcher maintains credibility in a qualitative study when the non-participants who have undergone similar experiences can recognize the descriptions and interpretations of the studied phenomenon (Sandelowski, 1986). In this study, the researcher reflected over personal bias, knowledge, and history with the phenomenon through reflective memo-writing as well as describing the researcher’s role earlier in this chapter. The researcher
also selected international schools with which he had familiarity, which attempted to help participants feel more comfortable with the researcher. In addition, the participants reviewed the data to ensure that interpretations reflect accuracy.

Dependability

Another component of increasing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study pertains to the consistency of data. In quantitative research, reliability describes the measures taken to produce the similar results if the design were used in with other subjects in similar situations. However, reliability would pose challenges when conducting qualitative research because, unlike quantitative research, it includes the atypical experiences (Krefting, 1991). Therefore, the criteria for dependability takes into account the variability found in qualitative research. Dependability is achieved when data and the interpretations are consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the researcher attempted to increase dependability through several measures. One measure entailed recoding the data after completing the first round of coding, which is a common practice in interpretative phenomenological analysis. Additionally, the researcher had a peer, who is knowledgeable of qualitative research methods, conduct a review of the protocol used for the collection and analysis of the research. This individual also provided feedback.

Transferability

Qualitative studies achieve transferability or applicability when a study’s findings fit into contexts of studies with similar situations (Krefting, 1991). Lincoln and Guba
(1985) added to the description of transferability by stating that increased transferability occurs when the researcher leaves adequate descriptive data for comparison in other studies. In this study, a description of the time, place, context, and culture provided the details for other researchers to make judgments on the studies transferability (Mertens, 2010).

Confirmability

The fourth criterion in increasing the trustworthiness of this study pertains the degree other researchers can corroborate the findings if given the same data and context (Merriam, 2002; Krefting, 1991). The researcher took measures to increase confirmability by writing self-reflective memos of personal biases that emerged. Additionally, the researcher provided an audit documentation that detailed the study including the interview question guide, transcripts, memos, and data collection and analysis notes.

Limitations and Delimitations

No study is without limitations and delimitations in its research design. Chapter 1 indicated the limitations of funding and time affected the way data was collected. All interviews were conducted by Skype and phone communication rather than a face-to-face format. Additionally, the participants were affiliated faith based international school organizations. The delimitations of the study pertained to the focus of the study on American international teachers in the Asian Pacific Rim region.
Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research design for this study. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, the researcher collected data by interviewing participants and collecting pertinent artifacts from them that described their cross-cultural experiences. A purposeful criterion sampling determined the selection of participants for the study. After the collection of data, the researcher conducted the analysis by organizing data, immersing in data, developing themes and codes, offering interpretations, and considering alternate explanations (Rossman & Marshall, 2006). The generating of codes and themes followed the interpretative phenomenological analysis process recommended by Smith (2011). The study built in measures on how the study increased the trustworthiness of the study including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The concluding section described the limitations and delimitations of the study.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This study explored the cross-cultural experiences of 15 American international teachers who currently teach or formerly taught in the Asian Pacific Rim region with a specific focus on the adjustments they made in and outside of their schools. The investigator collected data from transcriptions of recorded interviews. This chapter presents the results from the data collected from the study. In the first section, the sampling for the study details the profiles of the participants and schools used in the study as well as the process used in analyzing the data. The second section provides a description of the analysis approach used to interpret the data. In the final section of this chapter, a description of the participants’ accounts from their international teaching experiences will be presented and its relation to the research question and sub-questions.

Sampling Overview

The purpose of this study was to capture the lived experiences of U.S. trained teachers who migrated to other countries to serve as teachers in American international schools. The study sought to answer the research question, in what ways do U.S. trained educators teaching in American international schools abroad experience and respond to cultural adjustments? More specifically, the study sought to address the questions:

1. How do the teachers describe their experiences adjusting to both the culture of the country or region where the school is located and the culture of the school itself after being in there for at least a year?

2. What adjustments do they describe to living and working in the new country?
3. What adjustments do they describe in adapting to their school?

4. What adjustments do they describe making to the ways in which they structure their classroom and engage with students?

5. How have these teachers’ experiences adapting to new international school cultures impacted the ways they think about and go about their work as teachers?

Sampling Selection

To answer the research questions, the researcher used a purposive sampling in the study to find fifteen teachers from the United States who currently teach or formerly taught in American international schools in countries in the Asian Pacific Rim region. These teachers have served minimally one year as teachers with international students ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade in the countries of South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Guam, and China.

Upon the HSIRB approval of the study, the investigator contacted directors from American international school organizations who employ teachers in the Asian Pacific Rim region. After explaining the study to the directors, they offered to send the recruitment flyer (see Appendix D) for the study to their teachers in that region. The flyer included a description and criteria for the study as well as contact information. In all, the directors sent the flyer to over 200 teachers resulting in 25 teachers responding to the flyer.

As prospective candidates requested information on the study, the researcher gave additional details of the study and answered questions that they had. Out of 25 consent
forms sent to teachers, fifteen interested candidates returned electronically signed copies to the researcher. The researcher and participants arranged times to interview by Skype or phone. Thirteen participants chose to interview by Skype while two chose to interview by phone. The investigator recorded the semi-structured interviews and transcribed the dialogue for analysis in the spring of 2013.

Demographics of Participants

Ten schools comprised the setting for the study. In China, the participants taught in non-traditional formats determined by Chinese governmental regulations on schools. Two participants taught in English as a Second Language programs that service Chinese national students in two international schools. The purpose of the programs is to expose students to English conversation through studying subject areas such as science, math, art, and history. The schools integrate these classes into regular school hours as well as after school times. The other participant in China taught a small group of elementary international students using an American-based curriculum in a remote area of China.

The other participants in the study taught in traditional American schools that offer an American curriculum in a kindergarten through 12th grade setting. One participant taught in an Indonesian school with nearly 200 students and 11 different nationalities represented in their student population. Four participants taught in three schools in South Korea with enrollments ranging from approximately 100 to 900 students with 10 to 50 nationalities represented in their student population. Two teachers were in a Singaporean school of 400 students with 20 nationalities represented. One participant worked as an elementary teacher in an international school in Malaysia where there were
500 students and 27 nationalities represented. The three teachers in Guam taught in an international school of nearly 1000 international students. All of the schools used American based curriculum. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants in this study including their gender, years of international teaching experience, subject or grade level taught, and the location of their international schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of International Teaching</th>
<th>Grade or Subject</th>
<th>Location of School</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>H.S. Math/Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Admin/Sub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>H.S. Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>H.S. Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H.S. English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher 8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Band</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher 9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>E.S.L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>H.S. Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher 12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>K – 4th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher 13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>H.S. Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 15</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>K/E.S.L.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Data

For the purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher supported the premise that examining the world directly through the participants’ eyes is impossible and requires the researcher’s interpretation to construct the meaning.
Therefore, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was suitable for this study because it not only sought for the participants to make sense of their worlds, but also for the researcher to assist in the participants’ efforts in making sense of their own worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher combined two analysis processes for the qualitative research. First, Rossman and Marshall (2006) recommended six steps: (a) organizing data, (b) immersion into data sets, (c) generate categories and themes, (d) coding the data, (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos, and (f) searching for alternative understandings. Smith (2011) recommended another analysis process specific to IPA studies: (a) make notations of the first case, (b) develop initial themes from the first case, (c) cluster themes, (d) produce a table of themes, (e) repeat the steps with each remaining case (using existing themes and adding new ones when deemed significant by the researcher), (f) produce a table of superordinate themes, (g) prioritize and reduce themes, and (h) create a master table of superordinate themes. The analyst iterated the process of reviewing the cases as new themes emerge through the distillation (Smith, 2011). Therefore, the hybrid steps taken for analyzing the data of this study included: (a) organize the data, (b) immerse into the data through multiple readings, (c) generate codes, (d) develop subordinate and superordinate themes, (d) prioritize and reduce themes, (e) create a master table of themes, and (f) check for alternate explanations.

When the interviews concluded, the recordings were stored as digital files on a secured laptop. During the transcription process, the investigator converted the written transcripts to a spreadsheet format with each interview recorded on separate worksheets. By using a spreadsheet format, the researcher wrote algorithms and utilized functions
such as word searches and hidden columns to improve the accuracy of data and to maximize the ability to retrieve information quickly and efficiently.

In order for data immersion to occur, the researcher went through multiple rounds of listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts. The research listened to the recording of the interviews three times with the first time being the actual interview. For the second round, the research created transcripts by listening and repeating the dialogue from the interviews using a speech-to-text software. The final round of listening allowed the investigator to edit the transcripts for better accuracy of the transcripts. Each round allowed the researcher to become more familiar with each interviewee’s conversation.

Further immersion of data occurred when the researcher read the transcripts eight times throughout the analysis phase. For the first two phases, the investigator read the transcripts concentrating on the content of the interviews. During the third reading, the researcher made a column of keywords and concepts shared on the corresponding lines.

After making notations, the researcher developed descriptive coding for the notations. Using descriptive coding allowed the researcher to categorize a range of opinions by the participants (Saldaña, 2009). The investigator treated each interview independently of each other during the initial coding process. During the fourth reading, the investigator coded the transcripts followed by a reduction process of recoding and regrouping codes, which led to emerging themes. This reduction process occurred for two additional readings.

At the conclusion of the sixth reading, the researcher cross-referenced the emerging themes from each transcript to pull emerging superordinate and subordinate
themes from the text. After constructing a table of superordinate or subordinate themes, the investigator read the transcripts two more times to continue the reduction process.

To maintain a fresh perspective on the themes, the researcher set the data aside for a few days before resuming. For the final reading, the researcher hid the columns with the notations and codes and recoded using the subordinate themes. This measure served as a means to test the dependability of the study.

In reviewing the list of themes, the researcher prioritized themes, which took the total number of participants referring to themes (prevalence) and the frequency of the theme (density) into consideration. Although the IPA process does not solely rely on prevalence of themes (Smith, 2010), the researcher determined to use the themes that were coded in at least ten transcripts.

From this reduction process, eleven subordinate themes emerged from the data: (a) challenge of communication, (b) change in lifestyle, (c) exposure to the international school climate, (d) understanding of expectations, (e) understanding of social norms, (f) immersion in community lifestyle, (g) source of encouragement and support, (h) articulation of roles and expectations, (i) development of relationships, (j) expansion of worldview, and (k) appreciation for student individuality. The researcher clustered these themes into the four superordinate themes: (a) encounter with cultural differences, (b) understanding of cultural underpinnings, (c) adaptations in personal and professional lives, and (d) transformation of cultural identities.

Throughout the analytic process, the researcher logged all activities in the collection and analysis process and included dates, times, and comments. Furthermore, the investigator wrote analytic memos about concepts and emerging themes that surfaced
from the transcripts. These memos helped formulate ideas and rationale for organizing
the data for interpretation. Throughout the interpretation process, the researcher referred
to the log and memos as a reference.

Findings

After analyzing studies using an IPA approach, Smith (2011), who is a prominent
IPA researcher, emphasized the importance for a quality study to consider the prevalence
and density of themes. The researcher of this study defined the acceptable measure of
theme prevalence as those themes referenced by at least 10 of the participants. Likewise,
the researcher determined the acceptable measure of density to be themes collectively
referenced at least 15 times. Table 2 indicates the prevalence and density of
superordinate themes in the data.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encounter with cultural differences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of cultural underpinnings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptations in personal and professional lives</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of cultural identities</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each superordinate theme and its corresponding subordinate themes address
specific research questions. The researcher organized the findings of the study by
presenting the superordinate themes with the corresponding research question(s) followed
by the subordinate themes that correspond with each research question. Table 3 describes the organization of the superordinate themes, subordinate themes, and research questions.

Table 3

*Organization of Themes and Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Subordinate Themes</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Encounter with cultural differences</td>
<td>1. Challenge of communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Change in lifestyle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Exposure to the international school climate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understanding of cultural underpinnings</td>
<td>1. Understanding of expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Understanding of social norms</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Adaptations in personal and professional lives</td>
<td>1. Immersion in community lifestyle</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Source of encouragement and support</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Articulation of roles and expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Development of relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Transformation of cultural identities</td>
<td>1. Expansion of worldview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Appreciation for student individualism</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Encounter with Cultural Differences

From the analysis of the data, teachers described cultural differences that they encountered in a variety of ways that occurred in and outside of their schools. While many of their descriptions depicted the differences between their lifestyle in the United States and their new home, the participants referred mostly to three areas. These areas emerged as the subordinate themes under this superordinate theme: (a) challenge of communication, (b) change in lifestyle, and (c) exposure to the international school climate. These themes capture the international teaching experience of the participants as
it relates to Research Question 1. Table 2 shows the prevalence and density of these themes.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encounter with Cultural Differences</th>
<th>Number of Participants Referring to Theme</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of communication</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in lifestyles</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to the international school climate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1

How do the teachers describe their experiences adjusting to both the culture of the country or region where the school is located and the culture of the school itself after being there for at least a year?

During the interview process, the researcher provided an opportunity for teachers to share their experience of going to their international school assignment. The researcher asked participants to share their background, which gave insight on how they perceived things as they entered the country as an international teacher. Participants reflected over their experience using the following questions from the interview outline:

1. What led you to international teaching?
2. What cross-cultural experiences or training did you have prior to your international teaching experience?
3. What did you expect professionally and personally as you planned to go to your international school?
4. When you reflect over the time you have been at your school, what are cultural differences you face outside of school? your school? your classroom?

