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How Teachers Experience Learning and Change: A Phenomenographic Study of Internationalized Teacher Professional Development

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As concerns about increasing teacher quality and the quality of student learning continue to grow, the professional development of teachers is continually heralded as one of the most important avenues in reaching these goals (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2000; Guskey 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Accordingly, a significant amount of funds are annually poured into teacher development projects and programs (Birman et al., 2007; Desimone, 2009); at the same time, the literature on teacher professional development has grown substantially, with a wealth of research revolving around a myriad of topics. However, in spite of both this recognition and the allocation of resources towards teacher professional development, a two-fold problem emerges. Firstly, much of the available literature fails to explain how teachers learn from professional development and the conditions that support and promote this learning (Clarke, D. & Hollingsworth, 2002; Girvan, C. et al., 2016; González & Skultety, 2016; Hanushek, 2005; Korthagen, 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Sykes, 1996; Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008). Secondly, not only is the research on teacher professional development programs limited in ascertaining the effectiveness of these programs on teacher professional development, but much of the research that is successful in ascertaining effectiveness reveals the teacher professional development programs to be ineffective and inadequate (Borko, 2004; Guskey, 2002; Kuijpers et al., 2010). Herein emerges the need for a better understanding of teacher professional development and what makes it effective (Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Gatt, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016; Wayne et al., 2008).

Further, research concerning internationalized teacher professional development remains unaddressed to a large extent. In contrast, when it comes to the parallel field of pre-service teacher education, arguments concerning the need to prepare pre-service teachers for the global realities of teaching in this day and age have created a very strong push towards both the internationalization of pre-service teacher education in both practice and research (Kissock & Richardson, 2009; Larsen, 2016; Martin et al., 2017; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019, Tye, 1999). This is not to say teacher professional development has been immune to the growing phenomenon of internationalization. Rather, teacher professional development is also increasingly influenced by internationalization, as internationalized teacher professional development programs increasingly crop up in school boards, NGOs, universities and other institutions and organizations – also largely the result of a world increasingly beset by the effects of internationalization. Such organizations are looking for opportunities to create, further establish, or support internationalized teacher professional development initiatives and projects.

However, as both the literature on teacher professional development and internationalized teacher professional development programs continue to grow, research concerning internationalized teacher professional development remains unaddressed to a large extent. This reveals a stark need to

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address the fact that teacher professional development and the influence of internationalization have yet to intersect significantly in the literature.

This article delves into this niche in the hopes of uncovering some of the complexities of internationalized teacher professional development and its influence in terms of teacher learning and change by answering the question, "How do teachers learn and change as a result of internationalized teacher professional development?" In attempting to understand in-service teachers' internationalized teacher professional development experiences, this study will draw on transformative learning theory, specifically focusing on the concept of "cognitive conflict" (Cobb, Wood & Yackel, 1990) and "disorientating dilemmas" (Mezirow, 2000) in an effort to advance our understanding of internationalized teacher professional development and how teachers learn and change as a result of it. There have also not been many ties made in the field of professional development of teachers that investigate the learning and change of teachers connecting it to both transformative learning theory and intercultural learning/international education, a gap this study attempts to fill.

The Internationalization of Teacher Professional Development: A working definition

There is first, however, the issue of defining what exactly constitutes internationalization of teacher professional development in terms of its goals/specific objectives. The overall lack of research conducted to date on the internationalization of teacher professional development confirms that it is imperative to have a working definition of the internationalization of teacher professional development, which can be constructed by bringing together definitions/goals of teacher professional development with definitions/goals of internationalization.

There are many definitions of teacher professional development, but all are invariably centered upon teachers themselves and their learning, while internationalization is concerned with a process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into an existing structure or format. The argument can be put forth, then, that what makes internationalized teacher professional development distinct is that an international/intercultural dimension influences the learning that unfolds within the professional development. The following working definition is, therefore, put forward for purposes of this article: *the internationalization of teacher professional development is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into teachers' learning and learning how to learn in a professional development context.* In this way, the learning route is influenced by an international/intercultural dimension and, thus, the teacher's transformation will have been influenced by their internationalized/intercultural learning experience during their internationalized professional development.

