

# Transformational Experience during Study Abroad: The Case of a Japanese Pre-service Teacher<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Although there is a growing recognition of the importance of pre-service teachers' experiences abroad, scant research attention has been paid to the lived study-abroad experiences of pre-service language teachers of English in non-Western countries. It is vital to shed light on the experiences of this particular group of teachers because their linguistic and cultural particularities (i.e., non-native speakers of English from the non-Western world) and the characteristics of their future students (i.e., largely monolingual and monocultural) differ notably from those of their counterparts in Western countries. This study examines, through the use of narrative interviews, the transformative learning of a pre-service language teacher of English at a Japanese university who participated in a study-abroad program in Sweden. Findings suggested that the participant experienced interrelated, but successive, phases of transformation processes: from having increased confidence to experiencing a disorienting dilemma, and from engaging in critical reflection to performing new roles. Practical implications and research recommendations associated with study-abroad programs for pre-service teachers are also included.

## Resumen

Aunque existe un reconocimiento creciente de la importancia de las experiencias de los futuros profesores en el extranjero, se ha prestado poca atención a las experiencias de estudio en el extranjero vividas por los futuros profesores de inglés en países no occidentales. Es vital arrojar luz sobre las experiencias de este grupo particular de docentes debido a sus particularidades lingüísticas y culturales (es decir, hablantes no nativos de inglés del mundo no occidental) y las características de sus futuros estudiantes (es decir, mayoritariamente monolingües). y monoculturales) difieren notablemente de los de sus contrapartes en los países occidentales. Este estudio examina, a través del uso de entrevistas narrativas, el aprendizaje transformador de un profesor de inglés en formación inicial en una universidad japonesa que participó en un programa de estudios en el extranjero en Suecia. Los hallazgos sugirieron que el participante experimentó fases interrelacionadas, pero sucesivas, de procesos de transformación: desde tener una mayor confianza hasta experimentar un dilema desorientador, y desde participar en una reflexión crítica hasta desempeñar nuevos roles. También se incluyen implicaciones prácticas y recomendaciones de investigación asociadas con los programas de estudios en el extranjero para futuros maestros.

## Introduction

In recent years, study-abroad opportunities are extensively available to pre-service teachers through teacher education programs (Cushner, 2007). Concurrently, growing recognition of the importance of pre-service teachers' experiences abroad has resulted in a substantial body of empirical research on their learning during study abroad, which covered wide-ranging topics, such as critical awareness (Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012), foreign language abilities and pedagogies (Rahatzad et al., 2013), multicultural competencies (Sharma et al., 2011), and reflective practices (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). The majority of previous research on the subject matter, nevertheless, focused primarily on pre-service teachers originally from the West (e.g., U.S. and Australia) who wished to equip themselves with ample knowledge of teaching strategies for students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, 2014). Often the justification for the study-abroad component of the teacher education programs in such contexts is to prepare pre-service teachers to raise cultural sensitivity and competence as global citizens and as future teachers dealing with multiple factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, and political convictions (Faulconer, 2003; Vatalaro et al., 2015). However, what is noticeably lacking in the literature is the research attending to lived study-abroad experiences of pre-service teachers in non-Western countries, in particular those who are non-native speakers of the language. Besides scarce research data, there are at least two other significant reasons why it is of vital importance to throw light on this particular cohort of pre-service teachers. Firstly, the motivations and the intentions of the specific pre-service teachers, as well as the objectives and the focus of the study-abroad programs are likely to be notably different and unique due to teachers' linguistic and cultural particularities (i.e., non-native speakers of English from the non-Western world). Secondly, the students

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with whom those teachers imagine working in the future are largely monolingual and monocultural individuals. That is, the students usually share the same language with, and a similar culture to the teachers.

Therefore, the present study contributes to this area of scholarly inquiry by examining, through the employment of narrative interviews, the transformative learning of a Japanese pre-service language teacher of English who partook in a study-abroad program in Sweden. Situated within the framework of a transformative learning theory, the results of this study may provide a better understanding of the possibilities and pitfalls of study-abroad experiences of pre-service language teachers of English from a non-Western country, Japan.