5. What are some of the most significant cultural moments you can recall? Funniest moments? Frustrating moments? Surprising moments?

6. What feelings and thoughts did you experience as you encountered these cultural experiences? How did these feelings change over time (if they did)?

Challenge of communication. Typically when entering another country, people face communication differences immediately. Language barrier is often the biggest contributor to this issue. From the interviews, all fifteen teachers shared their perspectives on what communication challenges exist as they started. Teachers noticed these differences occurred inside their schools as well as out in the community.

Three teachers indicated that the English as a Second Language (ESL) has become an increasing issue in international schools as globalization spreads across our world. As a seasoned veteran in international schools, Teacher 4 started his teaching career in the Philippines with a class of predominately North American students nearly thirty years ago. Comparing his past with the present, he acknowledged, “We didn’t have ESL issues then as we do now.”

As Teacher 5 explained the challenges in the classroom, he stated, “You certainly have to deal with a lot more English language issues with students whose mother tongue is not English.” Despite the expectation for high school students to be fluent in English when you go to an international school, Teacher 6 admitted, “At a high school level we’re are hoping students learned English, but still there are some students that have
fairly weak English skills.” While Teacher 3 expressed appreciation for teaching mathematics, which she referred to as the “universal language,” she also noted,

We have some ESL students that come in that speak little English and they are in the English language programs, but they are trying. But I didn’t have nearly the struggles as other teachers had in my class because of less language barriers.

The issue with communication is not necessarily bound to the student’s English skills, but also the teacher’s ability to pronounce words or names in other languages. With a diverse group of students from different countries, there are different names, which make of teacher’s job a challenge in pronouncing names. Teacher 1 recalled when she first arrived to her school:

It took me forever to learn their names. They are different names because you have Korean names. You have Chinese names. You have Japanese names. You have Island names. And then you have kids with American names with their Korean names or whatever. So their names were different.

While commenting on an international teacher’s task to pronounce names, Teacher 3 remembered her first teacher mistake, which involved pronouncing a student’s name:

My very first teaching mistake - I will never forget - we were taking attendance and so I was doing roll call. These are some different names that I've never seen or pronounced before. And I had warned them before that if I totally mess up your name, don't laugh at me too much if I butcher your name. So I am going down the line and they're all saying that they're here and I say the name, Sum’en. And everyone starts to giggle and I responded, "I'm sorry, did I say that wrong?"
And this boy stands up and says, “It's Su'men. Then afterwards, I said, "I'm so sorry, I understood that it was wrong but it wasn't too wrong. Why was it so funny?" And someone said, "Because that's a girl's name." And they were all giggling because I had called him a girl's name. All I could say is "I'm so sorry."

Along with names, learning to pronounce words in other languages was an issue for one teacher as they started. In China, Teacher 9 found that different tones mean different things when you communicate in school and community. He admitted, “I consider myself tone deaf. I asked my wife to tell me the four tones of mom and they all sound exactly the same. I had no idea. I know that one means horse and other means mother.”

Students with limited English skills are not the only ones posing communication challenges. Seven teachers indicated that communicating with parents is a big challenge too. Communicating takes more time, which is not always afforded to a teacher. In explaining the reason for this, Teacher 11 said, “There are a number of parents who don’t speak functional English. It makes it harder to communicate because often times when they pick up their child from the car line, the translator is their child.” This time issue also was reflected in Teacher 12’s account when she noted, “I sometimes had a parent that didn’t speak very much English. I had to be careful there about speaking slowly and simply.”

Teachers indicated that the communication challenge was not confined to school, but also affected the teachers as they were in the community. Teacher 13 realized after getting to China that knowing Chinese was important for living in her community. She emphatically stressed this by saying:
In China, if you don’t speak Chinese, I’m sorry to say that there are probably many, many things you cannot do here .... It’s very difficult to order food. It’s very difficult to do something such as purchasing water and getting it delivered to your house, setting up internet. I could talk about that for a long time.

Also realizing this difficult language barrier in China, Teacher 9 admitted, “I just know enough to say, ‘Hello,’ ‘Goodbye,’ ‘Right,’ ‘Left,’ for the cab. Beyond that, if I had to order water or give directions in a cab, we had a cheat sheet that I would show them.”

Not all countries rely on language acquisition as much as teachers do in China. Teacher 2 commented about getting around in Korea, “Even though I didn’t know any Korean at all, you could still get around pretty easily with the English translations on the subway stations. Taxis are a little harder because you have to say where you want to go.”

Challenges in communication also exist in other forms according to several teachers. Two teachers mentioned their developing awareness of different channels of communication that they found in their countries. Teacher 11 pointed out the pros and cons of this form of communication with the Korean mothers:

There’s a Korean grapevine mother society here. All of the Korean mothers know each other and they hang out together. They can be good at times because you find out things you need to know and there are other times when the answers from a test from someone shows up on a student’s paper the following year .... So it has its good and bad aspects.

With different channels of communication, there can be misunderstandings between teachers and parents. Teacher 14 explained this scenario:
As far as parents go, we would hear complaints and concerns expressed by Asian parents, but we would hear about them through back channels. And that is still something that is frustrating to some extent today. Westerners tend to be pretty upfront and direct and so you know where they stand whereas Asians with the shame-honor cultural value tend to not want to rock the boat, but they want to get their message across, but they wouldn't do it the way that would inhibit or harm their relationship.

Change in lifestyle. When describing their international teaching experience, fourteen participants contrasted their American lifestyle with their new community. A wide range of lifestyle differences surfaced in conversations with the teachers. One of the most common responses targeted conveniences in everyday living. Seven teachers contrasted the typical conveniences of the American lifestyle with the less convenient lifestyles of their countries.

Shopping proved to be challenging especially if people were looking for American items. Teacher 13 concluded from her shopping experience, “There is no one-stop shopping. They do have grocery stores though, which was good. The stuff I’m used to is imported, so it’s a lot more expensive and obviously more than we would pay in the U.S.”

Also describing the expense and inconvenience of getting certain American items, Teacher 5 explained the scenario in this way:

Every grocery store in our town had one kind of cheese. It was a grated really bland thing called pizza cheese, so occasionally I would take a one-hour trip
downtown to go mortgage my future [sarcasm] on a block of cheddar cheese at an import store.

Being in more remote regions only made it a greater challenge in shopping for certain items. Teacher 1 explained about shopping in Guam, “It’s not like ‘We don’t have it at this one store, so we’ll go find it at another store.’ It’s more about ‘We don’t have it on the Island because we haven’t gotten the shipment yet.’”

Convenience was not an issue with shopping in Singapore according to Teacher 10. He pointed out the items are not necessarily the exact match to American items that he commonly knew. He explained, “You can get just about everything, but it may not have the same name. Even though it may be English, there may be a different name for it because it’s British.”

Another change in lifestyle patterns mentioned by the participants pertained to the food selections. Five teachers indicated changes with their regular diet. For some, different food choices posed some issues as they acclimated to their new home in China, Teacher 9 said, “My wife has stomach issues so she can eat certain foods. And my son doesn’t care too much for the food. He’s more, ‘I’d rather eat Western food.’” This posed issues during their initial time there. He further described how the adjustment took its toll on the family by explaining, “You get to a point where you’re tired of going out for 45 minutes to go get food every day because your refrigerator is so small. It doesn’t hold it. And you have to do it for your family or they won’t eat.”

Five teachers indicated contrasting perspectives in what was normal when it comes to cultural definitions of personal space. Teacher 13 described a time when she encountered this difference in a Malaysian store. She explained, “I would literally have
Chinese ladies physically push me out of the way, when I stood in front of something they wanted. There was no ‘Excuse me.’”

Reflecting over his initial experience in China, Teacher 9 gave a humorous depiction of personal space differences:

I was always on the bus. I laugh because there is no personal space. In the winter, you're so close to people around you and everybody else is shorter than me, so I had the Velcro and zipper coat on because it’s 30 degrees below zero. And you get their hair caught in your zippers. And you're stuck like Velcro to each other. And everyone's trying to get off at different times, but you’re stuck.

It can be pretty funny.

From Teacher 3, one of the first memories of arriving in Korea pertained to personal space issues as she deplaned. She described the experience in this way, “As soon as you get to the airport, everyone is rushing to get off the airplane. Everyone wants to get off the airplane. I get that.” She continued by rationalizing, “The lack of personal space was one of the first moments of cultural difference that I experienced. They’re not trying to be mean, but they push and shove and it’s not rude to them, but to us it would.”

Teacher 10 found a difference in personal space in stores. In Singapore, Teacher 10 described the store space as “being a third the size of the grocery stores I was used to.” Later, he described how the closeness of space affected his perception of personal space when he visited the U.S.:

We were standing in line at a Wal-mart and the guy in front of us turned around and was like, ‘Hello’ [surprise] ‘What’s going on here?’ Because we were just
standing there and if you’re not right behind him, you’re not in line and somebody may come and get in front of you.

Another area reflected in lifestyle changes occurred with time management. Six teachers noted differences in time management of daily routines. Teacher 15 described her first experience with the differing views of time management with her employer:

The culture here works on a last minute basis .... So basically, the girl whose position I was taking was leaving in eight days when I arrived in China .... I arrived and then I had four days of training, which I’m supposed to have a week and a half. I had four days of training and basically, they put me on a train. Mind you that I speak no Chinese.

Teacher 11 referred to adjusting to a slower pace of life found in Guam by saying, “Readjusting to where clocks don’t mean much to some people .... People enjoy sitting around under the mango tree and chatting instead of rushing off to do whatever they think this person should do.” Teacher 8 also commented of this slow pace of life in Guam and added, “We always talk about Island time here, [which] is anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour late.”

Similarly, Teacher 7 referred to this polychronic view of time in the Indonesian lifestyle. To illustrate this point, he described the reality of planning events in this way, “We had a Christmas gathering here at my house and the invitations went out and I think it said 3:00, and it didn’t really start until 4:30.” Teacher 7 further explained how this perception of time and schedules impact affects his daily plans:

You have a beautiful day planned and all of the sudden the mosque goes off and you hear that somebody has just died. And that’s it. All your plans are out the
window because if someone in the neighborhood dies, the expectation is for you to go to the funeral and pay your respects.

On the other end of the spectrum, Teacher 5 recalled his experience with the Japanese perception of time, which stems from a monochronic culture. He described their punctual behavior in this manner, “At 5:59, there was no one there and I was wondering if this thing was going to be a complete bust. At 6:01, everyone in the neighborhood was there. They all showed up exactly at 6, not a minute early, not a minute late.”

As teachers acclimated to the new culture, they found that they encountered changes in their modes of transportation as well as navigation. Eight teachers discussed what the common modes of transportation were and how they adjusted to it. Teacher 7 noticed quickly that traffic was “chaotic.”

Also noticing the chaotic driving patterns in Malaysia, Teacher 13 described watching people park:

The driving was appalling. I would see these Chinese people pull into a parking spot, which is way too small with cars all around them and it didn't matter. They would hit the cars and then they would walk off. And they’re literally hitting the other cars with their car and it didn't matter. They would walk away. It was just the way they were.

Teacher 2 referred to her change in mode of transportation as doing more “walking versus driving.” Teacher 4, Teacher 6, and Teacher 7 indicated a high use of motorcycles in their areas. Teacher 7 explained his surprise by saying, “There are a lot of motorcycles and that’s what most people drive. And then the number of people that can
get on a motorcycle and the type of things you can carry on motorcycles were pretty startling.”

*Exposure to the international school climate.* The third theme that emerged from the data pertained to the teachers’ description of an international school. As part of their explanation of the international teaching experience, all fifteen teachers remarked on their acclimation to the international school climate, which for those exposed to teaching in the United States is significantly different. Although five teachers specifically described their schools or curriculum as being “American,” all fifteen participants described the international climate by identifying unique characteristics of the types of students that they taught. The two groups most referred to were TCKs and Asian national students, which comprise a high percentage of their student population.

While TCK students may have a passport from the United States, South Korea, or other countries, many are highly internationalized and take on their own unique culture. The American TCK students are not the typical “American” students found in the classrooms that the participants did their U.S. teaching or internships. Five teachers described characteristics of what they observed with TCKs. From her years in working with this group of students, Teacher 12 described an American TCK in the following manner:

They’re so widely traveled and knowledgeable about the world. They travel immensely and have been exposed to many cultures, sometimes more than one culture other than American culture. And a lot of them have lived in a foreign country and don't even know American culture outside of their home culture. Their family lives that, but outside of that they don't know American
culture. It's very strange to them. They're almost like a third wheel. When they
go back to the States, it's really hard for them because they don't know where to
fit in. They don't really feel at home in the culture overseas.

She further explained that TCKs “face a lot of transitions coming and going …. and it
wears on the kids a lot.” Adding to this description, Teacher 10 indicated that there are
American TCKs “who never lived on American soil.”

In observing the TCK’s social behavior, Teacher 4 noticed, “TCKs interacted
more with adults.” When Teacher 13 observed TCK’s at her boarding school, she
described them to be “more physical with each other.” She further explained, “The girls
would hold hands and the boys would put their arms around each other in a friendly way.
They kind of stuck together and they were very close touchy wise kind of thing, but not
in a weird way.”

