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TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AROUND ISSUES OF
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AMONG ESL TEACHERS

A Dissertation in

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the significant teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers around the issues of culture and language. The theoretical framework of the study was informed by transformative learning theory. The study began with semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve teachers who obtained their ESL certificate from an ESL endorsement program. Sources of data included these transcribed interviews.

The findings of the study are organized into two major areas relating to: learning in context and possible dimensions of transformative learning. Findings relating to learning in context highlight two primary areas: negotiating the online learning environment; and the disorienting but beneficial learning experience of the English Language Structure course.

The second major set of findings in regard to the possible dimensions of transformative learning include three primary findings relating to: participants’ deeper understanding of language and culture, particularly through relationships with ESL students and families that promoted the greater development of empathy; the communicative dimensions of teaching and learning; and the limited dimensions of artistic ways of knowing that were present in the study.

The study ends with a consideration of findings in light of the theory and offers implications for theory, practice and suggestions for further research.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of a qualitative study that explored significant learning and teaching experiences of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers around the issues of culture and language. The study focused particularly around their learning in regard to issues of culture and language, and how they have implemented their new learning in their own classrooms.

In order to address this purpose, this chapter includes a background to the study, including a purpose statement, followed by a description of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, research methodology and the significance, assumptions, and limitations. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the remaining chapters that are included in this text.

Background to the Problem

The United States has been a country with a long history of welcoming immigrants. Since the 1500's, colonists from various countries came in search of religious and political freedom, and economic opportunities (Gonzalez, Minaya-Rowe, & Yawkey, 2006). As immigration continued, people from different countries of origin settled throughout the United States (U.S.) and assimilated to the American culture while keeping their cultures and traditions at the forefront of their daily lives. “Over a third of U.S. Citizens today descend from at least one ESL immigrant.” (Gonzalez, et al., 2006, p. 4). Currently, many of the immigrants who have come to this country speak little or no English. Hence, they learn to speak English as a second language (ESL) and are often referred to as English language learners (ELLs) within the school setting. Because this
nation was essentially founded by immigrants, the development of the cultural and linguistic aspects of the U.S. is an important component to understanding why ESL programs started in this country.

In April of 2013, the United States Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013) reported that 315,715,7531 people live in the United States, a whopping two million more people than in the year 2012. Of these people, the Bureau reported that 19.7% of them speak a language other than English at home. Within this percentage, there are many school-aged children who speak a first language other than English and are being placed in English-speaking classrooms for the very first time. With the continued growth of the ESL population, it is estimated that by the year 2030, about 40% of the school population will speak English as a second language (Klingner, Artiles & Barletta, 2006). These statistics highlight more recent research, for example, “in today’s urban schools, foreign-born children and children of immigrants are the fastest growing sector of the student population” (Magaldi-Dopman & Park-Taylor, 2013, p. 47). As these students arrive in American public schools for the first time, many of them are included with their native English speaking peers, yet they might not understand how to read, write, speak and listen in English and there might be some learning gaps between the two groups in terms of language acquisition. “Such disparity heightens the need for teachers worldwide to be responsive to bridging the educational divide that separates native and non-native speakers’ academic achievement” (Liggett, 2014, p. 114).

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) recognized the growing ESL population in the state and formed a division to focus specifically on ELLs and their academic needs. Furthermore, this division was given the challenge of managing data,
creating laws, organizing professional training, developing standards, and promoting best practices in the area of ESL. Pennsylvania then implemented regulations that assist ESL students in acquiring English language skills within a program that is appropriate to their developmental and instructional level (PDE, 2009). The regulations state that it is the responsibility of the school district to provide a comprehensive and appropriate program for these students. Like other states, Pennsylvania school districts use the ESL program as a way to help facilitate student achievement in schools that contain ELLs.

This has prompted a need to develop competency in teachers who work with ELLs and competency in teaching ESL. As a result, ESL endorsement programs have been developed throughout the country and include particular accountability standards developed by Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). These standards are put in place to ensure that ESL teachers are well-qualified to teach ESL students. They include: language; culture; planning, implementing, and managing instruction; assessment; and professionalism. Further, these teachers come to such programs as adult learners.