### Theoretical Framework

As study abroad is a transformative practice (Tayler, 2008), in this study I drew upon Mezirow's transformative learning theory as a lens through which to interpret the participating pre-service teacher's study-abroad experiences in Sweden. At its core, transformative learning theory refers to "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167) and involves "constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world" (Taylor, 2008, p. 5). It should be noted that the theory pertains to both individual and social dimensions and implications that require learners to engage in deep reflection and interactions with others. This practice prompts learners to question, evaluate, and reflect upon their preconceived perspectives and values, leading to a dramatic transformation in their beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotions (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). More specifically, transformative learning theory elucidates the way in which the new encounters that learners have with the world and events affect the remodeling of their *frames of reference*. These are individuals' tacit points of view or mindsets inclusive of assumptions and expectations stemming from their previous experiences (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). In other words, the theory enables us to scrutinize the process of shaping and reshaping the learners' notions as well as their subsequent practices by virtue of a perspective transformation (Taylor, 2008). Crucially, Mezirow (2000) outlines ten phases of perspective transformation that are typically, albeit not always, linear. In particular, I take up in this research the first nine phases of Mezirow's transformative learning theory: (1) a disorienting dilemma, (2) self-examination of prior notions, (3) critical reflection on the notions, (4) recognition of dissatisfaction, (5) exploration of alternatives, (6) plan for action, (7) acquisition of new knowledge, (8) experimentation with new roles, and (9) competence building. By continually referring to these various phases of transformative learning and carefully analyzing the data acquired in this research, I endeavor to establish the relationship between the phases in the theory and the data of this research for the purpose of adequately delineating the Japanese pre-service teacher's transformational experiences, both in the academic and private domains, during the study-abroad program in Sweden.

### Literature Review

Morley et al. (2019) completed a comprehensive literature review on study-abroad programs for pre-service teachers, identifying 47 empirical research publications in the period from 2000 to 2019. The review revealed that the majority of the study-abroad programs (29 of 47) originated in the United States with destinations in Europe or in Latin America. The review detected only five studies related to language education, three of which originated in Hong Kong, that investigated the experiences of pre-service teachers from non-English speaking countries. Germane to this study, the review did not contain any study that included Japan as the origin or the destination of the study-abroad programs for pre-service teachers.

Theoretically and methodologically, there were four studies within the review which utilized, like the present study, transformative learning theory as their conceptual framework. Trilokeka and Kukar (2011) inspected the study-abroad experiences in Luxembourg, Austria, and Switzerland of five pre-service teachers in the Faculty of Education at a Canadian university. The study brought to surface the complicated disorienting experiences reported by the participants: acknowledging racial dynamics, struggling with the 'outsider' status, engaging in risk-taking, and recognizing global power relations. Dunn et al. (2014) carried out a comparative case study in the U.S. by analyzing two study-abroad programs for pre-service teachers, one in Sweden and the other one in France. The results highlighted the need for relevant and interactive assignments, hands-on experiences, and support for personal growth in programs that aim to aid the pre-service teachers in 'going global'. Foster et al. (2014) investigated nineteen pre-service teachers who participated in a course which included a short-term study-abroad program in South Korea. The study was couched in the context of global school-based agricultural education in the U.S. It was indicated that the

participants' perceptions of knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to global competency were subject to substantial and sustained changes due to the study-abroad opportunity. The central focus of Vatalaro et al.'s (2015) study was on the experiences of five pre-service teachers in the U.S. taking part in a two-week study-abroad program in Italy. The transformative themes that emerged from the study were: (a) a resulting increase in content knowledge of a pedagogical approach called *Reggio Emilia*; (b) an enhanced understanding of cultural differences; and (c) a heightened sense of self-awareness.