Theoretical Background

One of the most popular theories that has been guiding adult learning in past decades is the transformative learning theory (Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow (2000) defines transformation as "a process whereby we move over time to reformulate our structures for making meaning, usually through reconstructing dominant narratives or stories." According to the experts in the field, there is not one avenue to transformation. However, as Cranton (2002) explains, one common way transformation may come about is through a significant event that causes a person to question or challenge her/his assumptions or beliefs. As Cranton (2002) explains, "Through some event, which could be as traumatic as losing a job or as ordinary as an unexpected question, an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world. (p. 64) This is known as an "an activating event" (Cranton, 2002), what Mezirow (2000) calls "a disorienting dilemma," and Sokol and Cranton (1998)

call a "trigger event" and can be what sets the transformation process in motion. However, it need not always be one significant event that causes a person to question or challenge; as Cranton explains, it may be an "incremental process in which we gradually change bits of how we see things, not even realizing a transformation has taken place until afterward" (Cranton, 2002, p. 65).

Shifting focus from how it can occur to where it can lead, Cranton's summary of facets of transformative learning show that the acts of articulating assumptions and critical self-reflection can lead to a transformed perspective in a learner. She describes this perspective as more open and better justified, likewise, outcomes of transformative learning described by Mezirow (1991) are "a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective" (p. 155). Another early authority in the field, Carl Rogers, also identifies that an outcome of significant learning is a more mature person who is open to "new people, new situations, new problems" (1961, p. 115). In this way, the perspective of transformational learning within adult learning centers on development and growth.

Crucial for this study, Mezirow's (1991) work that explains when a person begins to interpret new meaning perspectives and meaning schemes, discussion with peers provides an ideal vehicle for learning (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 114). Along with articulating one's assumptions through critical discourse, critical self-reflection is also key to transformative learning (Cranton, 2002). It is the idea that an unpacking of our assumptions can lead to critical self-reflection, which Cranton (2002) describes as "the means by which we work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge, considering their sources, and examining underlying premises" (p. 68). Thus, according to Mezirow (1991), critical reflection is considered the distinguishing characteristic of adult learning, the avenue by which one questions the validity of her or his worldview, and rational discourse is identified as a catalyst for transformation, as it leads various participants to explore the depth and meaning of their various worldviews and articulate those ideas to others. Thus, both critical discourse and reflection are integral to transformative learning, and how these unfold during internationalized teacher professional development will be explored in this study.

Literature Review

Culturally diverse discourse communities

What forms does internationalized teacher professional development take? In other words, how can the learning that teachers undergo be infused with an international/intercultural dimension? Here we consider that the learning most commonly takes place in groups, as teachers primarily go through professional development with other teachers, be it within the same department, school, or district. The importance of teacher networks and community learning as part of effective teacher professional development is found in various studies (Boyle et al., 2005; Gamoran, Gunter, & Williams, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2001). One term used to describe this is Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Synder, 2002), where learning is seen as a natural part of social participation: "Social learning is viewed as something that occurs, emerges and evolves when people with common goals interact, and a community of practice is a community that has a group of people who share a common goal where social learning is a natural part of the development of the community" (Cajander et al., 2012). As Cajander et al. (2012) describes, through the process of communicating information and sharing experiences within the group, the members learn from each other and develop both professionally and personally. An overlapping term is discourse communities; as Putnam and Borko (2000) state, these discourse communities also play central roles in shaping the way teachers view their world and go about their work.