To set the context of this study, a brief introduction into some of the relevant issues in educating teachers as adult learners in endorsement programs is in order. Thus in this section I consider the development of ESL endorsement programs, including culturally and linguistically qualified ESL teachers, and online ESL endorsement programs. The remainder of the chapter will focus on what is known about certified ESL teachers as adult learners, followed by a discussion about transformative learning and ESL teachers.
The increase in the ESL population is one factor leading up to a need for more comprehensive, standardized curricula in school districts around the country. Federal initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) were both designed to help students succeed in school (McQuitty, 2012). Both reforms are highly political documents that focus on student achievement, but they are very different from one another. NCLB is federal legislation that is designed to focus on setting high standards and establishing measurable goals in order to improve individual outcomes in education. By establishing these goals and setting high standards, NCLB is designed to close achievement gaps among students by way of measuring academic progress, teacher qualifications, and funding. Because NCLB relied mostly on one-size-fits-all standardized testing, the data that came out of this policy is evidence that it was a failure in terms of closing the achievement gaps in schools. As a reaction to the failure of NCLB, RTTT was created as an incentive that encourages education innovation and educational reform while also targeting “individual teachers and teacher education as well as schools” (McQuitty, 2012, p 358). The passing of NCLB and RTTT, the increase in the country’s population, and the increasing percentage of non-English speakers living in the United States have all contributed to the demand for creating comprehensive programs that strive to meet the needs of ELLs in this country. To be sure, these initiatives have proponents and critics due to their political nature and the pressure it puts on teachers to constantly teach to standardized measures that are not always seen as facilitating students’ learning (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Jones-Carrea, 2008). Nevertheless, they have impacted what is required of teachers in all areas, including in
the area of ESL. Yet, it is worthwhile to consider new paradigms for an educational policy that will support meaningful learning for all students, teachers, and schools.

Higher educational institutions have recognized the high percentage of ELLs in our country and have taken an initiative to develop teacher training programs that indirectly help these students achieve in school. For example, the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) presented institutions of higher education with multiple grants in order to provide teachers with the training, development, and improvement to develop multicultural perspectives for their education curriculum (Baca, Bransford, Nelson, & Ortiz, 1994). Additionally, the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) helps to ensure that all ELLs and immigrant students achieve success by helping teachers reach high professional qualifications. In turn, if there are highly qualified ESL teachers in a school setting, it will essentially help the ELLs develop English language proficiency.

**Culturally and Linguistically-Qualified ESL Teachers.** Currently, Title 22, Chapter 4, Section 4.26 of the Curriculum Regulations of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2011) states that:

Every school district shall provide a program for each student whose dominant language is not English for the purpose of facilitating the student’s achievement of English proficiency and the academic standards under § 4.12 (relating to academic standard). Programs under this section shall include appropriate bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) instruction.

Because the need for ESL curricula is continuing to grow, more professional development opportunities and endorsement programs are being offered, including pre-
service teacher requirements in universities and colleges. Furthermore, those individuals who are entering the education field have the option of taking additional coursework in ESL and special education instruction in order to enhance their cultural and linguistic skills. These steps toward obtaining an ESL endorsement help to ensure that teachers have a basic understanding of the culture and language of the diverse ESL population and their need to succeed in the P-12 setting. They include criteria such as culturally and linguistically appropriate pedagogy, second language acquisition, reflective teaching practice, literacy development, methods and assessments to help measure achievement and success of ESL students.

It is important to understand that there are different means in delivering this type of instruction to adult learners. Teachers have the option of obtaining credits through a local intermediate unit, college, or university. With the growing number of teachers who would like to earn their ESL certificate, other programs have been developed to meet their needs, but at a pace that is flexible and conducive to their own learning styles. One such way could be through online learning. Thus, it is important to mention this aspect of ESL endorsement programs.

**Online ESL endorsement programs.** Across the state of Pennsylvania, for example, there are many colleges, universities, intermediate units, and community colleges that offer the ESL Program Specialist Certificate to individuals. One online ESL endorsement program is the ESL Program Specialist and Leadership Certificate Program. This program is intended to train teachers who provide or will provide instruction for ELLs. Consisting of at least 16 semester credits, this program is designed to provide ESL teacher candidates with the latest skills, strategies, and techniques to teach the diverse
ESL children in their classrooms. Additionally, it provides these adult learners with the knowledge of concepts and practices that can be used from pre-K up to grade twelve. The components of this particular program requires teachers to understand the foundations of teaching ESL, to study English language structure, to gain knowledge on how people acquire a language, to prepare for the methods and assessment of ESL students, and to understand their roles as leaders, researchers, and advocates for their ELLs. The unique aspect of this program in one particular local university is that it is mostly online except for at the end of each semester when the participants need to meet with their colleagues and instructors in a workshop setting.

The literature related to this type of learning setting in an ESL endorsement program is quite limited; thus, it shows the need to do more research in this growing field of adult education. Yet, online learning is becoming a very popular phenomenon in the world of higher education because of the newer forms of technology and the growing number of adult learners who are willing to forego the “lecture” mentality of traditional schooling. For example:

Online education is being touted as the new wave that will sweep away brick-and-mortar campuses, and finally end the tyranny of the lecture-test mentality established by out-of-touch faculty that is seen as dominating college classrooms. A new digital generation is predicted to be more willing to take their smartphones and tablets anywhere, anytime to access learning on their own terms and presumably at a much lower cost (Menchaca & Hoffman, 2013, p. 255).
Knowing this, it is important to at least highlight some of the ways in which an online learning program, such as an ESL endorsement program, could offer excellent teaching and learning practices for adult learners.