Teacher 3 also noticed that TCKs were “very skeptical.” She attributed this
behavior to the transitional lifestyle they live:

The students were very skeptical. If they had been in the school for a long period
of time, they know that teachers come and go because we're only required two
years by contract. So they know every 2 to 3 years, teachers leave and new
teachers come in. At the time during 9th to 10th grade, they've probably seen
about 20 different teachers within their career. We were taught this that third
culture kids don't let you in very easily. The more people they let in; (when the
teachers leave) the more hurt they become. They were very hands-off and "I am
not going to let you into my life until I know that you really want to be a part of
my life. I know you want to invest in me.”
Fourteen participants also described the Asian students, one of the other largest student populations in their schools. Four teachers described the students’ high expectation for academic success. Teacher 7 depicted this behavior in a situation with grades. He said, “The kids that made B’s felt like they had failed the exam. There is such a focus on grades here.”

Teacher 1 explained the efforts Asian students make to meet their high expectations in Guam. “We do have a lot of them getting tutoring, even if they aren’t necessarily struggling. Like if they’re starting to get low A’s or high B’s and they have never had them behavior. Suddenly, they need a tutor.” Teacher 10 also noted this activity in Singapore. “A lot of students go off for tutoring … But even the top students are going for tutoring to get better.” Four teachers also noted that this high expectation brings about the ethical dilemmas. Teacher 1 stated that they “do anything they can to get the A. And so if you cheat, a lot of parents and a lot of kids don’t see why we get upset about it.”

Four teachers also described the Asian students as relying on rote learning. Four of the participants indicated that memorization was common among their ways of learning. Teacher 3 said, “They just want to know what they needed to know and ‘How can I pass the test?’ And that’s very typical in the Asian culture. Because they are a very rote memorization culture.” Teacher 6 described it in this way, “The Asian educational philosophy is ‘Give them the facts and let them memorize it and then give them an opportunity to spit the facts back out.’”

After talking to several American professors in Singapore, Teacher 14 found that they shared the same observation of their Asian students. He said, “The emphasis is on
the grade and the academic standing of the student not the learning and application and the intrinsic value of whatever is being considered.”

Being in a classroom of Chinese nationals, Teacher 15 made this observation about her Chinese students:

Our children who learn English here are like robots. We make them repeat vocabulary and sentences and words, but I think they start these children at the age of two or three and they don’t necessarily want to learn English …. I don’t think children are robots, but the educational system here does and parents sometimes force them into that structure.

Teacher 11 added that some students have blended nationalities. She described some of these students by saying, “I had one girl who was a mix of Japanese and Iranian …. I had one student that was part Hawaiian. So there were some surprising ‘halves’ – one parent or the other – with some interesting cultures thrown on the side.”

In conjunction with their descriptions of student populations, all fifteen teachers commented on the international atmosphere of their schools. Teacher 7 noted his appreciation for the interaction between students with different nationalities. He observed, “During lunch I see American kids adopting some Korean customs and sharing food. You’ll see the blending of two cultures there …. I think a lot of the culture is being created by the students and student interaction.”

Likewise, Teacher 1 remembered seeing this cultural fusion when she first started teaching in her school:

I also remember that at lunchtime going down to the cafeteria and you have one kid eating a burger and fries sitting next to a kid with chopsticks and sushi. That's
just normal. You have one kid opening up a package of seaweed next to the kid who is opening a bag of potato chips. And they were trading, "Hey, can I have some of your seaweed and I will give you some of my potato chips?"

Teacher 2 pointed out that even at the kindergarten level, her students possess unique qualities as international students. “They travel a lot and see a lot experiences. They all understand what it is to fly on an airplane and go to different places. Several can speak different languages.”

Summary. In response to Research Question 1, teachers described their international experience with an initial awareness of cultural differences. From this superordinate theme, the three most common areas that teachers described their encounter with cultural differences included challenge of communication, changes in lifestyle, and exposure to the international school climate. These areas formed the three subordinate themes for this research question.

As teachers arrived in their countries, they encountered issues with communication predominately from the language barrier with students, parents, and community members. Simple tasks, such as pronouncing names and words that normally go unobserved in the American teaching experience posed challenges for some of the teachers. The level of difficulty in communicating depended on the country and their English fluency. Along with the language barrier, the channels of communication used were also difficult for some teachers.

Part of the international experience is about living in a new community with different ways of shopping, food, and transportation. When capturing their international experience, teachers referred to changes in the lifestyles because of moving into another
culture. While teachers noticed the expense or inaccessibility of American items, they also appreciated the discoveries of different food and marketplaces. Along with shopping and food, teachers encountered different levels of personal space and modes of transportation in their communities. As a final observation, teachers recognized how people view time management differently depending on if they are in a polychronic or monochronic culture. All of these areas of their lifestyles were notable changes for them when they arrived in their new homelands.

To add to their description of their experiences, teachers found their schools to have an international climate. Their students consisted predominately of TCKs and Asian national students that possessed unique characteristics that were not present in their students in the United States. The converging of many nationalities presented cultural fusion opportunities between students. Teachers noticed differences in learning styles with their students too. Overall, they encountered an international atmosphere of their schools. Table 5 displays the distribution of responses by each participant.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1-Challenge of communication</th>
<th>Theme 2-Change in lifestyle</th>
<th>Theme 3-Exposure to the international school climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
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<td>Theme 3</td>
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Understanding of Cultural Underpinnings

In the interviews, teachers explained that as they observed cultural differences over time, they learned the cultural underpinnings of these phenomena. The second emerging superordinate theme, understanding cultural underpinnings, captured the teachers’ transition from viewing these phenomena as surface behaviors to ones influenced by cultural roots. Viewing issues through this cultural lens occurred in their schools and community. In all, the teachers referred to this theme 84 times. Two subordinate themes comprise this superordinate theme: (a) understanding expectations and (b) understanding social norms. Table 6 shows the prevalence and density of these themes. These subordinate themes further addressed Research Question 1 by describing the transition process that teachers encountered as they entered their new countries.

Table 6

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Understanding of Cultural Underpinnings</th>
<th>Number of Participants Referring to Theme</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced Overall</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of expectations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of social norms</td>
<td>14</td>
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Understanding of expectations. The fifteen participants described how that many issues they faced in their schools and communities stemmed from the expectations from schools, parents, and students. Often, the teachers saw cultural influences in these expectations, which helped them to make sense of the different viewpoints on topics such as their roles as teachers and community members. All teachers described that they noticed a very high expectation for a quality education especially from students raised primarily in an Asian culture. Teacher 11 recognized this high expectation saying,
“Coming from a primarily Asian culture overall, most of the parents have high expectations educationally. They expect hard work and great success, so they’re pushing for that and expecting it.”

As Teacher 3 encountered behavioral issues with her Korean students, she noticed that her expectation of parental involvement was different from that of the parents. She realized through these situations that her Asian parents defined student success on grades and, therefore, was the greatest concern for them. She pointed out, “If I had to talk to any parent because their student had a C or D, they wanted to know how to fix the grade. They didn’t want to know how to fix the student just how to fix the grade.”

With the high expectation for student success, parents had high expectations of teachers. After spending several years teaching in Europe, Teacher 5 discovered a difference between parent’s views on the student and teacher’s roles. Contrasting the European parental expectation with academics, he described, “Here it is ‘What is my student doing wrong? Why is my student getting an A- and not an A+? What is wrong with them?’ In Europe, it would be ‘Why did you give my student a B? What’s wrong with you?’” He also explained that the high expectation for student success resulted in parental involvement in their child’s education. As he described the parent’s role in education, Teacher 5 indicated that the Korean parents “wanted to know what their child should be doing and make sure that that’s what happened.”

In China, Teacher 9 also found his students’ parents to be highly invested in their children’s education. He described his Chinese parent’s sacrifice saying, “You know that they are going to give them the best with an education. So they will give them everything
to give them that. They will work 20 hours a day if they have to give them that opportunity.”

Not only did teachers observe the amount of time parents worked to support their children’s education, but also their willingness to relocate. Teacher 13 noted about several of her Korean families, “The mothers would move to Malaysia to put their kids in this school, so that they could get an American education .... And the dads stay in Korea and work.”

With high expectations for their children comes a high expectation for teachers too. Teacher 2 illustrated this point when she described a conversation she had at one particular parent-teacher conference:

This little boy was in kindergarten and his parents were already talking about his college and how he was doing in school in trying to prepare him for college. I remember thinking to myself, “Oh my goodness, how can they be so worried about his future life when he’s just starting out?”

Teacher 7 explained a similar experience with a parent that approached him one day. She asked, “What are you going to do to prepare my child for the SATs?” Teacher 12 also added, “they wanted homework and they wanted their kids to work hard.” Teacher 6 echoed this observation by explaining, “Especially Korean parents, my job is to teach them everything. My job is to give them the homework.”

Along with this high expectation for educators, the participants indicated that parents also have a high reverence for teachers. Six teachers described the various ways that this reverence manifested in their classrooms. The parents of Asian students expect their children to respect their teachers. As Teacher 5 explained it, “You’ve got
Confucianism over here. You have kids with their Confucian moms that are told every night you will respect your teacher or else.” Similarly, Teacher 3 said, “The culture of Korea, teachers are very highly respected. Teachers are put on the same level as doctors and lawyers …. Being a teacher in Korea is very respectful and as students, you do not disrespect your teachers.” Teacher 1 explained this high reverence in this way:

If you go to visit them or they take you out to eat, you are a guest of honor. With that comes very high expectations of you as a teacher and if you fail to meet that expectation, there is definitely a huge loss of respect. You don't have to earn their respect. You automatically have it at a very high level.

Not only did teachers note that parents have expectations of teachers, five teachers also noted that they have expectations of the school. Teacher 1 asserted, “They want the very best education that they can afford and a lot of it is reputation. So if your school can get a reputation for good educational quality, they will send their kids to us.” Teacher 15 also found that the school reputation is very important to her parents in China:

There’s a level of fame that each school has especially in my city. This lady that I was speaking to wanted me to teach her child English part-time … and she said that she was a teacher from a specific elementary …. Someone told me that that was a very good elementary school, so I should respect that.

Understanding of social norms. As teachers acclimated to their new experiences, they started to view social norms through a cultural lens. Fourteen teachers recognized cultural influences in the social behaviors of people in the community and school. This understanding developed after living and acclimating into cross-cultural settings over
Teachers described the behaviors as different from their own, but followed up by acknowledging that it was part of their culture. Teacher 2 described this transition in international teachers’ lives in this way:

You don't really notice things at first because everything is so exciting and new …. So at first, you don't become aware of all of the underlying things …. Sometimes it frustrates you more times than others. Sometimes you're like, “That's just the way they are. Get over it.” And other times you say, “No. Why are they like that?” And you get upset about it. I think it's something that you have to learn to deal with and not to get upset because that's the way they are. That's what their mindset is and that's what their culture is and it doesn't help to get upset about it because you really can't change it.

Teachers described situations in which some behaviors that they believed to be socially unacceptable were acceptable norms in other cultures. For instance, realizing that there are privileges given to the firstborn son in Korean culture, Teacher 1 explained how this manifested into behavior issues:

In the Korean culture, the firstborn son has a lot of leeway. He ranks over mom especially as they get older not so much when they're little, but as they get older, they can rank over mom. So there are a lot of the attention or respect issues especially between women teachers. So we will say, “Is he the oldest boy? Oh, okay [I understand now].”

As Teacher 9 described the male’s power in the Asian culture, he mentioned, “Discipline is a big deal because most of the kids that are boys are brought up in the
houses as the kings of the house. So when they go into a classroom and you say, ‘You can’t do that’ .... you’re in a power struggle.”

In addition to the birth order and gender rites, Teacher 4 noticed how the Asian parent’s role influences parent-teacher relationships. He illustrated this point in the following way:

One of the things that helped me get in better with the Koreans is that Korean dads are not responsible for their children's education .... In Korea, Korean dads don't mess with education. That's mom's job. I cannot mess with mom's job. If you get in trouble with mom and mom's not happy, nobody's happy .... The hard part about that is that the boys are typically better linguistically because they've had more experiences .... So we at school have a tendency to try to communicate with the dads because he speaks English well and mom doesn't, but dad has no responsibility in the education of their children. And they don't pass them along to mom. They don't try to explain to mom. That's mom’s area. So we have found it much better to deal with moms even though it's harder to deal with moms. So it appears that dads have a more hands-off approach to school and that's true. Moms have a good hands-on experience sometimes to the point that you think they're enabling.

Teacher 6 also noticed this lack of presence with Korean fathers. He said, “I only see mom. If I had a conversation with a parent whether a discipline or grade problem, the mother is usually the only one that I talked to.”

Ten teachers talked about how the underlying social norms of shame and “losing face,” affected the students in their schools. Teacher 4 pointed out about the shame
culture, “For the Korean culture, the shame that is brought to the family is a major motivation for kids to do well. It is not substance-oriented. In other words, if you’re not caught then there’s no shame and you are alright.” Teacher 14 further described the shame culture by saying:

Asians with the shame-honor cultural value tend to not want to rock the boat …. If they bring up the problem that is perceived by the teacher as a complaint … or would offend the teacher in some shape or form, they are worried that the teacher is not going to treat their child fairly.