The review above confirms the value of the present study in the field of teacher education, particularly within language teacher education because, firstly, the findings of this study, emanating from a pre-service teacher from Japan experiencing study abroad in Sweden, will add new insights into this under-explored area of inquiry by contributing a Japanese perspective and a Swedish context to the discussion. The second area of significance stems from the study's employment of transformative learning theory as the methodology of data analysis and findings presentation. To the best of my knowledge, no empirical study hitherto endeavored to achieve this dual purposes. Accordingly, the research question that guided this study was: In what way did the participation in a study-abroad program in Sweden transform the perceptions of a Japanese pre-service language teacher of English?

## Methodology

### *The participant and context*

The participant in this study, Hana (a pseudonym), was a female, third-year undergraduate in the Faculty of International Studies at a Japanese university. She was chosen by means of convenience sampling, an approach through which participants are selected based on their accessibility to the researcher (Patton, 2002). Prior to joining the study-abroad program, she was majoring in global studies as well as taking teaching license courses at the university in order to become an English language teacher at the secondary school level upon graduation. Aside from a school trip to Australia for five days in high school, she had never been outside of Japan, and the study-abroad program was her dream opportunity in the sense that she would be able to assimilate herself into a different linguistic and cultural environment for an extended period for the first time. The rationale behind her decision for choosing Sweden as her study-abroad destination was two-fold. First, she wanted to join a one-year study-abroad program, as opposed to a one-semester, or shorter program (the shorter programs were more common at her university). Second, she did not particularly mind whether or not the destination country was an English-speaking country, such as the U.S. or Australia; instead, what was paramount to her was whether she could take accredited courses with local students at the university, rather than English language lessons only with international students. In other words, she chose the university in Sweden as her first choice because that program was one-year long and provided international students, like her, with an opportunity to take content courses with local students. One such course was English for Secondary School Teachers, in which, according to the syllabus, students could experience teaching practice in local secondary schools.

As a result, she applied for the program and underwent the internal competitive application process that included an individual interview at her Japanese university. Subsequently, she was accepted as the successful candidate for the fiscal year of 2019. Her language proficiency level in English at the outset of study abroad was approximately level B2 within the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). In September 2019, she commenced studying at a university in Sweden. The autumn semester continued until the middle of January 2020, and the spring semester began the next day. At the end of March during the spring semester, however, she had to cut short her study-abroad experiences and return to Japan abruptly, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Although the impacts of the coronavirus crisis on her overall study-abroad experiences and her following life back in Japan were life-altering and warrant thorough examination (see Hiratsuka, 2022), in this paper the focus is particularly on her transformative learning as a pre-service teacher during her study-abroad period over the course of September 2019 - March 2020.

The qualitative data collection method and the data analysis procedure I employed for the present study were as follows.

### *Data collection*

Every walk of life has stories to tell. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) contend: "People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories" (p. 375). In the field of language education, research that makes use of narratives as data and the presentation of

research findings (i.e., narrative inquiry) has gained apparent traction particularly since the turn of the century (Barkhuizen, 2013). Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool when it comes to transferring and sharing the knowledge and memory of participants in a seemingly truthful manner, as well as an effective form in order for participants to fulfill their desire to communicate the meaning of their experiences to others (Bruner, 1990). Narrative interview was my specific choice because the approach “places the people being studied at the heart of the study process and privileges the meanings that they assign to their own stories” (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 631).

After obtaining permission from the participant, I interviewed her in Japanese, her first language and mine, for approximately two hours via Skype in the middle of April 2020, about two weeks after she came back to Japan from Sweden. I began the interview with a prompt, “Tell me your stories, any story at all—if possible, with some examples and episodes—from your study-abroad experiences. You can start wherever you like and continue however long you like”. Rather than a question-answer format, the interview thus centered around creating an opportunity for the participant (storyteller) to freely narrate her experiences to me (listener). As a narrative interviewer, therefore, even though I did ask some questions I prepared beforehand as guideposts (e.g., “How do you think the study-abroad experience affected you as a preservice language teacher of English?”), I concentrated on the natural flow of her story as well as the meaning of her own perspectives and priorities while encouraging her to speak in the expressions and terms she preferred. Where appropriate, also, I asked her follow-up questions (e.g., “What did it mean to you to feel like that?”). In the spirit of narrative inquiry, I believed that my positionality, vis-à-vis hers, was quite appropriate in that I had no previous relationship with the participant and I had not been involved with the study-abroad program at the time of interviewing. This was unlike the majority of the previous studies on the topic which were carried out by the faculty members who served as the study-abroad trip leaders (Morley et al., 2019). My hope is that my positionalities facilitated her honesty and transparency for the co-constructed and open-ended explorative study.