Loertscher and Koechlin (2013) suggest three ways that an online course can provide the tools and strategies needed for success. These can be through learning individually, cooperatively, and collaboratively. Within the ESL online endorsement program mentioned above, all three aspects of learning are present in this particular model. Adult learners take on the role and responsibility for reading class assignments, journaling, completing assignments, and posting discussion forums. Further, they work cooperatively with other colleagues in the program by responding to peers’ discussion forums and responding to research-related final projects. Finally, these adult learners are able to collaboratively work with other members in their class through group work or group discussion forums. They are even free to work with individuals outside of class to help make meaning from the content of the class. All of these factors above highlight the fact that, “students are exposed to multiple methods of online pedagogy across the sequence of courses as a way to model best practices for distance learning” (Menchaca & Hoffman, 2013, p. 259). Here, they call online learning distance learning because there are a variety of people from distant places, but they are all learning through one central classroom online. Even though these classes are online, the program still follows the same standards listed above. Yet, the delivery of these standards is quite different than that of a face-to-face classroom.

Once teachers finally acquire their ESL certificate, either online or in the traditional setting, it is assumed that they will be using it to enhance the quality of
education for their ESL students. Whether an ESL teacher is the only certified ESL specialist teacher in the school or is a classroom teacher with his or her ESL certificate, the bottom line is that it is assumed that these teachers have developed culturally and linguistically appropriate skills that will help the vast population of ESL students. It is further assumed that teachers have learned these skills and are using their pedagogical knowledge to implement them in the ESL classroom. Nevertheless, there is little research about such teachers who have gone through ESL endorsement programs.

But most do so as adult learners; hence it is important to consider the component of ESL teachers as adult learners. The implications for being an adult learner in this regard are that they will be improving their professional knowledge, but they also have an obligation to meet the linguistic and cultural issues of the diverse ESL population.

**ESL Teachers as Adult Learners**

Since many ESL endorsement programs are for in-service teachers, most of whom are experienced educators, it is important to consider the relationship between adult learning and the content of ESL endorsement programs. The following sections show how within the ESL endorsement program, future ESL teachers need to be aware of the culturally diverse ESL population and truly honor their individualism. By including culture in the content of obtaining an ESL endorsement, adult learners can begin to challenge their culturally and linguistically held beliefs about the ESL student population. This can be helpful in viewing multiple perspectives of a diverse population and learning from them. A way for adult learners to make sense of this is by reflecting on their experiences. Teachers’ perspectives can change during this reflective process; thus, the ways that they make meaning from their own learning could help them in being culturally
responsive to their ESL students. In turn, this could help both ESL teachers and their students to recognize the cultural and linguistic differences in the world and help to make a difference in the way people acknowledge diversity in this world. This could potentially be the beginnings of a transformative experience that we will later define in the following chapters.

**Culture as content.** An important part of the content in ESL endorsement programs is dealing with the concept of culture, and teaching in a way that honors and attends to culture and language. Nevertheless, “the core of the teaching profession in the United States remains the monolingual teacher” (Diaz-Rico, 2008, p. 2). If this is the case in most schools around the country, these teachers have a challenging task and need to learn how to overcome any obstacles they encounter. More specifically, they need to learn how to educate the growing number of students in K-12 who speak a language other than English or who have a background that is culturally diverse. Byrd, Hlas, Watzke, and Valencia (2011) suggest that “one of the challenges to teaching culture is the ability to learn and maintain culture knowledge” (p. 5). While it is important to learn about the different cultures of students, the fact remains that “teachers continue to struggle to find time to teach culture for various reasons” (Byrd, et. al., 2011, p. 9). Teachers are often left to their own knowledge and learning experiences in order to find cultural resources and instructional strategies that can help these students. In some cases, teachers “have already developed a mental image of what teaching and learning will look like in their language classrooms based upon the culture of education where those experiences occurred” (Haley & Ferro, 2011, p. 292). Therefore, the need to include culturally and
linguistically diverse curriculum in an ESL endorsement program is essential in helping ESL teachers develop appropriate skills for teaching a diverse population.