Sometimes the shame culture brings about funny situations. As he described the shame culture in Indonesia, Teacher 7 told of a time where he encountered an awkward moment pertaining to shame:

One of my most glaring mistakes I made is that you don't want to shame the students in a shame culture. You don't want to shame yourself either. Don't put yourself in a position where you are viewed as bad. I remember when a child greets you, the parents tell them to greet them by taking your right hand and touch their cheek. And I got mixed up and greeted a baby and touched his hand to my cheek. So I was like putting the child higher. So that was embarrassing, but they were pretty forgiving.

Saving or losing face is another factor in social norms. Teacher 12 spoke to the issue of saving face in the Asian culture:

I have parents say, “Shame” and get down on their kids in front of everybody. But there’s also saving face, which is very important. You wouldn’t approach or
accuse somebody. You always protect them in front of others, so that you’re not shaming them.

Understanding the saving face culture, Teacher 15 uses it to her advantage when working with students. “There is a huge issue of saving face. It is a huge problem because I tended to break away from that and use it against the children. Such as I would say, ‘Your mom and dad are watching this and they’re going to know that I’m talking to you.”

Two teachers emphasized the importance for teachers to know about the saving face culture. If you find yourself in a power struggle with male students in China, Teacher 9 warned, “You lose face with the child and you will never reach them.” Similarly, Teacher 11 noted, “You don’t lose face or there’s going to be a problem.”

Summary

The teacher’s understanding of the cultural underpinnings of issues surfaced in the interviews as a part of their experience entering into their new countries. While the first superordinate theme described the initial reactions commonly found when international teachers arrived to their school assignments. The second superordinate theme described how the teachers moved from an exposure to cultural difference, which is common when visiting or initially settling in another culture, to an understanding of why their schools and communities function in certain ways. Two subordinate themes encompassed the second superordinate theme: (a) understanding expectations and (b) understanding social norms.
During this phase of their experiences, all fifteen teachers realized that high expectations for education, which was prevalent in their Asian families, defined the roles of the parents, students, and teachers. Teachers acknowledged that with high expectations for student success, parents prioritize grades as the most important issue. Therefore, issues such as behavioral concerns are less significant to parents than what teachers believed them to be. Parents also expected teachers to provide homework and prepare their children for college. Teachers in elementary and secondary noted this expectation when they interacted with parents. Along with the high expectations on teachers came a great respect for them. Parents instilled this reverence for teachers in their children. Several participants indicated that teachers in the Asian culture are on the level of doctors and attorneys. In some situations, teachers also noted that a school reputation is very important to parents too.

Teachers also realized that implications that culture have on the social norms of people in schools and communities. From their experiences, teachers explained that the social norms of gender roles with firstborn sons and mothers attribute to issues of behavior and communication between families and teachers. All of the interviewed teachers noted the significance of understanding how the Asian culture embraces the shame culture, which fuels student performance to avoid shaming their families. They also are concerned with saving face, which influences how Asian families communicate in ways to avoid embarrassing others. Table 7 shows the distributions of response by each teacher.
Table 7

Distribution of Prevalence and Density by Participants under Superordinate Theme 2

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Theme 1: Understanding of expectations
Theme 2: Understanding of social norms

Adaptation in Personal and Professional Lives

As teachers described their experiences, they indicated that as they understood the expectations and norms of the schools and communities, they made adjustments in several ways. These ways emerged as the subordinate themes for this third superordinate theme. The following themes describe the ways that teachers adapted to their new surroundings: (a) participation in community lifestyle, (b) articulation of roles and expectations, (c) source of encouragement and support, and (d) development of relationships. These themes address research questions 2, 3, and 4. Table 8 shows the prevalence and density of the themes.

Table 8. Prevalence and Density of Subordinate Theme 3

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<th>Adaptations in Personal and Professional Lives</th>
<th>Number of Participants Referring to Theme</th>
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<td>Source of encouragement and support</td>
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<td>Articulation of roles and expectations</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of relationships</td>
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</tbody>
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Research Question 2

What adjustments do they describe to living and working in the new country?
In the interviews, the researcher asked teachers to reflect over the ways they adapted to living in a new cultural setting. Teachers reflected over the following interview questions to help them describe the adaptations:

5. Thinking about these experiences, what adjustments did they cause you to make in how you interacted with the community?

6. Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?

Immersion in community lifestyle. One crucial piece of the adjustment process into a new country is the degree newcomers immerse into their community. Twelve participants described this importance and the ways they accomplished their immersion into the community activities. After observing various teachers’ responses to immersion in Singapore, Teacher 14 shared his insight on immersion:

I think it's important for long-term success to have an identity and an investment in the community that you’re in and outside of the school that you're in …. So there are people here that can come and be involved in school and then after school they can go to Starbucks to get a coffee. And then they go to Carl's Junior to get a burger and then they go home and get on the Internet and watch Western TV shows on iTunes and then go back and do it all over again …. And it's really like a slice of Americana …. I think investing in the community in some regard outside of your bubble in the international school that you’re in is important. You want to be a member of that community as much as possible volunteering, helping out, getting to know local people, eating local food, being invited into their homes. These are all things that some Westerners never do. And if they don't do that, they're missing out on a lot of rich experiences.
One way four teachers immersed into their communities pertained to food choices. The teachers either made substitutions in their cooking with local ingredients or adapted their eating choices to local foods. As Teacher13 described dealing with fewer American items, she said, “So you have to see what Asian substitutes you could get so it’s not so expensive and then you try it. And sometimes it’s gross and other times it’s doable.” She also shared about her pleasant discoveries along the way by saying, “It was great because I’m a pretty healthy eater and so I love having the fresh stuff around and Asian fruits are delicious.”

For some teachers adjusting to local foods is about your attitude toward the transition. Teacher 5 explained:

My wife is having to make these changes in that she has to buy things that she wouldn’t normally buy if she were in Europe and feed it to her family. If we can’t make peace with that, then this whole experience is going to be miserable.

Teacher 4 also bragged about his wife’s adjustment to cooking in Philippines saying, “My wife is well known for several things. Cooking is one of them.”

Whether walking or using a common mode of transportation in the community, nine teachers referenced using these modes as part of daily life. Two teachers specifically mentioned the adventures driving in their communities. After buying a vehicle, Teacher 4 recalled adventurous moments with it:

We bought a slightly larger car but still a compact known as the Butterscotch Bombshell …. My wife proceeded to lose the key to it, so I had rigged it to start with a screwdriver. I remember parking it on the hill next to the school so that
that I could merely take off the parking brake and rolled down the hill to start it.

It wasn’t in real good shape, but it worked for us.

Along with the adventure of driving a car also comes challenges as you navigate through the community. Teacher 13 also recounted the challenges she faced when driving a vehicle in Malaysia:

I already knew how to drive a stick shift, so that wasn’t a big deal, but everything was on the opposite side, so when I would go to turn my turn signal on, my windshield wipers would go across the windshield. So it took me a good two months before I didn't turn on the windshield wipers every time I went to make a turn just because you get used to it. And then it flip-flops and then I come back to the U.S. who are doing the opposite. So it takes time to get adjusted. You'd ask yourself, “Am I on the right side of the road in the right lane?” Because it's just so weird. But not weird in a negative way, but it's more about how your brain has worked for the last 20 years of your life and then, boom, it's completely opposite. It was interesting. It was one of those challenges I liked.

Two teachers indicated that despite immersing into the community through the use of public transportation, there were things that they had to know and respect.

Teacher 15 indicated that when she rides the bus, “I have ten pairs of eyes on me simply because I’m on the bus. They’re thinking, ‘Why am I not taking a taxi or riding my BMW?’” When riding public transportation such as buses, taxis, or subway trains, Teacher 2 mentioned how you learn certain norms as you ride, “You may not think you talk loudly, but to them they may think that you are …. Americans can be loud and laughing, so they don’t like that.”
Teacher7 also remarked how he grew accustomed to common practices of transportation in Indonesia. “It was startling … seeing someone go down the road holding a goat on their motorcycle or carrying a 10 foot long rebar on their shoulder. Now that’s what we do. If I need cement, I throw it on the back of the motorcycle and take off.”

Along with using common modes of transportation, nine teachers indicated that they participate in different types of social gatherings. Teacher 7 explained, “I’ve gone to Pasar [marketplace] with some Indonesian friends and followed them around and got some stuff.” Teacher 13 also spoke of visiting local marketplaces. “We actually have the open air markets, so you get fresh fruits and vegetables … I went to the market every week.” Teacher 15 explained that visiting shops has built a rapport with people. “There are a few places I go for ice cream and yogurt or little things. They know my name … There’s a coffee shop person that knows my name.” She also noted that she participates in entertainment such as “taking music and yoga.”

Participating in everyday activities has benefits. Teacher 9 described these benefits in this way:

You’re on the bus so often that you start to see the same people. And then they get the nerve to say, “Hi.” And you start a little dialogue with people. And that’s kind of fun because you start getting invited to dinner or you go out or do whatever. I guess they start accepting you as somebody.

Similar to Teacher 9, six other teachers indicated receiving invitations by parents and community members to various activities. Teacher 1 said, “If it’s an Island family and they are having a fiesta, it is very common to be invited to that along with 200 of
their closest friends from the Island. Asian families … I have been very frequently taken out to very nice restaurants.” Elaborating on the hospitableness of families on Guam, Teacher 8 shared that the Islanders typically “showed up with trays and trays of like catered food like their parents had been making food all weekend or they went out to a restaurant and ordered these huge amounts of food …. They know how to party.”

As Teacher 15 mentioned, invitations for teachers to attend events also occur in China. “One girl that I work with can speak more Chinese than I can and she will go to parent’s house for dinner. They will take her out for coffee.”

Research Question 3

What adjustments do they describe in adapting to their school?

Along with adjustments in the community, the researcher asked participants to recall what type of acclimation they had working in an international school system. From the interview outline, teachers considered the following questions:

7. Thinking about these experiences, what adjustments did they cause you to make in how you interacted with the school community?

8. Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?

One subordinate theme surfaced from the text that answered this research question. As teachers adjusted to their schools, they adjusted to being more reliant on support bases. For many teachers, family and friends were one form of support while other teachers mentioned support bases within their schools that helped them transition. These support bases came in the form of encouragement and advice.

Source of encouragement and support. While all of the participants indicated that adjustments to the school climate were relatively easy, they referred to having different
sources of encouragement and support to help them adjust to their schools and communities. Family, friends, and colleagues helped the teachers in a variety of ways. Teacher 15 best characterized this reliance on others when she described the benefits of international teaching. In the conversation, she said, “So my water shuts off. So my apartment loses heating. Okay, I can go complain and cry, but what if the office is closed? I have to go to friends and people I rely on.”

Technology was a form of support used in adjusting to the school and community. Three teachers pointed out that forms of technology helped them during the adjustment period. Teacher 9 described using a cell phone to help him in school and community to identify people and things:

Because of the language barrier, cell phones are gold. Going out, I take pictures of all the foods and if I go into another restaurant, I show them a picture of the food. For us, it's hard to go to China. It’s hard for me to tell the people apart. They all look the same. Doing that with the cell phone is gold. You can always take pictures of the kids. It’s not like the States. And go up to another teacher and show them the kid. But you can do that. It’s not a big deal.

Nine teachers described having a support base of friends in their schools that helped in the transition to school and community. Teacher 3 explained a system that her school used to assist new teachers:

We have something called a buddy system, which is the best way to describe it where one of your veteran teachers is buddied up with one of the new teachers. They become not only a mentor teacher to you, but also a life-mentor that
answers, “How do you get around the town? How do you find the market and do things like that?”

She recalled this experience when she first arrived in Korea in the following way:

I did have one really good friend who came over to meet with the teachers early. She walked my roommate and I around and showed how to get the market and how to get the church. These are the different areas you can go to. The first two or three days I needed her by my side.

Likewise, Teacher 13 had the opportunity for the school to provide avenues of support:

We [new teachers] went through the class together and you bonded with them because you’re new. So you tend to hang out together …. You’re also assigned a family who has been there. So I had a family who I would go over to their house and they took me grocery shopping and to help get me setup.

Teacher 8 appreciated the support from colleagues at his school as he adjusted to the school community:

My co-workers are awesome. It's neat to be working with teachers who are for the most part, international teachers. They all have the same experiences. So I get here and everyone is giving me advice on what to do and what not to do, where to go and what time to go. So I think it was easy because of the (school) community here and the staff being so helpful. And everyone understands the difficulty of moving away from friends and family.

As discussed earlier, teachers encountered various challenges with communication in their countries. While teachers adjusted to this barrier, five referred to using translators to assist in communicating with parents. As noted earlier, the child
served as the translator at times. Teacher 11 expressed some uncertainty about these situations by saying, “The translator is their child …. And I’m never 100 percent sure what the child tells the parents. It usually goes on for awhile, so I am sure they are embellishing and telling their side of the story.” On the other hand, Teacher 13 was not too concerned about having children translate. “The kids knew how to speak the language, so they could very easily interpret back and forth. And I wasn’t worried about them telling the truth.”

Research Question 4

What adjustments do they describe making to the ways in which they structure their classroom and engage with students?