### Data analysis

In this study, the interview was recorded with a SANYO digital voice recorder (ICR-182RM). I transcribed the interview and translated the data while making every effort to maintain the essences of the utterances of the participant. In terms of managing and sorting the data, I uploaded all the data into qualitative analysis software, called NVivo 11, and read them by paying close attention to the sequences (i.e., from September 2019 to March 2020) and themes (i.e., Mezirow's different phases of perspective transformation) of the participant's experiences. In other words, the data analysis simultaneously took advantage of the features of a qualitative content analysis approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This iterative strategy enabled me to synthesize data, formulate codes, categories, and themes, and search for patterns among these. As a consequence, the data analysis that hinged on the pre-service teacher's transformative learning generated two inter-connected themes. They were: (a) from increased confidence to a disorienting dilemma and (b) from critical reflection to new roles.

### Findings

#### *From increased confidence to a disorienting dilemma*

Hana had always been good at English at school, at least as far as the tests were concerned, and she enrolled in an international course at high school and afterwards began studying in the department of global studies, primarily given in English, at a Japanese university. When applying for the study-abroad program in Sweden, there was a fierce competition amongst the applicants at her Japanese university. As the successful candidate for that year, she was one of the very few chosen for the program. In the autumn semester at the Swedish university, her life was quite hectic. It was her first time living on her own, let alone in a foreign country, it was difficult for her to get used to an entirely different culture, and it was challenging to catch up with everyday lessons that demanded much more reading and collaborative work with other classmates between the lessons than at her Japanese university. Notwithstanding, she kept her motivation high. She even made it a rule to sit in the front row of the classroom asking questions of the teachers as well as passing relevant comments, thus making meaningful contributions to the lessons. When the first semester was over, she was delighted to find out that she had passed all the courses she was enrolled in (i.e., *Global Issues* and *Language and Linguistics*). She explained what the experience was like:

*I am not a boastful person. I cannot take compliments well and tend to be humble whether it is about my achievements or abilities. However, when I passed all the courses in the autumn semester, I thought to myself: “I can do this! This is easy!” The fact of the matter was that there were local Swedish students who failed some of the*



*courses, you know? Besides, up until then I never had difficulty in using and communicating in English as I went about my everyday life in Sweden. My confidence was at the peak.*

Hence, with her impressive resume (e.g., success in getting into an international course and a global department, and winning selection for the study-abroad program) as well as her significant accomplishments in the initial months of studying abroad (e.g., doing well in the courses and getting by in everyday life in English without any major problems), her confidence in English was not only maintained but also bolstered. She seemed to have taken full ownership of both the academic and personal spheres of her life in a foreign country and appeared to be on the right track for a positive study-abroad experience.

It was, however, during the spring semester when she started taking the course *English for Secondary School Teachers* that her confidence began to fade. The classes were held three times a week, initially through lectures by a professor about various theories involving English education and later through a teaching practicum by the students on their own. Through various sources, however, Hana gradually experienced disorientation, or what Che et al. (2009) call disequilibrium, which caused her pre-existing meaning structure (frames of reference) that she possessed as a pre-service teacher of English to be shaken and crumble away. First of all, she became aware at the beginning of the semester that she would have to teach English to EFL students who were mostly immigrants from the Middle East at the English extension program affiliated with the university, rather than to local students in secondary schools. She recounted the experience by saying: "Many of the students were old and mature. Overall, they had a good command of English, especially speaking and listening. They could make themselves understood by using what I considered to be very difficult English words and expressions." Second of all, she discovered after she enrolled in the course that she would have to teach with Dutch and Swedish students as a member of a group of three. She was cognizant that people in the Netherlands and Sweden are the number one and two in the world, outside of English-speaking countries, in terms of English skills (see Education First [EF], 2019) and learned that those particular students had received bilingual education all their lives and had high proficiencies in English (level C2 in CEFR) and that they already had substantial teaching experiences. She spoke about the shame and self-blame she experienced as a result of the group-work experiences with those students:

*They [Other group members] were speaking English as if they were native speakers of English. They were familiar with the communicative language teaching method as well. Whereas I could not speak English well; my pronunciation was useless; and all I knew was the grammar translation method I was used to in the Japanese education system. I could not add to the discussion of class preparation, nor could I be even partly responsible for our lessons. I was like "I am so sorry. I am really sorry." I almost had a mental breakdown.*

Juxtaposed with the group members who were fluent users of English and simultaneously skillful teachers of English, Hana felt ashamed and became apologetic towards her group members and her students, provoking a number of very discomfiting and somber feelings. She experienced this disorienting dilemma to the point where she "almost had a mental breakdown" because she presumed that (a) she was not contributing to the preparation or the practice of the teaching job, as the other members held more knowledge and better skills in English communication and language pedagogy, and that (b) she was not deserving of being the teacher for the students, as she could not be a positive role model as well as the other group members could.

#### *From critical reflection to new roles*

About a month into the spring semester, Hana was caught in a downward spiral. She knew that her contributions to the discussion with the two group members prior to the lessons and to the actual teaching in the classroom was minimal. Despite this cognizance, she could not bring herself to study, read, or engage in thinking at home in order to change the unfavorable situation involving the course. She hit rock bottom. However, it was out of guilt and necessity that she reflected on her recent experiences, tried to get to the heart of the issue, and was determined to take a first step to tackle the challenge and achieving growth. After due reflection, she realized that her mental state of disorientation derived not only from the distress she suffered from the particular course, *English for Secondary School Teachers*, it was also partially from studying too much during the semester so as to attain perfection in other courses, such as *Sociolinguistics* and *Swedish Language*. It was also partially from a trip she had made during a day off in February to the Auschwitz concentration camp, which led her to ponder the matter of life and death and to question the very core of her existence:

*I knew I had to climb out of this hole, at least for the other group members and students if for nothing else. But I lost my entire motivation at that time. I might have painted myself into a corner by studying too much in general at the beginning of the semester. I was burned out. It was also around the time when I traveled to the Auschwitz concentration camp where I thought a lot about the matter of life and death and the meaning of my existence.*

The combination of the struggle she faced in the particular course, the exhaustion she felt from overworking during the semester, and the visit to Auschwitz all appeared to have intricately affected the dynamics of her mental state and her actions (or lack thereof). At the beginning of March 2020, nevertheless, she made a breakthrough because of two significant incidents. The first was that, in part due to the reflection and realizations, she seemed to come to understand that the study-abroad program offered much more than just one course (*English for Secondary School Teachers*, although it was indeed the most important reason for her selecting this university as the destination of her study abroad) or just one activity (studying at the university). The recognition appeared to have helped lift a burden from her shoulders by giving attention to diverse aspects of what the opportunity could present, such as *fika* (coffee break) and the time with other Japanese students living in the same city. The second significant incident occurred during one of the group discussions with the Dutch and Swedish students in which they told her: "You are being quiet. Are you OK? I would like to hear your ideas more." Prior to these comments, she had not invested time and energy as much as she could in this matter, presuming that they might not value her comments so much. The comments in fact instilled a sense of competition into her, and she endeavored to put forth her ideas as much as possible from that point forward.

*I thought to myself right then and there: "I will speak as much as I can!" And I came to one crucial realization that it is true they can speak English fluently without stopping but they might not be able to explain grammar well and they might not have knowledge about the systems or the rules of the English language. Maybe, that's where I can come in and assist them!*

In light of what ideas she could propose and what contributions she could make in relation to her competent group members, she arrived at a conclusion that she might have greater grammar knowledge and deeper insights into the technicalities of the language, an area she felt she could be of assistance to the group. Despite feeling inferior to the other group members in the use of English, she eventually seemed to have found her place in the group as a grammarian or linguist. Concurrently, she became more confident in teaching the students in the classroom by concentrating on providing extra help in the areas of reading, writing, and grammar instruction, rather than their speaking and listening skills which she considered were already at the advanced level.