When teacher professional development is internationalized, the nature of the group becomes distinct: the group of teachers may be from areas that are geographically dispersed, but most

importantly, and/or culturally heterogeneous. What comes into play is intercultural learning, defined by Alred et al. (2003) as both the experience of encountering two or more different cultures and the learning that occurs through such an encounter (as cited in Gill, 2007). As Nsamenang (2003) writes, "Cultural learning usually takes place, not in a homogenous society, but in a culturally diverse one, where competing sets of norms and values interplay" (p. 220). Davies (2006) dissects the word 'intercultural' in a way useful to this discussion; he points out that "using the word 'intercultural' means putting the whole weight on the prefix 'inter': interaction, exchange, opening up" (p. 16). Here we can also consider in what ways this affects the learning within the professional development; while the exchange, opening up, and learning across cultures takes place between the teachers within the intercultural discourse community, does the intercultural learning also encourage the teachers to experience cognitive dissonance or disorienting dilemmas as they critically think about their own pedagogy and practice? Specifically, within internationalized teacher professional development, does the culturally diverse nature of the group of teachers encourage or support transformation? In this way, how interacting with a multiplicity of cultures affects the individual learning of the teachers within the professional development is the crux of this study.

Different cultural setting than one's own

It has already been established in this paper that the cultural diversity of the discourse community/community of practice and the intercultural learning that arises out of this dynamic is what can be considered to lie at the heart of internationalized professional development. The lens of transformative learning allows for a new perspective into the experience of teachers within this form of professional development. What will also be considered is the effect of this type of intercultural discourse community/community of practice undergoing their professional development in a physical setting that is outside of the teachers' home environment/culture, i.e. the importance of context. How does this further influence the learning and change of teachers as they receive their professional development?

In their work, Putnam and Borko (1999) offer considerations on new views of knowledge and thinking that help to delve into this topic. As they describe, teachers often complain that learning experiences outside the classroom are too removed from the day-to-day work of teaching to have a meaningful impact. They explain, "At first glance, the idea that teachers' knowledge is situated in classroom practice lends itself to this complaint, seeming to imply that most or all learning experiences for teachers should take place in actual classrooms" (p. 6). However, Putnam and Borko reference situative theorists who challenge the assumption of a cognition core independent of context and intention (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Using the situative perspective, which holds that all knowledge is, by definition, situated, Putnam and Borko state that the question is not whether knowledge and learning are situated, but in what contexts they are situated. They purport, "for some purposes, in fact, situating learning experiences for teachers outside of the classroom may be important – indeed essential – for powerful learning" (p. 6). Thus, this situated perspective is important for this study because it focuses on how various settings for teachers' learning give rise to different kinds of knowing. As Putnam and Borko question,

> If the goal is to help teachers think in new way, for example, it may be important to have them experience learning in different settings. The situative perspective helps us to see that much of what we do and think is intertwined with the particular contexts in which we act. The classroom is a powerful environment for shaping and constraining how practicing teachers think and act. Many of their patterns of thought and action have become automatic – resistant to reflection or change. Engaging in learning experiences away from this setting may be necessary to help teachers "break set" – to experiences in new ways. (p. 6)

Here Putnam and Borko raise the point that while teachers need opportunities to think about teaching and learning in new ways, it may be difficult for teachers to experience new ways of thinking in the context of their own classrooms – the pull of the existing classroom environment and culture can simply be too strong (p. 6). In this way, a different and new context can provide the opportunity for teachers to, as Putnam and Borko call it, "break set," and therefore be a rationale for why internationalized teacher professional development should be offered in different cultural environments.

Along the same lines, in their review of studies in which pre-service teachers have been placed in international contexts, Santoro and Major (2012) found that "the dissonance created by presenting students with concepts and ideas that challenges sometimes deeply entrenched views, and the associated discomfort can ultimately, lead to learning" (p. 312). There are a variety of ways in which this dissonance can be sparked, as they explain, "…dissonance arises from being in an unfamiliar environment that may be physically, culturally, socially and emotionally challenging" (p. 312). Specifically in terms of pre-service teachers teaching in a culturally different context, Alfaro and Quezada (2010) write that this can create "cultural, pedagogical and ideological dissonance, a sensation that promotes increased ideological awareness and clarity" (p. 50). These ideas are useful to this study, as they indicate that immersion or being in an unfamiliar environment can play an important role in learning and change.