Not only did the investigator want to find what adaptations teachers made in the community and school, but also in their classrooms. In order to capture this aspect of their adjustment, the following questions from the outline guide were used to generate discussion:

9. When looking at your teaching practices, what adaptations did you make in instruction, classroom management, and parent/community relations?

10. Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?

11. How do you know if you are connecting culturally with your students and their parents?

From the transcripts, two subordinate themes emerged from the discussions that addressed the research question. The participants indicated that parents had expectations of what teachers were to do in educating their children. Part of the adjustment process for the teachers entailed them establishing and articulating expectations and roles of
parents, students, and teachers. The other theme described the emphasis teachers made in developing relationships with their students, which they perceived as very important in international schools.

**Articulation of roles and expectations.** After understanding the expectations of parents, school, and students, eleven teachers commented on their efforts to define the roles and expectations within their classrooms. Six participants addressed how they worked with parents by explaining what their expectations were of the parents in their child’s education and defining their own role as a teacher in an American educational system. When defining these expectations, they considered the cultures involved in their schools and determined the degree to adapt to the international setting.

Although parents are involved in some aspects of their children’s educations, Teacher 1 explained that some parents do not follow up with issues at home. She described her way of giving advice on the parent’s role in addressing these matters:

I think the hardest thing is when I do have a problem that needs to be addressed at home and getting them to understand that “Yes, I can discipline them at school, but you need to follow up with them at home. I can't just do this. I just can't fix the problem with school.” And most of the time, if a given something specific to do at home, that there also needs to be consequences at home, then they will usually follow up with that.

Likewise, Teacher 3 described how that in the American educational system there is an emphasis on parental involvement in their child’s education. However, not all cultures share this philosophy on education. Teacher 3 described this situation and how she worked with parents to accept this way of educating their children:
Parents are a little bit hands-off when it comes to their students, academics. They want them to be straight A students, but they aren't willing to take the time to make sure that they are straight A student. So we have to really encourage the parents to get involved by checking their homework in their notebooks each night. So that's been a struggle for the parents, the parents would rather take them to a specialty class that you can take after school that are specifically for math, piano or violin …. They would rather send them to a math tutoring class then spend an hour with them at home with him. The students need not only the teacher support, but also the support from their parents. Just sending them off to tutoring classes isn't going to fix the problem. So we've had to share that with parents. They've tried working with their students at home, and we've seen really great progress with that …. We encourage parents to invest their time in their child's academics.

Speaking to this issue of the parent involvement in their children’s education, Teacher 8 described how he believes teaching parents to be active in their children’s academics is significant in getting them involved. He explained his method of equipping parents with tools that created opportunities for interaction with their children:

I actually interact with the parents because even when the class is over, I go out in the lobby with a book and sit down with the parent and child and have the parents read because they need to understand what they're saying whether they’re right or the wrong. So they can learn it when they go home and practice it.

On the other end of the spectrum are over-involved parents. As a teacher and administrator, Teacher 4 observed various behaviors of parents with their children’s education. He described dealing with highly involved parents in the following way:
I would say the major issue is that they're [parents] over-involved if anything, which is a blessing and a burden all at the same time. You feel like a professional. And you’re providing a service and they are saying the service should be provided this way and this way. And you're saying, ”Wait a minute, I'm a professional. I decide how the service should be given.” You have to realize that almost all of them have their own degrees and for many of them their masters or higher. So in that setting, you have a bunch of professionals really do feel like they know education because they've been through it even if they don't value education.

Along with parents, teachers are intentional about setting expectations for students in their classroom. Six teachers described their ways of setting clear expectations for behavior and academics. Teacher 13 emphasized, “Establish expectations and consequences and stick with them all the time no matter what …. Kids need to feel safe and they need to trust you and know what to expect before they can actually learn anything.” Part of this expectation is self-responsibility according to Teacher 15. She teaches her students the behavior and academic expectation of “you need to take control of yourself.”

Because many of his students are from a rote-memorization culture, Teacher 6 explained that he does not assume that they will understand how to think critically. Therefore, he is intentional about defining his expectations for student work. To illustrate this point with a simple exercise, he instructs students, “I want you to write, blank is about blank and come up with three arguments as to why you came up with that.’ So the idea will get them to look at the topic they’re interested in.”
In a collectivist society, everyone is responsible for each other’s action. While this has positives, it can also be difficult for students when assignments require individual effort. Teacher 1 described how she dealt with such an issue in her classroom:

So usually in my classroom, I try to be very clear. A lot of times if I am not taking a grade on it or I know going into it that they all have the same answer and that’s okay. Otherwise, with homework, it’s very much, “You are working on it by yourself.”

For Teacher 1, she accepted this cultural norm and set an expectation on assignments that brought compromise between individualism and collectivism.

Similar to addressing cultural differences in assignments, Teacher 11 described addressing cultural issues with classroom participation. In cultures where responding to teachers is perceived as disrespectful, students struggle to participate in discussions, which is encouraged in Western forms of education. Teacher 11 described how she addressed this issue with defining acceptable responses in the following situation:

I had a few at the beginning of the year that you could see that they wanted to ask questions about whatever, but no one was asking questions and they didn't feel like they could. And when they did, I had one child that said something like, “That's not polite. Don't ask questions.” So then we had a classroom discussion to say that as long as questions are respectful, there are no problems in asking questions, but if you don't ask questions, you will not learn as much.

Two teachers also indicated that using written communication as a means to establish clear expectations helps reduce misunderstandings about the student, teacher, and parent roles. After dealing with many questions about her classroom expectations in
her first few years, Teacher 1 decided to write her expectations down for students and parents. By doing this, she finds that fewer parents try to barter with her. As she pointed out about expectations, “I type out all of the directions. I hold the kids accountable to written directions …. So now I can say, ‘Well, it’s on the paper and you signed.’” In addition to accountability, Teacher 11 explained that written communication helps those with limited English skills. She said, “I feel like I do a lot more double communicating. I try to talk to them and I try to communicate in writing as well … because if they didn’t understand it the first time even though they nodded and smiled then they have something written down that they can take to someone.”

In conjunction with academic expectations, six teachers discussed how they make behavioral expectations clear with students. A common misinterpretation in cross-cultural situations pertains to the definition of what respectful actions are. Teacher 10 remarked on such an issue in his classroom:

Well in their culture, looking a teacher in the face is a sign of disrespect, so for me to be upset with them and tell them to look at me when I’m talking to you is a sign of disrespect for them to look at me in the eyes. So, I have to say that it may not be your culture, but it is mine. You show me that you’re paying attention by looking at me.

Teacher 10 took the approach of articulating his expectation for high school students to adapt to the American cultural practices and the rationale for the expectation. He believed that this was important to learn as they prepared to go to American universities. Facing a similar situation with elementary-aged students, Teacher 1 described a slightly different approach with her students:
I found out later that in their culture, it is considered respectful to lower your gaze and not to meet the authority figure's eyes because you are showing submission when you lower your head or your eyes and you are showing shame for what you've done. So that was like an "Oh!" [surprise] I still have that reaction of "I want you to look at me when I'm talking to you." But learning that it's okay if their eyes are down. I still will ask for a verbal acknowledgment of what I've said, especially with the boys.

Clear expectations of conduct were not only at the classroom level, but also school-wide. Having a school-wide expectation helped Teacher 6 in his classroom with discipline issues. He said, “Everybody knows what the school rules are so if somebody’s doing something, I can just ask them for their card and they get it out.” For students who have been in his school for years, they know the expectations of them academically and behaviorally.

Development of relationships. A second subordinate theme emerged from the text that described how teachers make concerted efforts to build connections with their students. Eight teachers noted that, in their international schools, developing relationships with students is significant. Five of them gave examples of how building relationships help them in the classroom.

For those who were familiar with teaching in American schools, they acknowledged that relationship building is a higher priority than in the United States. In comparing their school with U.S. schools, Teacher 13 stated, “[I am] interacting more with students than I would have in the U.S. So you really get to know them on a more
personal level than at a professional level.” Similarly, Teacher 4 stated, “It was different than in the States. It was more relationally-oriented than rule oriented.”

As he described his role as a teacher, Teacher 6 emphasized, “You have to be willing to do whatever it takes to figure out what level you’re students are at, so that you can give advice.” He further elaborated on his approach to relationship building. He indicated that “his personality” and “humor” are vital to his success.

One way that Teacher 5 illustrated his approach with building teacher-student relationships is how he addressed the inequity of Korean to non-Korean students in advanced placement classes often created by the Asian culture’s drive for academic success. He said:

I’ve been very careful of watching my non-Korean students and their lower grades and try to talk to them and get a sense of “Are they and their family happy with them? Is this what you’re after? Are you encouraged by it or are you discouraged by it” I don’t figure that in class. I find that out by getting to know the students outside of class.

As she understood her students’ needs, Teacher 3 recognized the value of spending time getting to know her students. She explained, “I spent a couple days getting to know the students even before getting into the math stuff.” She added how that building the relationship helped her to address other issues later:

A lot of these students are Third Culture Kids. They are very standoffish and they want to know that you are for real before they trust you. So any time I had any confrontation in the classroom, I may call them after class and find out what was
going on. I would talk to them and asked them how they were feeling. …. And we would talk about what made them disrespectful and angry in class. When they realize and understood that I was there to be more than a teacher and that I was there to be their friend and mentor and carry them along, then they were much more willing to open up and trust and realizing that I am for real and that I was cool.

Encountering a similar reserve with his Asian students, Teacher 8 described his perspective to building relationships with them. He pointed out, “You have to go to them first. To break the barrier, you have to personalize your attention …. A lot of it is if you can talk to them as though you know them and can remember their name.” He further explained that when you made the connection they are loyal to you. He said, “The Chinese and Koreans are more reserved, but when you get past the barrier, they are with you.”

Summary. Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 focused on the adjustments that American international teachers made in the community, school, and classroom. One superordinate theme emerged from the transcripts that addressed these questions. Teachers achieved a greater understanding and appreciation for different cultures by actively engaging with people in the schools and community.

The third superordinate theme, adjustments into school and community cultures, described the teachers’ approaches to adapting to new cultures. While teachers shared a variety of adjustments, four common ways emerged as prominent themes. The following subordinate themes captured how teachers demonstrated adaptations to their countries:
(a) immersion into community lifestyles, (b) articulation of roles and expectations, (c) source of encouragement and support, and (d) development of relationships.

The theme, participation in community lifestyles, addressed Research Question 2. In the community, teachers pointed out that while it is possible for international teachers to quarantine themselves from their host country’s culture, they miss the learning opportunities brought about from immersion. The levels of immersion ranged from cooking to participating in community events. Teachers described adapting to differences in cooking in several ways. While some tried substituting local ingredients to make traditional American food, others chose to eat local foods. In addition to food choices, teachers adapted from having personal vehicles to using common modes of transportation in their local communities. As teachers used these forms of transportation, some noted that they learned additional things about social norms in their community. Several teachers adapted to their communities by going to marketplaces and shops, attending celebratory events, and eating in local restaurants. These interactions brought about stronger ties with community members who were eager for them to experience their cultures.

In addressing Research Question 3, the subordinate theme, source of encouragement and support, described how teachers adjusted to their schools. In some cases, schools provided mentorships with new teachers. Seasoned teachers helped teachers adjust to the international school environment and provided additional support in the community. The use of technology such as cell phones also helped teachers in areas such as navigation and communication.
Research Question 4 focused on the adjustments teachers made in their classrooms. The first theme that addressed this question gave a description of teachers articulating expectations to parents and students of what their roles are in the American educational process. The second theme responding to the research question addressed the building of teacher-student relationships.

Knowing the expectations and roles that existed when they initially started in their schools, teachers gave examples of ways that they taught parents the American educational philosophy of being actively involved in their children’s education at home. Teachers also explained how they were intentional in giving clear expectations of student work and behavior. As they developed these expectations, teachers considered the cultural underpinnings of each area before articulating them to their students. Because the participants believed teacher-student relationships were significant in an international school setting, they described steps they take to help foster a connection with their culturally diverse student body. Table 9 indicates the distribution of prevalence and density of the subordinate themes for Superordinate Theme 3.

Transformation of Cultural Identities

When teachers experience international teaching, different cultural perspectives challenge their own mindset transforming from perspectives that are more narrow-minded to ones that are more internationalized. This fourth superordinate theme characterized the meaning that teachers drew from their experiences. The transformation
of the teachers’ cultural identities commonly occurred in two areas: (a) expansion of worldview and (b) appreciation for student individualism. These areas were the subordinate themes that answered Research Question 5. Table 10 shows the prevalence and density of the themes:

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformation of Cultural Identities</th>
<th>Number of Participants Referring to Theme</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of worldview</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation for student individualism</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 5

How have these teachers’ experiences adapting to new international school cultures impacted the ways they think about and go about their work as teachers?

Participants valued their experiences and saw it having many benefits. To capture the meaning constructed from their international teaching experience, the researcher
asked participants how they would apply their experience to future teaching. Participants reflected over two questions from the interview outline:

12. What has helped you the most in facing cross-cultural experiences as an international teacher?

13. What advice would you give an aspiring teacher who is considering teaching internationally?

*Expansion of worldview.* The exposure and immersion into other cultures challenges the ideologies that people harbor. When individuals objectively assess their ideologies and seek to learn from other cultural practices, they begin to expand the way they view themselves and the world around them. This theme focused on what the participants expressed as areas of growth in themselves from working in cross-cultural settings.