By the middle of March, Hana began to feel like she was an invaluable contributor to the group and its teaching. She then stepped up a gear by showcasing her desire to conduct lessons on International Women's Day and LGBT issues and playing a pivotal role in preparing them. She cheerfully talked about the experience:

*I was happy that I could start to contribute to the discussions and the lessons. In particular, when we chose to teach lessons on International Women's Day and LGBT issues, I could contribute as the only woman in the group. The lessons were successful, and we could mutually acknowledge each other's strength. We did a high five after the lessons!*

For Hana, the initial experience of feeling inferior to other group members in the course was very real and quite disconcerting; however, the opportunity of the reflection in which she engaged seemed to have allowed her to start exploring new roles or making already existing roles move to the forefront in her mind. For example, her identity as a café-goer became conspicuous relating to activities outside of the classroom. Her role as a syntactic specialist was also established concerning lesson preparation and classroom teaching. Furthermore, her gender role as a female contributed prominently to the selection of lesson contents. Looking back, she surmised: "The whole experience made me realize the pros and cons of both the English language education systems in Sweden and in Japan." As a learner of English and a pre-service teacher of English in the Japanese education system, she experienced first-hand the advantages and disadvantages of both the Japanese grammar-oriented and the Swedish communication-oriented pedagogical approaches.

## Discussion

As indicated above, the interview data suggested that the study-abroad program in Sweden led the Japanese pre-service language teacher of English to experience various stages of transformative learning. The themes of transformative learning in this study included (a) from increased confidence to a disorienting dilemma and (b) from critical reflection to new roles. Up until the beginning of the second semester, her study abroad

was a relatively smooth ride without major bumps. Although she was swamped by the huge number of assignments given at the university every day and, at the same time, had to get accustomed to an independent life and a new culture in a foreign land, she managed to pass all the courses in the autumn semester and never ran into any serious trouble concerning the use of English. It all started to crumble when she participated in the course, *English for Secondary Teachers*, and joined in group discussions with her Dutch and Swedish classmates. She confronted a disorienting dilemma in which her pre-existing assumptions and expectations, particularly with regard to her English and pedagogical competence, did not fit with what she was experiencing in those moments (Phase 1) (Mezirow, 2000). In other words, her meaning perspectives, or frames of reference, involving her English and teaching abilities were called into question, resulting in her feeling discouraged and almost having a nervous breakdown. However, an encounter with a new experience often comes with a sudden lack of balance and a state of disequilibrium that becomes the catalyst or impetus for change, bringing about a profound shift in the manner that people perceive themselves and the world around them (Taylor, 2008; Trilokeka & Kukar, 2011).

In Hana's case, it seems to have been a sense of guilt about her ineffectiveness as a group member in the discussions and as a teacher in the practicum that required her to engage in critical reflection (Phases 2, 3, and 4) (Mezirow, 2000). She carried out a self-examination and assessed that her low spirits were not attributed to a single source but rather to multiple ones, such as stress from general overwork at the university and the emotional and thought-provoking visit to Auschwitz, in addition to the experience of the teaching-practicum course. The critical reflection appeared to have enabled her to point toward two crucial realizations. One was that she had access to wide-ranging activities that can enrich her study abroad, besides studying for the sake of the university courses, such as enjoying cafés and spending time with Japanese peers. The other was that instigated by her group members' comments, she became aware that her contribution to the group mattered, in particular surrounding issues of grammar and rules of English. Developing into a key member of the group, she assisted the group as the central figure in organizing lessons on International Women's Day and LGBT matters. Therefore, she slowly but steadily explored options for new roles, relationships, and actions. She then tried them out and eventually cultivated competence and self-confidence in her study-abroad experience and English language pedagogy (Phases 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) (Mezirow, 2000).