Background of the study

The model of internationalized teacher professional development selected for this study was a program run by an independent non-profit and non-governmental organization that seeks to promote educational leadership for critical thinking, open inquiry, cross-cultural understanding and regional cooperation. To preserve anonymity, this organization will be referred to as Project Y. Project Y works to empower secondary school teachers of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region through teacher training, leadership and organization skills.

In July 2011, twenty-four secondary school teachers from nine different Middle Eastern and North African countries came to a major city in the United States for a four-week foundational teacher professional development program centering on how to promote critical thinking, civic education, and mutual understanding in the classroom. For anonymity purposes, the program will be referred to throughout the study as Program Z. Program Z took place at a small liberal arts college where the teachers both lived in residences and classes were held. During the program, the teachers participated in approximately 100 hours of interactive classroom time, focused on fostering active learning, with an emphasis on discussion and group work. Classes spanned numerous disciplines, and encouraged collaboration across cultural, disciplinary, professional and linguistic lines. Through interactive class sessions, research projects, and visits to cultural and educational sites, the goal was that participants develop and exchange innovative teaching practices to actively engage their students in the learning process, enhance critical and creative thinking, foster student involvement in their local and global community, and encourage cross-cultural understanding.

The twenty-four 2011 participants were secondary school teachers from diverse communities in the Middle East and North Africa. The teachers collectively came from nine MENA countries: Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, Jordan, Turkey, Israel, Algeria, and Lebanon. According to the organization, the participants of 2011 all demonstrated a deep commitment to their vocations as educators and to their students' learning and growth. As a reflection of the region it serves, Program Z included significant numbers of participants from the region's major religious, ethnic and linguistic communities, highlighting the importance of diversity amongst the group. Because Project Y was able

to provide full scholarships, educators from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and varying levels of teaching experience participated, including participants from urban and rural areas. They were selected through an extensive application process and in-person interviews. All participants possessed a high standard of English-speaking skills and taught various subject areas including: languages, social studies, science, technology, art, math, and vocational studies.

Program Z meets the definition that has been set out in this study of what internationalized teacher professional development entails because it integrates an international/intercultural dimension into teachers' learning and learning how to learn in a professional development context by being comprised of a culturally diverse group, taking place in a physical setting that is outside of the teachers' home environment and culture, incorporating international/intercultural themes and comparisons, and overall intercultural learning.

Research Methodology and Data Analysis

An initial overview of all the data (interviews and videos) was made by two researchers to familiarise with the corpus of data. During this phase, the extracts considered as capable to give insights about the sense of readiness were selected and, later, themes connected to the expression of sense of readiness were identified (Charmaz, 2006; Mayring, 2004; Neuendorf, 2016). This circular process was driven by our theoretical framework. Specifically, the themes were examined in reference to the readiness perspective of knowledge, as outlined by Billet (2015): i) conceptual, ii) procedural and iii) dispositional dimensions. At the same time, three temporal dimensions are considered: the sense of readiness before the master's as retraced in the teachers' accounts, the sense of readiness right after the course, and after one year as traced directly in the teachers 'accounts. Consequently, for each dimension, there are three sub-categories related to the temporal perspective.

Of the twenty-four participants of Program Z, eleven volunteered to participate in the study. The group that ended up being able to participate in the study serendipitously turned out to be a diverse one in many significant ways. This bode well for the phenomenographic methodology of the study, as it supplied a range of teachers from different areas, with different backgrounds and of different subject areas and roles for me to investigate the qualitatively different ways in which people experience internationalized teacher professional development.

Interviewing is the most common method for collecting data in phenomenography (Walsh, 2000). Thus, in-depth individual semi structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The aim of the interviews was to have the participant reflect on his or her experiences and then relate those experiences to me in such a way that we were able to come to a mutual understanding about the meanings of the experiences (or of the account of the experiences). Most phenomenographers seem to agree that the participants should have sufficient flexibility to describe the experiences as they wish in their own way. Hence, most of the questioning and probing was open-ended.