Faced with different perspectives on doing things, eleven teachers indicated that their experiences helped them become “open-minded” and “flexible.” Unexpected events are typical for international teachers and require alterations in their original plans. Experiencing this phenomenon during her time in China, Teacher 15 noted, “If you’re not prepared to teach a class for two hours without anyone helping you or if you don’t have materials in your brain, you should not be teaching.” Other teachers described similar situations in their schools and community. Teacher 12 illustrated this point in the following situation:

We just found out this week that our school building would be torn down. The city government is going to be putting a new road in and they’re have been
rumors for five years and all of a sudden this last week, they’re telling us it’s going to be next month.

Participants characterized these moments in various ways. Teacher 4 referred to this process as “knocking the little ball out of the hole” while Teacher 10 described it as “being stretched.”

Realizing the importance of adaptation, Teacher 9 emphasized, “Don’t go if you’re not flexible. Don’t even bother. You can’t bend it [culture] to what you know, so don’t even try it. In American we say, ‘It’s my way or the highway.’ And that’s not where it is.” As Teacher 9 mentioned, part of becoming flexible is learning to self-reflect and realizing that there are alternative ways of approaching things. Teacher 7 explained, “part of learning to adjust to culture is about me learning that my way isn’t necessarily the right way.” Recalling his own reflection experience, Teacher 4 posed a question:

But is individualism [American mindset] the right way to go on everything or is the group [collectivism] the right way to go on everything? No. There are good and bad in each culture. Your job as a teacher is to try to teach the truth from each culture and be excited when you see it.

Other teachers also assessed their personal cultural identities. Teacher 15 said, “No man knows his own country who only knows his own country.” Teacher 10 indicated this self-reflection when he said, “You begin to realize the U.S. isn’t the center of everything. You begin to realize how close-minded you have been all your life. It’s that bigger perspective on life.” Teacher 13 also recognized that when you deal with issues, “It can’t be all about you.” Teacher 12 believed that her experience had given “a broader view of the world and people. She further asserted, “And it’s not so narrowly, ‘We are
Americans and that’s all there is.’ There’s more to the world.” Likewise, Teacher 2 warned that you can’t “just try to come in and try to teach your own culture and think that your way is the only right way to do things.”

Appreciation for student individualism. The teachers also expressed how the transformation of their worldview affected how they view students. Eleven teachers shared that they have a greater awareness and appreciation for diversity. These teachers believed that before the international experience they saw students on the same level. Through their experiences, they became cognizant of the uniqueness of each student.

Teaching in diverse classrooms got Teacher 6 to realize the different needs of students. When reflecting on the impact of his experience, he believed, “The biggest thing would be to have an understanding that I may have students that are not all at the same level …. I think I would be accepting and aware of that.” Similarly, Teacher 5 said, “I would come back with a greater awareness that students are not all alike and that any interaction with the students should be personalized, to find out where the students are and where they’re coming from.”

Because of the emphasis on relationship building with students, Teacher 3 believed that as a teacher, her experience makes understanding the student important:

Before teaching, I would've said students are students. It doesn't matter what the background is or where they come from. Students are students. I have come to realize that that is not always the case …. Our families over here aren't perfect. You don't have it all together either. I know the struggles of a public school, but being able to get on their level and know exactly what you're going through and understanding that not getting their homework assignment is not the biggest
concern of their lives. And sometimes you have to realize that and understand it and work with them through that.

The richness of student backgrounds brought about a natural inquiry about her students. Teacher 1 described this curiosity in knowing her students better:

Be willing to open up and ask them questions. I think I found that with my students when I would ask, “Teach me how you would say this in Korean” or “Tell me how you would celebrate Chinese New Year.” And learning from them as much as you are teaching them.

From her experience, Teacher 2 believed that she has a greater appreciation for students with diverse backgrounds. She said, “The students you have come from so many different backgrounds and their own cultures. They bring so much to their education already. Even in kindergarten, the experiences they bring are very interesting.”

Teacher 7 believed his international teaching experience “[has made him] aware that there are differences in every culture and those nuances are important.” Teacher 8 also explained that his newfound awareness is “a huge strength” in his teaching.

Summary. Research Question 5 explored how teachers constructed meaning from their experiences as international teachers. From the discussions with teachers, the fourth superordinate theme of this study depicted the transformation of the teachers’ personal cultural identities, which is the essence of their experiences. Two subordinate themes comprised this transformation: (a) expansion of worldview and (b) appreciation for student individualism.

With cross-cultural experiences, different ways of thinking challenge the ideologies deeply engrained in newcomers from other cultures. Differences in
communication, conveniences, and time exercise people’s ability to be flexible. Participants in the study illustrated these challenges they encountered that brought about more flexibility in their lives. Furthermore, the teachers expressed that such events stimulated their ability of being open-minded to other cultural norms. This phenomenon brought teachers to a point of self-assessing their own ideologies greatly influenced by the American culture. From the self-reflection, teachers concluded that their experiences taught them that the “American way” is not always the best way of doing things. Rather, teachers explained that their cross-cultural interaction expanded the way they viewed the world.

Teachers also explained that working with diverse nationalities transformed the way they viewed students. Whether in a multi-cultural or mono-cultural setting, students possess unique qualities. The participants explained that their experiences nurtured an appreciation for student individualism, which would help them in meeting the needs of all of their students. Some teachers explained that to understand these needs requires teachers to build relationships with their students. Table 11 displays the distribution of prevalence and density for the themes by each participant.
Table 11

*Distribution of Prevalence and Density by Participants under Superordinate Theme 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1 - Appreciation for student individualism   Theme 2 - Expansion of worldview

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, a summary of finding provided responses to the research questions for this study. In the first section, the investigator provided the analysis approach used to extract the themes for this phenomenology. An interpretative phenomenological analysis aligned with Heidegger’s assertion that the researcher plays a role in the interpretation of experiences in a phenomenology. Superordinate and subordinate themes emerged from multiple readings that addressed each research question.

The first two superordinate themes addressed Research Question 1 by describing the participants’ experiences as they arrived in their countries and schools. Teachers described their initial encounter with cultural differences as they settled in their communities and school. The subordinate themes reflected the differences in the way they communicated with people, lived in the community, and worked in their schools. In conjunction with their exposure to cultural differences, the second superordinate theme described how teachers connected these differences to various cultural underpinnings. The two common areas of understanding of expectations and social norms were the subordinate themes.

In response to Research Questions 2, 3, and 4, the third superordinate theme depicted the common areas teachers described as making adjustments in their
communities, schools, and classrooms. In the community, teachers adjusted to the cultures by immersing in the community lifestyle in various ways. In school, they made adjustments in their reliance on mentors for encouragement and support. In their classrooms, they made adjustments by defining and articulating the clear expectations to parents and students and building strong teacher-student relationships. These four areas were the subordinate themes for the third superordinate theme.

The final superordinate theme, which responded to Research Question 5, captured the meaning of the teachers’ experiences as an international educator. There were two areas that teachers showed a transformation in their cultural identities. First, the teachers described becoming more flexible and open-minded, which broadened their worldview. In addition, teachers believed that they gained an appreciation for student individualism in multi-cultural and mono-cultural settings.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synopsis of this research study. In the first section, a description of the study will detail the purpose of the study and the methodology used to gather the data. Following the overview, there will be a summary of the research questions and findings. The discussion section will provide the interpretations drawn from the researcher and participants’ dialogue and prior research supporting the interpretations. In the final section, the researcher will explain the implications of the study on future research and the teaching profession.

Overview of Study

In the last two decades, federal mandates placed on American educational institutions have resulted in major changes in the way educators go about teaching. Stressing accountability, policymakers challenge districts to disaggregate their student achievement data into subgroups so that all students receive the same educational opportunities. The collision of accountability with a surge in diverse classrooms generates teacher interest in how to respond to diverse classrooms. This study examined how American teachers respond to diverse classrooms in international school settings.

Purpose of Study

In the American educational system, public and private schools have coexisted for many decades. While educational research pertaining to American education focuses on these institutions within the borders of the United States, another sector of American
education exists outside these boundaries. Because the majority of international schools service students abroad, people lack the familiarity with them including researchers. Yet, within their walls exist a plethora of information about the fusion of education and cultures. This study sought to add understanding of teachers’ experiences in multicultural settings through an examination of U.S. trained teachers working in American international schools abroad. The study further examined how teachers bridged cultural differences with students to build an environment of learning. Furthermore, this study investigated what cultural challenges they faced in their communities and schools and how they adjusted in each setting.

Little research focuses on the cultural interchange in classrooms, schools, and communities. While culturally responsive research studies discuss the actions teachers make in various diverse settings in the United States, few studies exam the cultural interplay between teachers, students, and community members outside of the United States. The research question that guided the study asked, in what ways do U.S. trained educators teaching in American international schools abroad experience and respond to cultural adjustments?

Review of Literature

The investigator reviewed and organized research literature pertaining to cultural variables in education into three sections: (a) home-related cultural factors, (b) school-related cultural variables, and (c) community-related cultural variables. The next section of the literature review described studies in the cross-cultural educational research.
Research supported the assertion of educational scholars such as Bruner and Vygotsky that culture is an integral part of learning and instruction.

Two prominent research studies (Plowden, 1967; Coleman, 1966) suggested that there is a correlation between home cultures and student achievement. From this research, several other studies branched out to investigate the influences of different components of home cultures on student success. Some components showing positive correlations to student success in learning included parental behaviors (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005; Sigel, Stinson, & Kim, 1993; Cohen, 1987), parental educational backgrounds (Davis-Kean, 2005; Fraser, Welch, & Hattie, 1987), and parental economic status (Payne, 2006; Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994).

Some research focused on school related variables such as the learning behaviors of students in classrooms. Learning style research (Canfield, 1992; Honey & Mumford, 1982; Kolb, 1976) focused on ways that people learn. These studies suggested that there are dominant learning traits in students and proposed several frameworks, which other researchers used to further their investigations on if these traits are common among various demographics. With national cultures, several studies explored the possibility of learning traits being common among different national groups. Often using comparative studies, the findings suggested that there are unique learning behaviors with various nationalities including Japanese and Taiwanese (Chu & Nakamura, 2010), British (De Vita, 2001), Vietnamese, Thai, and Indonesians (Nguyen, 2011), and German, French, and Canadians (Barmeyer, 2004). In conjunction with nationalities, some studies focused on the learning styles of ethnic cultures of Asian Americans (Park, 1997),
African Americans (Irvine & York, 2001; Willis, 1989), and Mexican Americans (Dunn, Dunn, & Price, 1985).

Working with business people with many nationalities, Hofstede (2001) identified behavioral traits common within national cultures. These cultural dimensions characterized how people socialized with others, responded to authority, and reacted to uncertainty. In addition to Hofstede, Hall (1990) suggested through his research that another cultural trait common within nationalities is their view of time management, which he referred to as monochronic and polychronic cultures. These cultural dimension studies served as foundations for cultural studies in the fields of business, healthcare, and education. Another body of research pertinent to this study focused on the teaching practices in diverse cultural setting also referred to as culturally responsive or relevant teaching practices. While there are limited studies addressing these teaching practices in a cross-cultural setting (Barmeyer, 2004; Joslin, 2002), a larger body of research on these teaching practices exist in cross-ethnic situations (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Weinsten, Curran, & and Tomlinson-Clarke; Gay, 2002; Dill & Boykin, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Lipka, 1991; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981).

Limited research also explored community related cultural factors in learning. These studies primarily focused on the school-community relation. In these studies, researchers suggested that the more schools are aware of the norms of the community; the better educational support they receive from the community (Reed, 2009; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Lareau, 1987).

Because this study investigated the meaning of cross-cultural meanings by teachers, the researcher described prior literature that paralleled the study in
methodology. The final section of the review presented cross-cultural studies in education that explored the meaning that the participants gained from their experiences. Specifically, this body of research captured the meanings of various teachers and students as they lived abroad for a period of time. Participants gained understanding of themselves and the cultures they encountered abroad (Summers & Lvorn, 2012; Edmond, 2010; Garson, 2005).

Methodology

To capture the cross-cultural experiences and meanings of American educators teaching in international schools abroad, the researcher conducted an interpretive phenomenological study, which is suitable for this type of research. The core belief of an interpretive phenomenology is that because individuals and their worlds are inseparable, their life experiences are not immune to subjectivity. Therefore, in following the traditions of an interpretive phenomenology, the researcher and participants actively engaged in constructing meaning from the participants’ experiences.

In order to collect the data to answer the research questions, the researcher selected fifteen teachers for the study using a purposive sampling. The participants met the following criteria: (a) they had minimally one year of international teaching experience, (b) they were American citizens, and (c) they either currently teach or formerly taught within the last three years in an American international school in the Asian Pacific Rim region. All participants gave consent to be interviewed by phone or Skype communication at a time and location that was most convenient to them. The
interviews were semi-structured allowing participants the freedom to share how they perceived their international experiences.

The researcher combined the analysis phases recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2006) and the interpretative phenomenology analysis stages recommended by Smith (2010). After multiple readings of the transcripts, the researcher coded emerging themes and revised the codes with each additional reading. The researcher determined the themes based on the relevance, prevalence, and density of the data. Throughout the analysis phase, the researcher took measures to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study.