As seen, Hana experienced multifaceted transformative learning while studying in Sweden, particularly at the beginning of the second semester. It could be inferred from the data that in her instance she succeeded in becoming keenly mindful of her dire circumstances and, as a consequence of reflection, discovered new roles (e.g., a grammarian) as well as seeing some of her previously-available roles in a new light (e.g., as a café-goer and a friend of her fellow Japanese students) (see also Vatalaro et al., 2015). However, not everyone is as fortunate as she was, as "some disorienting dilemmas lead to a perspective transformation and others do not" (Taylor, 2007, p. 42). For disorienting dilemmas to turn into an act of transformative learning, we need to engage in critical reflection at the threshold of transformation, or the "edge of peoples' thinking and sensemaking" (Berger, 2004, p. 336), so that our knowledge and pre-conceived notions can evolve, rather than remain limited (Mezirow, 2000; Trilokeka & Kukar, 2011).

In this respect, I would like to put forward three practical suggestions specifically for the implementation of critical reflection during study-abroad programs. Firstly, opportunities for reflection should be readily available to all students throughout study abroad (e.g., every month), whether at the host university or from the home university remotely so that the students can—intentionally, not haphazardly—document and come to terms with their feelings and reactions as well as remain hopeful and strong especially in the face of adversity or misfortunes (e.g., mental breakdown, financial difficulty, and natural disaster). The reflective activities should be systematic and employ a variety of potent tools, such as questionnaires, journaling, and interviews, in order to optimize the opportunity. Ideally, all the reflective activities should be crafted and carried out under expert guidance based on theories and previous research for them to be well suited for scrutinizing and contextualizing students' particular study-abroad experiences, so that who they are and what they are experiencing can become one (Merryfield, 2000). Furthermore, students should be able to choose the means and the degree of their reflection, depending on their needs and preferences.

Lastly, extra help should be provided at the stages of exploring options for new roles, planning a course of action, and provisionally trying out new roles (Phases 5, 6, and 7) (Mezirow, 2000). Students might be at a loss as to where to begin in terms of seeking new roles or which roles to prioritize. Not everyone can draw up proper plans and execute them, either. Faculty members both at the host and home universities, program organizers, as well as senior students who have experienced the same study-program in previous years

could support in this respect (see also Dunn et al., 2014). Moreover, although it was not particularly evident in the data within this research, it might be helpful for students confronting tough times to share their experiences, exchange their ideas, and negotiate new roles (see Phase 4 in Mezirow, 2000) together with others in similar situations—whether through face-to-face with those at the host university or virtually with those in other foreign countries from the same home university.

## Conclusion

Adopting transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000), this study reported the process in which a Japanese pre-service language teacher of English, Hana, who took part in a study-abroad program in Sweden, edited her frames of reference (points of view or mindsets), and transformed her beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotions concerning both her professional and private perspectives. In the first place, Hana went to the Swedish university primarily because she wanted to take a course called English for Secondary Teachers, which included a component of teaching practicum. Her goal was to familiarize herself with English education in Sweden and enhance her understanding of English language pedagogy. Ironically, however, the course became the root of tension and discomfort for her, due to the strong capabilities of her group members in the areas of the English language and language education as well as the high fluency of English of her students in the course. Nonetheless, she found new, or renewed, roles and regained confidence as a user of English and a future teacher of it. It is noteworthy that in this study-abroad research the focal point was not the acquisition of compartmentalized skills, knowledge, or abilities itself, such as critical awareness, foreign languages and pedagogy, global competency, and multicultural competencies (e.g., Foster et al., 2014; Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012; Rahatzad, et al, 2013; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011). Rather, it was a perspective transformation, or paradigm shift, whereby a state of disorientation invites a thorough examination of prior values, beliefs, and behaviors, causing an update of our mental model (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). We need to continue in this effort by investigating more and varied participants and research sites so that we can gain a complete picture of the characteristics of disorienting dilemmas, the effectiveness of critical reflection, and the nature of transformative learning among students studying abroad.

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