During the data analysis, a limited number of internally and logically related, qualitatively different, hierarchical categories of description of the variation in the way the internationalization of teacher professional development was experienced by the participants of Program Z were developed. In this chapter, each category of description is accompanied by a prose description of the category along with illustrative quotes sourced from the interview data (Bruce, 1997). The quotes from the interview transcripts served to illustrate how each category differs from the other categories identified (Booth, 1997; Bowden, 2000; Marton, 1994). The identified categories of description were sorted so they logically related to one another, and form a hierarchy that extends from basic to more complex understandings. This hierarchical representation of the categories of description was the outcome space.

Research Findings

The findings relevant to the research question posed in this article will be reported under the following two categories of description: internationalized teacher professional development experienced as 1) learning from their peers, 2) learning from their environment.

Learning from their peers

The teachers' accounts consistent with this category described residing in the same place and engaging in daily activities together led to learning from their peers. Many of the teachers described mutual learning that took place between them, which took the form of the exchange of ideas, seeing what each other do in their own countries, and getting feedback from each other on their teaching practices. For a number of the teachers, it was the high level of interaction with each other that resulted in so much mutual learning, as this teacher describes: "…so traveling together, working together, presenting projects together, eating together, so these interactions you know personally gave me a lot of knowledge about other personality styles and other teacher styles... really I benefitted a lot from them" (Participant A). The fact that they were all in a shared profession also led to the high degree of mutual learning, described by this teacher:

> I think that half of the development is done from other teachers who are with you going to this course or group learning. Like, you're going there to learn from the professors, but you end up learning half from the other teachers, from their experiences. Because let's not forget, they are teachers who are going through kind of the same problems you are going through. And because we are different, everybody handles problems differently. When you hear somebody handled the same problem and it worked with them, and it didn't work with me, I'm more likely to listen and do what they're doing, especially if I'm in the same environment as trusting the person I'm listening to, the teacher I'm interacting with. (Participant B).

As described by this teacher, the mutual learning that took place was especially strong and impactful because the shared profession of teaching created an inherent sense of trust amongst the teachers. It was the shared profession of teaching that created a bridge across diverse opinions, as this teacher explained: "Sometimes we don't see the same vision, but we learn from each other" (Participant C). Their shared profession also united them under the shared struggles of teaching, as this teacher described, "Frustration from teaching, from correcting papers, from working long hours, from, I don't know the whole profession of teaching" (Participant D), playing a role in deepening their connections with each other.

A different teacher even went as far as to say that the learning that occurred as a result of the other teachers was equally, or even more important than the official professional development being conducted:

> To tell the truth, when you go for international experience like that, maybe what you learn outside the classroom is more than what you learn in the classroom. We had great discussions with [redacted] and every other professor, but also what we learned as a network of teachers with the similar cause, what you learn from the practices of your friends in other areas of the world… so when you come back, you come back with a mixture of new perspectives of how things are done in different parts of the world, and now it's up to you to take those very positive aspects that you can integrate in your own view of doing things. (Participant E).

Many of the teachers also reported that the cultural diversity of the group was a huge benefit to the learning they experienced. One teacher explained that it was this factor that led to change even in those who were at first resistant: "I think the experience itself it will force people to be open I think. Because we were different coming from different backgrounds and different countries and we were forced or obliged to work together and to listen to each other…we were all trying and do you understand, even those moments I think the people who resisted or even those moments I think that everybody has changed and has accepted the others" (Participant C). Other teachers felt that the experience of being within a diverse group of people allowed them to see beyond what they felt they already knew, much of which was formed as a result of the media, especially from television, as this teacher explained: "When you listen from the person himself or herself, you get something authentic, right, it's not like when you read or when you watch it on TV or something like that" (Participant F). Being able to be with teachers from a range of different cultures also helped the teachers to learn about the complexity of culture, as this teacher described: "So I think that I got some ideas I, even [my country] I thought it was just one people one way of thinking, but I observed that [my country] has so many regions and each region has its own way of thinking, I didn't know that before" (Participant B).