Summary of Findings

From the analysis, eleven subordinate themes emerged from the text, which the investigator clustered into four superordinate themes. The first two superordinate themes addressed Research Question 1 while the third superordinate theme spoke to Research Questions 2, 3, and 4. The final superordinate theme addressed Research Question 5. The summary of the findings will be presented by research questions.

Research Question 1. How do the teachers describe their experiences adjusting to both the culture of the country or region where the school is located and the culture of the school itself after being in that school for at least a year?

During the interview, the researcher asked questions to the participants about their description of entering a country with a different culture than their own. The researcher also asked the teachers to describe their introduction into the American international education system specifically in their schools. As noted earlier, two superordinate
themes emerged from the dialog that described the experiences in two stages. The initial stage depicted the teachers’ encounter with cultural differences in school and community. While these differences varied, the most common areas were in communication and lifestyle changes. In their schools, they encountered an internationalized environment commonly found in their schools.

The teachers also described their experience as a gradual understanding of the cultural underpinnings that influenced people’s behaviors and thinking in the community and school. As teachers acclimated to the culture, they noted their discovery of the high expectations for students and teachers embedded in the parent’s culture. Teachers also described many social norms in the community related to gender roles, communication, and time management. These norms, which also influenced the school environment, reflected the beliefs and values embraced by the community.

Research Question 2. What adjustments do they describe to living and working in the new country?

After elaborating on their experiences entering new countries, teachers explained the adjustments they made in their communities. Their discussions of the adaptations were part of the third superordinate theme, which described the adjustments teachers made in their personal and professional lives. Immersing into their communities was the most common adjustment made by teachers, which helped them to identify better with their students and parents. Some teachers prefaced this adjustment by mentioning that international teachers have the choice to isolate themselves from the community or immerse into it. Strong ties to the community often occurred when teachers made conscious efforts to identify with their communities. Teachers gave many immersion
examples of how they engaged in the community such as participating in various events, adopting modes of public commuting practices, and incorporating local foods in their diets.

Research Question 3. What adjustments do they describe in adapting to their school?

Along with the adjustments in their personal lives, teachers also described areas they adapted in their professional lives, which was also a part of the third superordinate theme. While most of the participants believed their schools were Americanized and resulted in an easy transition, teachers with prior experience in the American educational system stateside acknowledged that there were some adjustments. Teachers explained that they learned to rely on support sources that provided advice and encouragement as they adjusted to their schools as well as in the community. Recognizing the adjustment issues common to newcomers in schools and the community, their mentors provided assistance in a variety of ways ranging from communication in cross-cultural situations to the navigation through their communities.

Research Question 4. What adjustments do they describe making to the ways in which they structure their classroom and engage with students?

In the center of international teaching is the teacher’s classroom. As the last part of the third superordinate theme, the researcher asked how teachers adapted to their classrooms. Two themes emerged from the interviews as the key elements of their classroom adjustments. First, teachers described their efforts of establishing and articulating the roles of parents, students, and teachers in an American educational system. Teachers articulated their expectations to parents and students verbally and, in
some cases, written to help reduce misunderstandings caused by language barriers or cultural norms of communication. Additionally, teachers emphasized the importance of building relationships with their students in order for them to understand their student’s cultural backgrounds, which also helped them to reduce cultural miscommunication.

Research Question 5. How have these teachers’ experiences adapting to new international school cultures impacted the ways they think about and go about their work as teachers?

A focus of a phenomenological study is to capture the meaning that people construct from a phenomenon. The last research question focused on the meaning built from the teachers’ cross-cultural experiences. The fourth superordinate theme emerged from the participants’ conversations about the transformation that occurred with their identities because of their cross-cultural engagement. Teachers described having a time of self-assessing of their own worldviews and making changes to them leading to greater exercises of flexibility and open-mindedness. Working with different nationalities, teachers believed their experiences nurtured a greater awareness and appreciation for diversity in classrooms.

Discussion

In this section, the researcher will discuss the conclusions based on the findings drawn from the study. For organizational purposes, the investigator will present the conclusions by the superordinate themes. In each section, the researcher will also connect prior research with the conclusions and findings of the study. In the final section, the researcher will provide concluding remarks about the findings.
Encounter with Cultural Differences

When living cross-cultural situations, communication is usually the first significant difference that people face. The findings in this study suggest that communication challenges are common in cross-cultural interchanges. Teachers described various forms of communication challenges when interacting within their communities and schools. The findings indicate that the language barriers posed the greatest challenge even in countries where English is considered a secondary language. Beyond language barriers, the findings suggest that other areas of communication confound the challenges of international living including the channels used to communication as well as words, phrases, and gestures, which can carry very different connotations in different cultures. For example, the use of indirect communication channels in the Asian culture may give the impression of slyness in other cultures such as the United States, but their actions reflect the saving face culture that avoids embarrassing individuals, which can occur with direct confrontation. Prior research that examined the differences and challenges of cross-cultural communication validate these findings (Hofstede, 2010; Gudykunst, 2003; Tyler, 1995; Hall, 1990).

In this study, the findings support prior research that suggested that the students’ home cultures mold their aspirations and behaviors in the classrooms (Cohen, 1987; Plowden, 1967; Coleman, Campbell Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, and York, 1966). Teachers explained how their Asian parent’s emphasis on getting a higher education at a Western university instilled high expectations for academic success in their children. Likewise, raised in a Confucian culture of respect, Asian students were respectful of their teachers to the extent that they were hesitant to respond to teacher
questions in fear of appearing disrespectful. Moreover, the participants in the study also indicated that the transient lifestyle of TCKs nurtured well-adapted relationships specifically with adults.

From extensive research on cultural characteristics, Hofstede (2001) presented prominent cultural dimensions existing in every culture. In this study, the findings suggest that there were cultural differences in education between the teachers and students. More specifically, these differences were more noticeable with their Asian students. Table 12 displays the contrasting perspectives between the American teachers and their Asian students using the cultural dimension framework of Hofstede (2001). While the findings present various distinctions between traits of the American and Asian culture, the traits are tendencies of cultural groups and not expectations.

Understanding of Cultural Underpinnings

From the findings, the teachers described transitioning from the initial shock reaction to a refined perspective on observed cultural differences. The transition, which occurred with students, parents, and community, developed their ability to view situations from a cultural lens. The findings suggest that understanding the cultural underpinnings of norms and expectations provided a foundation for adjustments to occur in different cultural settings.

Teachers indicated that as they learned the culture of the students and community, they gained understanding of why students, parents, and community members responded in certain ways. This understanding led to teachers assessing their own beliefs as to what
Table 12

Contrast of American Teacher Culture and Asian Student Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Teacher Culture</th>
<th>Student Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>Students initiate some communication</td>
<td>Teacher initiates initiate all communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and excellence of students</td>
<td>Quality of learning depends on excellence of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-centered education</td>
<td>Teacher-centered education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>Students are expected to discuss and learn in open-ended situations</td>
<td>Students expect structured learning situations and right answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers may not know the answer</td>
<td>Teachers supposed to have all answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine and Feminine</td>
<td>Students’ social adaptation significant</td>
<td>Students’ performance important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Failing is a minor setback</td>
<td>Failing is a disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism and Collectivism</td>
<td>Student initiative is encouraged</td>
<td>Student initiative is discouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education is learning how to learn</td>
<td>Education is learning how to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students expected to speak up in class or large groups</td>
<td>Students do not speak up in class or large groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

expectations and norms were negotiable and non-negotiable. From this assessment, teachers determined what adaptations they would make in their schools and community. Berry (2005) referred to this as acculturation strategies, which consist of the changing of a person’s attitude toward other cultures followed by actions taken to adapt.
The findings also suggest that because of the different cultural backgrounds of the Asian parents and American teachers, there were different perspectives on how to educate students. This finding is consistent with research by Foster (1993) who indicated that different backgrounds of teachers and parents create differences on the purpose of education. This knowledge assisted teachers in making decisions on ways to address the disparity of perspectives.

Adaptations in Personal and Professional Lives

The findings indicate that the participants acted as teachers and learners of culture in their adaptations to their schools and community. In the study, the participants perceived themselves as teachers of culture when they taught parents and students the expectations for success in an American system of education. This started with teachers learning the cultural expectations of the students and parents and then developing modified expectations that aligned to the school’s purpose of providing an American-based education. With the modified expectations, the teachers clearly articulated the roles of each stakeholder including the parents, students, and teachers. To assist, teachers created tools to help everyone know the intended roles including written procedures, templates, and parent-student learning activities.

Moreover, the findings indicate that teachers were also learners of their community culture. While teachers believed in teaching the American model of education to the students and parents, teachers also believed they were to be the learners of the community culture. Rather than expect people to adjust to their American ways, they accepted the community culture and adapted their lifestyles to it. Through this
immersion process, teachers gained greater insight on the community culture as well as their students. The findings indicate that as teachers immersed into their communities, community members appreciated the teacher’s interest in their culture, which helped to develop stronger school-community relations. Similarly, Meyer and Mann (2006) concluded from their study that when the teachers identified with the community through home visits, it strengthened relationships with parents and developed a greater understanding of their student’s performance. The findings also paralleled the study by Reed (2009) who concluded that as teachers lived and interacted in the communities they teach, they gain knowledge of their students and respect from parents.

The findings not only suggest that teachers were learners of their community culture, but also the learners of their student cultures through relationship building. Teachers who were familiar with education in the United States especially noted a greater emphasis on relationship building in their international teaching assignments than in their experiences in schools on U.S. soil. In order for teachers to understand their students, they interacted with their students ranging from attending after school events to asking questions about their customs and beliefs. This teaching practice of relationship building was characteristic in the studies on culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Osborne, 1994; Lipka, 1991).

Ultimately, the findings indicate that establishing a shared culture between the students, teachers, and community are necessary for learning. Traditionally, teachers have placed the onus of learning on students who were expected to adjust to the teacher’s instructional style. The traditional approach is transitioning to an increasingly progressive approach where learning is a shared responsibility of the student, community,
and teacher. This change requires teachers to understand the values, beliefs, and norms of students and community and create a cultural amalgamation of each stakeholder in their classrooms. As indicated in the study, teachers experienced a greater awareness, understanding, and connection with the students when they balanced teaching their culture and learning from the student and community cultures. In the study, teachers isolating themselves from interactions outside of their American culture missed opportunities for enriching experiences and stronger connections with their students. Likewise, teachers who isolate themselves from the cultures represented in their classroom and community create disconnects with their students and culture, which are vital in improving student achievement. Immersion into other cultures often builds stronger ties with students, parents, and community members (Reed, 2009; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005).

The findings also suggest that American international teachers possess other culturally responsive qualities described in several studies. The following qualities reflected traits of culturally responsiveness:

- Teachers ensured students develop and maintain cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1992).
- Teachers saw themselves as learners as much as teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1992).
- Teachers treated students with warmth and respect (Osborne, 1994).
- Teachers challenged their students academically (Osborne, 1994).
- Teachers were involved in community life and connected with their children’s family (Ware, 2006).
Teachers acknowledged personal cultural biases and beliefs as well as those of their students (Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003)

Transformation of Cultural Identities

Further findings suggest that when teachers make efforts to immerse into their communities, they redefined their cultural identities through a transformation process. Initially, teachers encountered cultural differences that, over time, created frustration and questions about norms. As a result, teachers made conscious efforts to learn about cultures different from their own and challenge whether their norms were superior to other cultures or if, in fact, the other culture’s ways were equal or superior. From this self-evaluation, teachers strengthened certain core beliefs, but also challenged other personal beliefs leading to changes in their worldviews (attitudes) about the diversity of cultures. Specifically, the teachers’ worldview transformed from “the United States being the center of the world society” to “the United States being a part of the world society.” The findings from the study indicate that by shifting away from an egocentric perspective, teachers’ beliefs changed from a teacher-centered educational philosophy to a student-centered mindset that valued and learned the uniqueness of their students. This cultural competence helped the teachers work across cultural boundaries to provide informed instructional and management decisions.

Humbert, Burket, Deveney, and Kennedy (2012) described similar findings in their study of students studying abroad. Teachers experienced a greater awareness of cultures after their exposure to differences with time management and social norms (Humbert, et al., 2012). In another study, international nursing students described having
a greater compassion with their patients after going through an acculturation process (Edmonds, 2010). Additionally, the findings from Edmonds (2010) indicated the nurses saw a great need to adjust to their cultures.

Implications for Future Research

International schools are fertile areas to gather data for educational research. In this study, the findings addressed a gap in literature pertaining to the impact that diversity has on the teaching practices of educators. Additional studies in international education may generate other insights that can be applied to leadership and teaching practices in diverse cultural situations. These potential investigations can generate additional data that may assist educational systems as they face an increasingly diverse population.

Because this study focused on the Asian Pacific Rim region, one recommendation for further research would be to explore the adjustments of American international teachers in other regions of the world. Because cultural characteristics vary from country to country, additional exploration of the cultural adaptations in teaching practices of other regions such as Arabic, Latin American, European, or African cultures may foster additional insight on how international teachers respond to cultural diversity.

Since this study focused on the adjustments of American international teachers, new international teachers were not included for this study. The veteran teachers in this study were beyond the culture shock phase and into the acculturation phase of their cross-cultural experiences. However, experienced teachers can have difficulty recalling details of the culture shock experiences they faced when they first started teaching internationally. Investigating the adaptations new international teachers make as they
encounter culture shock, may add insight on the responses to cultural changes to literature exploring cultural diversity in education.