Teachers involved in ESL endorsement programs come into such programs with varied backgrounds around attending to cultural issues. In their pre-service teacher education programs, they may or may not have had positive learning experiences involving culture and language. Regardless, there is an emphasis in ESL endorsement programs that teachers who teach students from various cultures need to understand how to conceptualize their own beliefs about teaching and learning in the ESL classroom. By acknowledging the diversity in an ESL classroom, it is important for teachers to develop ways to differentiate their instruction to include culturally and linguistically appropriate pedagogy that supports the needs of the ESL students. In a study by Haley and Ferro (2011), it was determined that teachers had to learn new ways of delivering their instruction to ESL students. Teachers had to change, or transform, their former ways of teaching in order to promote learner-centered instruction to their students. These teachers relied “on their own language learning experiences as well as their teaching experiences, even if they are limited, to establish their perceptions of language education and language learners in the United States” (p. 303). Diaz-Rico (2008) also highlights that “their passion for teaching and learning fosters within their students the capacity for joyful life-long learning, a sense of respect for and pride in their own culture, and a sense of curiosity regarding human diversity” (p. 5). In order to maintain and learn new culture knowledge, teachers noted that their own interest in culture was the most important motivator (Byrd et. al., 2011). It is important for teachers to learn how to create positive environments that fosters equal opportunities and positive experiences for ESL students.
By taking this critical stance, teachers are able to see “many sides to a problem, and often these sides are linked to certain class, race, and gender interests” (McLaren, 2002, p. 71). With these equal opportunities it is also assumed that teachers will learn to avoid stereotypes and prejudgments “so that such negativity does not produce a self-fulfilling prophecy of low achievement” (Diaz-Rico, 2008, p. 6). Yet, in order to foster this type of environment, ESL teachers need to be open to the possibilities of creating the spaces for critical dialogue to occur in the ESL classroom.

An assumption about ESL teachers is that they are highly qualified and they can deliver standards-based instruction to all students (Haley & Ferro, 2011). According to Diaz-Rico (2008), a fully qualified ESL teacher should know and have learned the theories and pedagogy to teach academic literacy to ELLs and he or she should also have some types of knowledge or proficiency in the primary language of their ESL students. Yet, it can be argued that from district to district, the ESL population has a variety of cultures and backgrounds and this poses yet another learning challenge for teachers because as stated previously, most teachers in the United States are monolingual. This is not to say that they are not well educated if they do not possess the two qualities mentioned above, however, it is believed that they might not be as fully qualified as their bi-lingual or tri-lingual counterparts (Díaz-Rico, 2008). As learners, it is quite difficult for teachers to learn every language of their ESL students; however, there are other ways for ESL teachers to learn how to communicate with their students. If teachers and administrators can learn ways to make their schools culturally responsive while adopting a multicultural environment, students will be able to communicate their needs effectively. “When the languages and cultures of students are highly evident in their schools and
teachers refer to them explicitly, they gain status” (Diaz-Rico, 2008, p. 290). Yet, it takes time and effort to learn new ways of teaching culturally diverse students and depending on the support from administration, faculty, and parents; it may or not be possible for this to occur in a timely manner. Therefore, ESL endorsement programs can help teachers become equipped with and learn the right tools to help their students communicate and succeed in school.

Diaz-Rico (2008) discusses that teachers can benefit from specialized instructional techniques that give teachers methods and strategies to help culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. As they go through this process, they learn that “teachers who develop a deeper understanding of the effects of culture and language on the success or disenfranchisement of CLD students through school culture, curricula, and instructional methods are better prepared to promote social change” (p. 4). It is this type of change that can create an atmosphere that is conducive to the culturally and linguistically diverse population of learners.

**An emphasis on self-reflection and constructivist learning.** One way teachers can begin to think critically about language and culture is by learning how to become self-reflective. Critical self-reflection has the capacity to help individuals connect their backgrounds with their learning on language and culture to some degree. Yet, it is difficult for teachers to “reflect upon their own teaching in a cultural context” (Haley & Ferro, 2011, p. 283). The theory of constructivism provides a base for the discussion of self-reflection in teaching and learning. “Constructivism is a philosophy that claims that learning is an active process in which learners 'construct' their own knowledge through action and reflection” (Correa, 2011, p. 311). The conceptual assumptions of the
constructivist approach show that self-reflection is about learning from one’s own experience. In discussing constructivism in relation to adult learning, it is a way that meaning can be “constructed through experience and our perceptions of those experiences and future experiences are seen through the lens of the perspectives developed from past experiences” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 8). In essence, it is one way that people can make sense of their experience. When teachers learn from their own experiences and critically reflect on them, they are able to examine their underlying assumptions, which can help them to better determine what to implement in the ESL classroom. Self-reflection encourages individuals to construct their own meaning through the different learning experiences that they encounter. From a teacher's experiences with his or her ESL students, along with and their own life experiences, they can begin to learn new ways in which to teach language and culture with their ESL classroom.