For many of the teachers, they cited personal, casual conversations with other teachers in the group as playing a significant role in helping them learn and change. Described as "hallway discussions" in professional development literature, these took place in various contexts, as the teachers describe, with individual results. This teacher describes discussions amongst some of the teachers that would take place after the formal day had ended and how they sparked new ideas and initiatives to make changes upon returning to teaching:

> Yes, I admit it was very effective in the sense it made me raise questions on the spot, and then when we got back to the dorms and through our discussions... and we started thinking, sometimes individually, sometimes as a group in general, and we reach conclusions, we found ourselves doing things this or that way, in the same way, and we said, why don't we give it a try differently? Why are we very conservative in doing things in that way? So maybe those moments that they help me raise questions but when I come back I implemented really new activities. (Participant G).

For some less experienced teachers, conversations with others in the group helped them to grapple with fears they had towards being able to help their students be prepared and inspired them to make practical changes once returning to teaching. One of these teachers without many years teaching experience felt she gained immensely from the discussions with other teachers in the group due to the cultural diversity of the group: "So it's like taking experiences in maybe 25 countries or 25 schools at the same time. So, such experiences enrich your experience with plus three years at least. It's like I gained three or four years of teaching in one month." (Participant C). Overall, the teachers explained how these casual "hallway" conversations had a profound effect on them and their learning, since, as one teacher described: "It was my first time talking with teachers outside of my small world…we would stay up late and talk, and when we would talk, we would talk about deep things, about teaching. And yes, they did affect me," (Participant E).

Learning from their environment

Similar to this learning that occurred beyond the curriculum, teachers also reported learning they experienced as a result of being in a new cultural environment. They described being in a culturally different physical environment meant learning was happening continuously, as one teacher described

the learning he experienced as not being limited to the official professional development itself, but rather, "It makes learning ongoing from the very beginning until the very end. You learn from the local culture, it gives you some sort of happiness that you are in a different context and this increases motivation to learn more," (Participant A). This notion of the new environment resulting in a sense of motivation that has positive effects, described by this teacher as "Motivation increases receptivity, and motivation increases openness to change," (Participant F), illustrates an important benefit for the teachers of being in culturally different physical environment. For some of the teachers, their experience being in a culturally different physical environment meant they felt more immersed in their professional development experience. Not having to return to their "regular" contexts had a significant effect, as this teacher described, "Because back in Tunisia once you get out of your workshop, you are in the context of the family, the familiar context, but in [major American city] for example you feel that you are learning everywhere," (Participant G). The impact of the physical distance from homes and regular routines on their learning was brought up by a number of teachers, for example, in this account: "The mindset that you have no pressures, you don't have to tutor in the afternoon, and you don't have to make lunch, so it facilitates learning because it's more relaxing I would say," (Participant B).

Being out of their regular routines also meant their mental routines were shaken up as well, as described by this teacher: "But when you're in a new country and new experience, you're kind of doing everything for the first time, so why not listen to ideas for the first time? At least I think so," (Participant H). In a similar way, the culturally different physical environment meant the teachers were more relaxed and free, which also meant have less fear of making changes, as one teacher described: "More open, more relaxed to new ideas, I was kind of willing to do anything new…the whole state I was in was in a state of doing new stuff, so listening to new things…I was kind of less afraid, which kind of played a positive effect on the whole experience," (Participant C). In this way, some of the teachers were explicit about how feeling physically free in the culturally new physical environment meant they felt mentally free as well.