Another recommendation for future research would be to explore what adaptations school administrators make in international schools. Among the growing administrative tasks, school leaders are expected to establish community connections, to develop their teachers, and to develop a school culture that support student achievement. For international school administrators, cultural differences may pose greater challenges for them as they balance the culture of the community and school. Investigating how they adjust their administrative practices to accommodate various cultures may add to research on leadership in culturally diverse situations.

Teaching in an international setting can be a life-changing experience for educators. Many international educators eventually return to their home countries to teach. No literature addresses how international teaching influences the teaching and administrative practices of educators when they return to their home countries. Exploring this phenomenon may deepen understanding of cultural immersion on teaching and administrative practices.

This study accomplished the purpose of capturing the American teachers’ cross-cultural experiences and their adjustments into an international classroom. The findings describe the attitudes and adjustment process the teachers encountered in their cross-cultural settings. One final recommendation for further study is to examine how this internationalized mindset translates into teaching strategies. With English Language Learning issues growing with international schools, there is a growing need to explore strategies that can assist teachers in helping students with language barriers.
focuses on ELL issues in an American setting, but very little addresses the issues in international schools abroad.

Implications on Professional Practice

Education has evolved over the decades to become a research-driven profession that examines the practices of administrators and teachers in schools and its effects on student achievement. The isolation of classroom teaching practices has given way to professional learning communities where educators not only study the academic performance of students, but also the instructional practices of teachers. The nature of this open dialogue generates a higher level of inquiry on the science of instruction.

Along with the emergence of collaborative teaching practices also has come the analysis of disaggregated data. Rather than the primary focus on student achievement collectively, data teams have broken the results into subgroups based on demographics such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status. One contributing factor to these targeted discussions is the accelerated change in the demographics of districts around the country. The subgroup achievement gaps on standardized assessments administered around the United States pronounced the slow response districts had with this change.

In earlier stages of education, American schools used the tracking system to divide students based on their level of performance. However, in the last two decades, schools have moved away from the tracking system to a more equitable learning climate. Coupled with a higher emphasis on mainstreaming students with special needs and less funding for specialized classes for remediation and enrichment, teachers are expected to provide more differentiated lessons to meet the needs of ranging abilities. As educational
researchers delve into this issue, findings support literature that suggest that greater student achievement occurred when teachers used differentiated instruction (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Norland, Berkeley, McDuffie, Tornquist & Conners, 2006; Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002; Miller, 1990). As similar findings continue to surface in research literature, teaching practices increasingly reflect the acceptance by teachers.

Although this transformation of pedagogy shows promising improvement in the educational world, practitioners should exercise caution in implementing strategies. Often, eager educators seeking ways to increase student achievement fall prey to hastily implementing strategies labeled as “research-based” without properly understanding their student and community cultures. This often results in frustration and skepticism of differentiated instructional techniques because of ineffective results and support. While a large amount of educational research addresses various teaching practices, few studies provide a cultural framework that is essential in designing instruction in diverse situations. This study suggests several principles for educators to consider prior to making decisions on instructional strategies to use in diverse situations.

The ramifications from this study provide a foundation for educators to consider when encountering diversity. International educators in the study describe a process by which they addressed cultures different from their own. For teachers who went through the stages of the process, the adjustments led to productive relationships with parents and students. Several participants described incidents in which teachers failed to complete the process of acculturation, which led to discontentment in international teaching and living.
When teachers initially face diverse situations other than their own, they go through an awareness phase that may start with fascination, but can eventually lead to questioning the behaviors of others based on the perception that their own beliefs are superior. During this stage, teachers may choose to immune themselves from their diverse settings or to advance into an inquiry phase. Those responding to the former disconnect with students, parents, and community leading to challenges in their teaching practices. In the inquiry phase, teachers seek deeper understanding of the norms by discovering the values and beliefs that drive the behavior of their students, parents, and community. This inquiry is often satisfied as they actively immersion into the culture of their communities. As they construct meaning from the cultural differences, teachers begin to challenge their personal values, beliefs, and norms, which results in the development of a broader worldview that understands their own culture as well as the cultures of others. Teachers who progress to this phase are able to surpass many of their own biases to understand issues from different perspectives. Progressing through the process transforms the personal and professional practices of teachers helping them to make informed decisions on communicating and implementing appropriate instructional strategies.

For international schools, this study provides a framework that international teachers commonly experience as they adjust to different cultures in and out of their schools. Not every international educator adjusts to the cultural differences at the same pace. In fact, some may not progress to the next stage of adjustment unless they have mentors that help them through the stages of adjustments. Several teachers in the study mentioned either providing or receiving support in transitioning to international teaching.
When mentors understand the adjustment process, they can provide the necessary assistance in moving teachers through the process. Moreover, when school administrators understand the process, they can develop mentor systems that monitor the progress of teachers through the adjustment period.

While the study focused on international teachers, its implications are not limited to only international educators simply because culture is not defined solely by nationality, but also in other ways. Within countries lie mixtures of regional cultures that may vary slightly or substantially resulting in teachers experiencing forms of culture shock without leaving their native countries. Likewise, cultural differences may manifest from differences between generations, which have been grouped into labels such as Baby Boomers, Millennials, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. Each cultural encounter carries similar challenges when interacting with other cultural groups.

Within American public and private school systems, this study provides a framework for teachers who face regional or national diversity issues in schools, which includes international, urban, rural, and suburban situations. As the international teachers became aware and understood the culture around them, they gained an appreciation for diversity, which helped them to see their students as individuals rather than a collective group. The teachers not only learned about their students in class, but also expanded their knowledge of them outside of the school. Learning the uniqueness of cultures helped teachers to develop a perspective that viewed educational issues through a cultural lens, which helped them to relate and connect to the students and parents more closely than those who chose to isolate themselves from other cultures. Teachers in public and private schools in the United States do not have to miss culturally engaging
opportunities. Participants in this study indicated that there are many cultural opportunities within the borders of the United States that expose people to different cultures including restaurants, festivals, and classes. With technological advances, teachers from the United States can easily expose themselves to teachers in other cultural settings through the utilization of communicative technology tools such as Skype and Facetime. With the same tools, teachers can further implement cultural learning activities with their students by communicating with schools around the world such as cyber pen pals.

In order for teachers to benefit from the findings of this study, they must see the significance that culture plays in education. Research continues to indicate that culture is a factor in learning (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005; Marzano, 2001a; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Cohen, 1987; Coleman et al., 1966). However, few schools spend adequate time in studying the cultural implications of their communities on student learning. Investing in this area of research may provide direction in resolving educational issues specific to their school or district. This study suggests that districts should consider the cultural factors as they make school improvement decisions on instructional strategies or parent and community involvement. As students, parents, and community members see schools desiring to be learners of their cultures, strong bonds may potentially develop leading to support in school initiatives, which can ultimately lead to student achievement.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Conceptual Framework
A. Conceptual Framework
APPENDIX B

Interview Outline
B. Interview Outline

Prior Knowledge of Cross-Cultural Experiences

1. What led you to international teaching?

2. What cross-cultural experiences or training did you have prior to your international teaching experience?

3. What did you expect professionally and personally as you planned to go to your international school?

Cultural Challenges in School and Community

4. When you reflect over the time you have been at your school, what cultural differences did you encounter in the community? school? classroom?

5. What are some of the most significant cultural moments you can recall? Funniest moments? Frustrating moments? Surprising moments?

6. What feelings and thoughts did you experience as you encountered these cultural experiences? How did these feelings change over time (if they did)?

Adjustments in Teaching Practices to Cultural Differences

7. Thinking about these experiences, what adjustments did they cause you to make in how you interacted with the community? With the school community?

8. Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?

9. When looking at your teaching practices, what adaptations did you make in instruction, classroom management, and parent/community relations?

10. Which of these adjustments were the easiest and most difficult?
11. How do you know if you are connecting culturally with your students and their parents?

Personal Meanings from the Participant’s Cross-Cultural Experience

12. What has helped you the most in facing cross-cultural experiences as an international teacher?

13. What advice would you give an aspiring teacher who is considering teaching internationally?
APPENDIX C

Consent Form
C. Consent Document

Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Patricia Reeves
Student Investigator: David J. Alban
Title of Study: Cultural Adaptations of American Teachers in International Schools

You are invited to participate in a research project titled "Cultural Adaptations of American Teachers in International Schools." This project will serve as David Alban’s research project for the requirements of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural experiences of American teachers in international schools outside of the United States. This study focuses on the challenges and adjustments these teachers make in their teaching practices such as specifically in instruction, classroom management, and parent relations.

Who can participate in this study?
Participants for this study must meet certain criteria including the following items:

1. Teachers must be American citizens.
2. Teachers must be certified by a professional teaching organization.
3. Teachers must have minimally one-year of international teaching.
4. Teachers must be currently teaching in an international elementary or secondary school outside of the United States or previously taught in an international elementary or secondary school outside of the United States within the last two years.
Additionally, administrators in international schools may participate in the study if they have international teaching experience.

**Where will this study take place?**

The data collection will take place through interviews conducted by phone or Skype (depending on availability).

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

For those who participate in the research study, you will be invited to participate in two 60 minute interviews which will be conducted within two weeks of each other for a total time commitment of approximately two hours.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate?**

If you decide to be a participant in the research study, you will be included in a pool of interested candidates. Randomly selected candidates will be invited to participate in two 60-minute interview on their cross-cultural experiences as an international educator by way of Skype or phone in a location free of distractions for the participant. One candidate will be selected to field test the interview protocol. Prior to the interviews, interview questions will be sent so that the participant can prepare for the interview. The interviews will also be digitally recorded to ensure accuracy of the discussion. For those in the research study, transcriptions of the interview will produced and provided to the participants for review and editing. At any time in the interview, the interviewer will honor the request of the participant to turn off the recording.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

The interview questions will pertain to the cultural adaptations that teachers make in international schools. More specifically, the questions will ask participants to share some of their personal experiences adapting to different cultures in and out of their classrooms. The interviews that will be transcribed will be secured by the researcher.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

Maintaining the confidentiality of each participant takes high priority in the study. Your name or specific names of locations or people will not be used in the study, but rather pseudonyms and general terms will be used in the reporting results (i.e. “Teacher 1”, “school in the Middle East”, and so on). Participants will be asked to only share about the ways they experience cultural adjustments in and outside of their classrooms. Additionally, transcripts from the research project will be secured and available only to the researcher. Upon the researcher’s verification of the accuracy of the transcripts, the audio transcripts will be destroyed by researcher.
What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There are several benefits from participating in this study. The results of the study may provide further understanding of the international school teacher’s practices in working with students with diverse cultural backgrounds. As schools in the United States continue to grow in diversity, educators are looking for ways to adjust their teaching practices to a more diverse student body. The results of the study may also provide additional strategies for teachers to use in diverse situations. Additionally, the findings of the study may provide educational programs in colleges and university additional insight on international education which may better equip aspiring teachers going into elementary and secondary schools.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

Participating in the study will require the time to interview twice. Each interview will be 60 minutes in length for a total of 120 minutes. There are no other known costs in participating in the study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

Those who participate in the interviews will receive a $20 Amazon gift card as an appreciation for their time. Arrangements will be made at the conclusion of the interviewing.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

The dissemination of results for the researcher study will be shared by PowerPoint with the dissertation committee of Dave Alban and any others present at the dissertation defense.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

During the study, you can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences professionally or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any question prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, David Alban, at (616)405-8644 or dalban@gulllakecs.org. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269)387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (269)387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of
the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped
date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained
to me. I agree to take part in this study by digitally signing this consent form and sending
the form as an email attachment to the researcher.
APPENDIX D

Recruitment Flier
American International Teachers Needed
for Research Study

Cultural Adaptations of American Teachers in International Schools

- A teacher is surprised to find his/her students standing out of respect when he or she walks into the classroom.
- Another teacher is frustrated when their students do not view helping each other on tests as cheating, but rather as helping each other out for the well-being of the group.
- A teacher is invited to a student’s home to celebrate in a traditional celebration.

Have you had unique experiences like these as an international teacher?

Description of the Project: This study will explore the unique and rich cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in international schools. Participants will be invited to share their experiences by interview and will receive a $20 gift card.

Participants: Certified American teachers with minimally one year of international teaching experience who are teaching or taught within the last two years in international schools in countries in the Asian Pacific Rim region.

Contact: To learn more about the study, contact the student investigator, Dave Alban, at dalban@gulllakecs.org.
APPENDIX E

HSIRB Approvals
E. HSIRB Approvals

Date: January 23, 2013

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
    David Alhan, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-02-38

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change to your research project titled “Cultural Adaptations of American Teachers in International Schools” requested in your memo received January 17, 2013 (Revise data collection procedures; Conduct 2 Skype/phone interviews in lieu of 1 focus group interview and 1 Skype/phone interview, conduct second interview field test with one teacher prior to data collection, add $20 gift card as compensation, and revise consent document to reflect these changes) has been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 1, 2013
Date: January 30, 2013

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
    David Alban, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-02-38

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change to your research project titled “Cultural Adaptations of American Teachers in International Schools” requested in your memo received January 29, 2013 (to add a recruitment flyer) has been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 1, 2014