ESL endorsement programs emphasize a constructivist approach to learning with an emphasis on how to communicate culture and language with ESL students, and the need for social interaction with colleagues in order to be able to think critically and construct new ways of learning. When adult learners are engaged in dialogue and actively share their problems or tasks collaboratively, they are introduced to different ways of looking at the issue or concern. As individuals build upon these experiences and interpret them, they are able to see the world as a result (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). As ESL teachers develop their own ways of learning how to teach ESL students, they begin to communicate with other individuals in the self-reflective process. Group discussions are an important step in this approach because they help individuals develop new and
different ways of learning. Teachers as adult learners begin to think about the best ways to learn and what works for them as educators in the ESL classroom. Teachers need to make meaning from all of their learning experiences and they need to think about the ways to accomplish their goals in order for a change to occur in the classroom. Thus, a discussion about the possibilities of transformative learning will be addressed.

**The possibilities of transformative learning.** As Cranton and King (2003) point out, transformative learning occurs when the learning process “leads us to open up our frame of reference, discard a habit of mind, see alternatives, and thereby act differently in the world (p. 32). The process of learning about and changing one’s attitudes and understanding of culture over time creates the potential for transformative learning in teachers as adult learners in ESL endorsement programs.

Transformative learning theory in adult education was originally conceptualized by Jack Mezirow in 1978 based on a research study of women returning to higher education. Since that time, the development of this theory has helped other perspectives of transformative learning to emerge, which will be discussed further in Chapter Two. Mezirow (2000) defines adult learning as “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 5). In essence, it is the way adults make sense of their life experiences. Transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in a person’s beliefs or attitudes. Additionally, this theory also involves questioning one’s assumptions, beliefs, and values, and considering multiple points of view, while also seeking to verify reasoning. He discusses ten phases of transformative learning include concepts of disorienting dilemma, self-examination, critical assessment, relating
discontent to the experiences of others, exploring options for new ways of behaving, building confidence, planning a course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills to implement plans, experimenting with new roles, and reintegration into society (Cranton, 1989; Kitchenham, 2008). At the heart of the learning process within this theory is critical reflection. Critically reflecting on learning experiences, particularly related to culture and language, ESL teachers can begin to assess various aspects of their learning and teaching. The transformative learning theory brings an understanding in how ESL teachers could increase their own learning by making connections between prior and present experiences. This signifies the importance of the ESL teacher’s experience in the classroom. This also empowers them by making his or her role an active and vital part in the teaching and learning process while creating a positive and conducive atmosphere. This environment will encourage dialogue while leading to active participation in the ESL classroom. This theory also informs learning because it enables students and teachers to not only critically reflect on their learning but to use dialogue to further understand and make meaning from reflection. This theory can provide a theoretical basis for teaching and learning in an ESL classroom setting and can show how adults make meaning from their experiences both within the ESL endorsement program and in working with culturally diverse individuals.

A critique about the transformative learning theory is that it is overly rational. Dirkx (1997) mentions that underneath the rational side of transformative learning is a continual search for meaning and a need to make sense of the changes in the world around us. All adults have significant learning experiences from which they construct their own meanings within the world and the ways in which adults come to negotiate
their perceived realities can vary. This is why Lawrence and Cranton (2009) reiterate Dirkx’s previous statement in saying that other theorists “place imagination, intuition, and emotion at the heart of transformation” (p. 315). This is relevant to understanding the experiences of ESL teachers because there is not one truth or one way of making meaning, rather, there can be other ways of knowing. Several have called attention to the ways that people come to know and learn through their emotions and extrarational ways of knowing (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). This would include knowing through image, symbol, spirituality, the arts, and other forms of creativity. Using these creative ways of knowing can help individuals make sense of the world around them, but can also help them to focus on issues surrounding culture and language within the ESL program. By using symbols or artifacts, adults can help uncover deeply rooted beliefs that might not have been expressed and it can be a way for people to see themselves and the world around them in a different and more open perspective (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

While there has been much emphasis in the past few years on the development of ESL endorsement programs, there has been little data-based research about the experiences of these teachers in ESL endorsement programs. Further, little is known about the specific research related to language and culture in ESL programs that are most relevant to transformative learning. Thus the purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore significant learning and teaching experiences of certified ESL teachers in their programs around issues of culture and language, and how they have implemented their new learning in their classrooms.
Based upon the purpose of this study, this research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are key significant learning experiences that teachers had in the ESL endorsement program, particularly about issues of language and culture?
2. How have they incorporated the key elements of the ESL endorsement program into their teaching practice?
3. What are the ways that teachers draw on creative and metaphorical ways of knowing in their learning or teaching experiences?

**Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

Because this study was about understanding recently certified ESL teachers’ significant learning experiences around culture and language, the theoretical framework of this study was grounded in transformative learning theory, but particularly those perspectives that both draw on Mezirow’s (2000) work, highlight issues of language and culture in transformative learning (Osterling & Webb, 2009), and that perhaps incorporate attention to extrarational ways of knowing through emotion, the arts, metaphors, songs, poems or even photography (Lawrence, 2012). As noted above, there are both rational and extrarational perspectives on transformative learning theory, but “there is a diversity of theoretical perspectives, which brings a rich complexity to our understanding of transformation” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3). The core elements of the transformative perspectives “are all found in some manifestation in other perspectives as well. Their difference lies in what each emphasizes, the source of experience, and how experience is engaged within group dialogue” (Taylor, 2005, p. 462). Even though there are different perspectives of this theory, there is still much that these different perspectives have in
common and there is a way that they can coexist, according to Cranton and Taylor (2012). While the transformative learning theory can be both rational and extrarational, the confluence of these perspectives creates a more holistic perspective on this theory (Cranton & Roy, 2003).

The traditional, more rational definition of transformative learning, is a “process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 87). Further, the rational definition shows that “learning occurs when an alternative perspective calls into question a previously helped, perhaps uncritically assimilated perspective” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 8). As noted above, transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in a person’s beliefs or attitudes, and it involves questioning one’s assumptions, beliefs, and values while considering multiple points of view and seeking to verify reasoning. This process can help learners to construct knowledge while revising their interpretations of these experiences in order to gain new knowledge.

There are many approaches other than the dominant rational theory of transformative learning. Further analysis of the transformative learning literature suggests that there are “significant shortcomings in the dominant model of transformative learning” (Taylor, 2005, p. 463). This analysis has helped to identify other perspectives of transformative learning; extrarational perspectives discuss a diversity of issues, such as the role of emotions, the arts, spirituality, and creativity in transformative learning (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Therefore, the lens that is used to view transformative learning is dependent upon the context in which transformation is used.
This study drew upon the extrarational perspectives of the transformative learning theory in order to seek both rational and other ways of knowing or looking at a phenomenon. Cranton and Taylor (2012) mention that in order to construct meaning from an experience, individuals may also have an imaginative, intuitive, or spiritual approach to learning. Within this extrarational perspective, three components will be discussed within this research. Individuation, the process of becoming aware of who we are and how that is different from others (Cranton & Roy, 2003), will be explored in Chapter Two. Further considerations of this theory will be highlighted through emancipatory learning and imaginative and emotional ways of knowing. In order for individuals to understand transformative learning from an emotional and imaginative way, symbols or images may be used as a way to make meaning. As ESL teachers describe their significant teaching and learning experiences, attention will be paid not only to how they discuss their learning from a rational perspective, but also that attends to the emotional domains and/or in the more imaginative and creative ways of expressing their learning.

**Significance**

Within the field of adult education, there is a lack of data-based research on the relationship between transformative learning and the teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers that have completed an endorsement program. Less is known about the possibilities of these individuals having a transformative learning experience within the realm of the ESL endorsement program or during their teaching practice. Further, there is even less literature surrounding ESL teachers and their potential use of creative ways of knowing either in their own learning process or with their students. As King (2000)
mentions, it can be a way for educators to improve their practice and to bridge the transformative learning theory with the perspectives of personal change. While there is an abundant amount of data that supports the growing number of ESL students in this country and the need for certified ESL teachers, less is known about these teachers and their experiences in an endorsement program. This lack of research and literature points to the significance of this study. Since this study focused on the significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers, it can help to enhance the quality of endorsement programs and bring additional information and awareness to this area of concern.

In most teacher endorsement programs, it is difficult for the instructors to determine if the effectiveness of instructional methodologies and techniques could promote learning among future ESL teachers. Furthermore, when teachers enter classrooms in P-12 settings after receiving their ESL certificate, it is unclear if the endorsement programs had any impact on their practices. Because transformative learning was used as the theoretical framework guiding this study, it was also used as a lens for looking at the significant teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers. This study also focused to some extent on creative ways of knowing, in that participants were asked to provide a symbol or metaphor of what might capture the significance of their teaching and learning experiences, and were asked to discuss what it means; thus, teachers had an opportunity to explore their experiences from a different perspective. This draws on Jurow’s (2009) insight who writes, “talk and interactions with other people and artifacts (both material and ideational) are important means for mediating individuals’ understandings and inviting them into particular ways of seeing, valuing, and
believing” (p. 279). This aspect of the study may cast insight on how this phenomenon facilitates a transformation in ESL teachers.