Discussion

The benefits of group learning within a culturally diverse group

Putnam and Borko's (2000) view that discourse communities play central roles in shaping the way teachers view their world and go about their work, and the views of Parson et al., (2016) that when teachers work together to discuss student needs, content, instructional delivery, and effective implementation, they are "able to create their own big picture" (254), are both well represented by the opinions of the teachers in this study. For these teachers, the discourse community had a significant impact, to the point where even after the group dispersed, the teachers continued to learn from the members and be impacted by them. The teachers even explained how learning from fellow teachers often even superseded the learning they experienced from the professional development instructors. They explained that while the learning that took place with the professional development instructors was important, the learning that took place amongst the group of teachers was even more impactful, describing much of the learning as "mostly incidental," arising out of casual discussions with other teachers. This is because there was an element of trust between the teachers that proved powerful to their learning and change process. This sense of trust and solidarity that they felt existed within the group since they were all teachers going through similar challenges shows Putnam and Borko's (2000) point that discourse communities play central roles in shaping the way teachers view their world and go about their work to be true.

Moving deeper than the literature that shows the benefits of discourse in groups and teacher networks on teachers' professional development, an important facet of this study was to explore the impact of teacher group learning when the group is culturally diverse. Drawing from intercultural

learning theory, this means that the encounters are with people who differ in some substantive way from the people they had interacted with up to that point in their lives - the differences that are most common are race, ethnicity, class, language, and national origin (Merryfield, 2000). The literature on professional development showed that diversity of the group can be seen as influencing the learning experience of the teachers in a significant way (Boyle et al., 2005; Gamoran, Gunter, & Williams, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2001). According to Putnam and Borko, the notion of distributed cognition suggests that when diverse groups of teachers with different types of knowledge and expertise come together in discourse communities, community members can draw upon and incorporate each other's expertise to create rich conversation and new insights into teaching and learning. (p. 8) The teachers in this study reported gaining new perspectives and solutions to problems they could then take back to their local teaching contexts. The teachers described learning from varied experiences of their fellow teachers in the group, and being able to get a range of feedback. The teachers showed that learning about how teaching and learning happened in places outside of their countries helped them to improve their teaching practices within their own countries. The teachers also viewed the cultural diversity as being beneficial and leading to change, even if it was not always a smooth process. At times there was resistance to the ideas of others, but it still led to further degrees of understanding. These teachers show that the diverse backgrounds and differing experiences of the teachers in the group all significantly contribute to the learning and transformation that each teacher experiences during the internationalized teacher professional development, particularly revolving around how to deal with and understand difference.

In addition, these findings also support the literature on cultural pedagogy that also emphasizes the important role that experience plays in developing intercultural skills. As Cushner and Mahon (2002) write, "developing the skills that enable an individual to live and work effectively among individuals from cultures other than their own requires significant, long-term, direct personal interaction with people and contexts different from those in which one is most familiar" (p. 45). As the teachers describe, it was the direct personal interaction with each other and the fact that they were from different cultural contexts that made a significant impact on their learning and change, a point that illustrates a powerful sentiment by Hayhoe and Pan (2001): "Of greatest importance is the readiness to listen to the narrative of the other, and to learn the lessons which can be discovered in distinctive threads of human cultural thought and experience" (p. 20).

The benefit of a culturally new learning environment

In addition to the benefits of cultural diversity of the discourse community/community of practice and the intercultural learning that arises out of this scenario, the findings of the study also support the literature that promotes this type of intercultural discourse community/community of practice undergoing their professional development in a physical setting that is outside of the teachers' home environment/culture. The findings of this study show that teachers participating in an internationalized teacher professional development program reported significant learning and change as a result of being in a new cultural environment.