While research suggests that a quality endorsement program will have an impact on student achievement (Good et al., 2006; Nye et al., 2004; Rowan et al., 2002), questions still remain about the transformation teachers might receive either in the program or in their teaching experiences in an ESL classroom. Teachers acquire a combination of pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of subject matter, assessment abilities, communication skills, and the ability to foster students’ responsibility to learn. Certainly these skills are valuable in creating effective teachers that are knowledgeable and that meet the criteria to become certified. However, with a pressing need to meet accreditation standards, Stoddart (1990) suggests that some education programs struggle to maintain the balance between accountability, autonomy, and academic freedom. For teachers, utilizing the knowledge that they gained in the endorsement programs might be beneficial to their transformation, as well as the ESL students in their classroom. In discussing their performance-based assessment study, Reusser et al. (2007) shows that endorsement programs will help to “develop accountable, competent, high quality educators who can enhance P-12 student learning gains” (p. 110). Furthermore, employment-based preparation will enhance the quality of final licensing decisions by incorporating information on candidates’ actual job performance.

Finally, as an adult educator, this study had particular personal significance. This study served to enhance my teaching skills and supported my belief in the importance of creating multiple learning experiences for ESL teachers. By conducting this study, I hope
to contribute to the adult educational field by enhancing the quality of ESL endorsement programs.

**Overview of Methodology**

This study was a qualitative study. As will be discussed further in Chapter Three, in general, qualitative research aims to uncover how people make meaning about a particular phenomenon, or to study a process that is embedded in a particular context (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Thus, this research study was designed to examine how ESL teachers make meaning from their teaching and learning situations in regards to culture and language.

Qualitative research has many assumptions that deal with the nature of knowledge such as the way that reality is constructed by individuals (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). It also assumes that people make knowledge based on their view of the reality of a situation. The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to use his or her background knowledge as a way to interpret a phenomenon or uncover essential insights in the research. It is assumed that reality is constructed by the individuals participating in the research and this is what guides the interpretive researcher.

Qualitative research typically makes use of three types of data collection methods: interviews, observations, and/or analysis of documents or artifacts (Patton, 2002). The primary means of data collection for this study was in-depth interviews with ESL teachers who were certified in the last five years. The questions asked within the interviews of this study primarily revolved around their learning experiences in the ESL teacher endorsement program, and then how they have implemented what they learned in teaching their ESL classes. Further, because I am also interested in the role of creative
expression in transformative learning, I also asked the participants the extent to which the use of artform, such as visual art, movies, music, and metaphor creation, was used in their ESL endorsement program, and if they used it in their teaching practice. As Merriam and Simpson (2000) point out, “qualitative methods are especially well suited for investigations in applied fields such as adult education and training because we want to improve practice” (p. 97). From this improvement of practice, the research gathered from this study helped to understand the teaching and learning experiences from the participants’ perspectives.

As noted above, another major source of data collection is through documents and artifacts (Patton, 2002). These documents can be written, oral, and visual because they are a natural source of information and can usually be found within the context of the study, and can include memos, mission statements, press releases, student papers, and photographs, to name a few. To some extent, this study used this type of data collection, in that the participants in this research study were asked to bring in a symbol or metaphor of what teaching and learning means to them. Through the context of the interview, the participants and researcher had a discussion to help uncover the meaning of the symbols chosen.

Qualitative research is an excellent approach in exploring the personal and individual experiences undertaken by those who went through an ESL endorsement program. Because this type of qualitative research can be open-ended in nature, it is essential in trying to “find out what people’s lives, experiences, and interactions mean to them on their own terms and in their natural settings” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 159). Details of the methodology are discussed further in Chapter Three.
Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions are embedded in this research:

1. Candidates are certified ESL teachers.
2. Candidates will have significant teaching and learning experiences in their practice.
3. Candidates have a story to tell about a critical incident in their lives related to learning about culture and language issues and are able to articulate this experience.
4. Candidates will take a picture of something, or create a metaphor that depicts a significant teaching or learning experience.
5. Candidates have deeply rooted beliefs about teaching.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

There are limitations and strengths to every study. Some of the potential limitations of this study include:

1. This study is dependent on ESL teachers and may not be generalizable to teachers that have completed other endorsement programs.
2. Due to the small sample size of the study, the results cannot be considered generalizable.
3. Definitions of what constitutes a transformative learning or teaching experience are often ambiguous, and therefore, candidates may have difficulties identifying this type of change during the study.
4. Due to my status as one of the ESL faculty members at the institution where they completed their endorsement program, candidates may feel hesitant to be open
and honest about their critical incidents and pictures for fear that their information may be shared with others.

5. This study is unique in that it focuses specifically on recently certified ESL teachers who are practicing the skills that they learned in the Penn State program.

6. Candidates involved in this study will help me to learn how to help make the ESL program stronger.

7. Candidates will have an opportunity to creatively express their teaching and learning experiences in a safe environment, which may or may not foster transformation.