Putnam and Borko (1999) explain it may be difficult for teachers to experience new ways of thinking in the context of their own classrooms – the pull of the existing classroom environment and culture can simply be too strong (p. 6). Some of the teachers in the study felt a stark difference between their existing classroom environment and culture and the new environment of their internationalized teacher professional development program. They felt more immersed in the internationalized teacher professional development program, even when they were outside the professional development classes, whereas in their home environments, once they exited their workshops, they were still in familiar contexts. As such, they felt more motivated in the new cultural environment, which positively contributed to their learning and change. Being in the new cultural environment meant continuous

learning, which made it easier to experience new ways of thinking in the new cultural environment compared to their own local classroom and context. As Putnam and Borko explained, when teachers are in their home environment, many of their patterns of thought and action have become automatic – resistant to reflection or change, whereas a new cultural environment helped them to feel more open and receptive to change. The teachers described feeling more open to new things, new experiences and new ideas. Feeling more relaxed and freer also meant they had less fear of making changes. The teachers' experiences of learning from everything around them created an opportunity for teachers to learn from a vast variety of experiences, very much to their benefit and enjoyment.

From these teachers' reflections, it becomes clear that they strongly feel the new cultural environment played an instrumental role in their learning and change process, thus supporting the professional development literature that purports that "learning experiences for teachers outside of the classroom may be important – indeed essential – for powerful learning" (Putnam & Borko, 1999, p. 6). The findings also support the assertion by Cranton (2002) that "critical self-reflection may take place in the classroom, but it is perhaps more likely to take place outside it" (p. 68). Bouchard (as cited in Barer-Stein & Kompf, 2000) would agree, stating that "experiential learning challenges the misconception that learning mostly occurs in formal environments such as classrooms, and replaces it with the notion that all learning is the result of experience, no matter where it occurs" (p.177).

Additionally, beyond the fact that the teachers were outside the classroom and formal teaching time, it is also extremely significant that the new environment was a culturally new place for them. Intercultural learning theory tells us international experiences create the space for teachers to "strengthen their practice and stretch beyond their traditional zone of comfort" (Cushner & Brennan, 2007, p. 6). As the teachers describe, they felt more open in a number of ways, such as being more open to trying new things and to listening to new ideas. Thus, internationalized teacher professional development shows that both being outside the classroom and formal teaching time, and in a culturally new environment, can create the space and place for many of the teachers to counter the nationalistic framework they operated under back home. Being in a new cultural environment resulted in many of the teachers feeling more motivated to learn and change, as well as having less fear of making changes - both to their perspective and ideas, and to their teaching practices.

Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that an important way cognitive dissonance that leads to important learning and change can be brought about is through close connections and interactions within a culturally diverse group, in a culturally new environment. The benefits of this scenario were many, including becoming more accepting and open towards others, particularly those from different cultures, shifting and expanding worldviews, and becoming more open-minded and accepting of difference.

These results do also raise questions for further research, such as, while the cultural diversity of the group proved to be of significant benefit to the learning and change of the participants, how might its impact have been different (or not) had the cultural diversity of the group not been contained to the Middle East and North African region? Does the fact that the participants came from distinctly different cultures and nationalities, but yet were united under a shared region play a role in the transformative learning and change they experienced? Is there such thing as too much cultural diversity within a group? Further, the culturally new environment for the learners was a neutral place (the Unites States), in the sense that none of the participants were from this country, it is physically far away from their region, and has a very different culture from that which any of the participants came from. How far and different does the new cultural environment have to be in order for it to have a positive effect, as it did in the case of this study? Does coming from a non-Western country to experience teacher professional development in a Western country complicate the learning that takes place by creating an implicit power imbalance? Such questions lead the author to hope that further research continues to

be done on the experiences of different groups of teachers who undergo internationalized teacher professional development in a variety of contexts.

Conclusions

This study concludes that internationalized teacher professional development is a highly effective, transformational form of teacher professional development. Significant learning and change takes place when teachers are taken out of their comfort zone and experience cognitive dissonance through the diversity of the teachers they learn with and the new cultural environment they learn in. From the findings of this study, institutions and organizations that administer or are looking to create and implement internationalized teacher professional development programs can have insight into the ways in which teachers may learn and change from this type of professional development. It is also possible to more deeply evaluate the effectiveness of these programs and consider changes that can be implemented to best respond to the needs of the teachers involved. It is high time that internationalized teacher professional development takes a deserving role in understanding the important field of teacher learning and change

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