**Definition of Terms**

1. **Transformative Learning** is “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 5).

2. **Creativity** is thought of as a way to be socially expressive and to have self-realization and a way to be self-fulfilled (Cropley, 2006).

3. **ELL** means English Language Learner

4. **ESL** means English as a Second Language

5. **ESL Endorsement Programs** are programs that instruct future teachers on how to use strategies and techniques to teach ELLs. “Is not a standalone license but rather an ‘endorsement’ or credential that needs to be added to licensure in another area (e.g., a foreign language or elementary education)” (Tedick, 2009, p. 264).
6. **Extrarational** includes knowing through image, symbol, spirituality, the arts, and other forms of creativity.

7. **Individuation** “is the *process* by which we become aware of who we are as different from others” (Cranton and Roy, 2003, p. 91).

8. **Perspective** is “learning to understand one’s self and one’s paradigm” (Morris & Faulk, 2007, p. 445).

9. “**Practice** lies at the heart of situated learning and provides a bridge to growing expertise” (Patterson et. al., 2009, p. 42). Practice is applying the knowledge and skills learned in a particular program to a teaching situation.

10. **Other ways of knowing** can be summed up as intuition, affective learning, extrarational knowing and the guiding force of feelings (Taylor, 1998).

11. “**Preservice Teachers** often have some informal ‘field experiences’ that work in tandem with methods courses, and they complete one term of student teaching, which is typically conceptualized as a culminating experience whereby student teachers put into practice what they have learned during undergraduate study” (Tedick, 2009, p. 263).

12. **Teacher Candidate** is a person who is enrolled in an endorsement program in order to “pursue elementary and secondary teaching positions throughout the country” (Maier & Youngs, 2009, p. 393).

13. **Teacher Preparation** “must not only develop prospective teachers’ knowledge base…but also provide well-supervised opportunities to apply that knowledge in working with children” (Spear-Swirling, 2009, p. 431).
14. **Transformative Learning** is a “process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 87).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of a qualitative study that explores significant learning and teaching experiences of certified ESL teachers around issues of culture and language, and how they have implemented their new learning in their classrooms. The study focused on those who have been certified in the last five years. This study was guided by these primary research questions: “What are key significant learning experiences that teachers had in the ESL endorsement program, particularly about issues of language and culture? How have they incorporated the key elements of the ESL endorsement program into their teaching practice?” and “What are the ways that teachers draw on creative and metaphorical ways of knowing in their learning or teaching experiences?”

In line with the purpose and the research questions, this chapter will begin by providing an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study and a discussion of how the transformative learning framework served as a lens through which the experience of certified ESL teachers was explored and understood.

The first section describes the philosophical underpinnings of transformative learning as the conceptual framework, more specifically the extrarational views of this theory. In relation to adult education, the theory addresses the importance of critical reflection and questioning the assumptions that shape the way we see the world around us (Cranton, 1992). The second section examines the culture and language of ESL endorsement programs. A brief overview of these programs will begin the section, along with an emphasis on culture and language in the curriculum. The review of the literature
will follow with an in-depth view of the studies related to culture and language and transformative learning. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of how transformative learning can be fostered in adult education and also some of the challenges associated with transformative learning within this type of adult learning environment.

**Theoretical Framework: Transformative Learning**

This study was grounded primarily in the transformative learning theory literature. The extrarational approach to the transformative learning theory was appropriate as a theoretical lens for this research because it centers on critical reflection and making meaning by drawing on multiple domains of learning in terms of examining, considering, and potentially changing how ESL teachers might define themselves and others, as well as their own practices, after going through an ESL endorsement program.

As discussed in Chapter One, there are multiple perspectives on transformative learning theory, but they can be generally collapsed into the rational and extrarational, but there are even newer theories that are emerging about transformative learning. Even though there is so much controversy and diversity related to these interrelated perspectives of this theory, there is still so much that they have in common. The discussions that will follow this brief introduction will show how the core elements of the transformative perspectives “are all found in some manifestation in other perspectives as well. Their difference lies in what each emphasizes, the source of experience, and how experience is engaged within group dialogue” (Taylor, 2005, p. 462). Knowing that there has been much debate between the two perspectives the issues among them should help to clarify the common points of view while also creating a holistic perspective on this
theory. (Cranton & Roy, 2003). This section begins by discussing the rational approach to transformative learning.

**Rational Approach to Transformative Learning**

Within the transformative learning theory, there are many dimensions of this type of learning; however, for the purposes of this research, the focus will be on the rational approaches to transformative learning. The traditional, more rational definition of transformative learning, is a “process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 87). Transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in a student’s beliefs or attitudes and it involves questioning one’s assumptions, beliefs, and values while considering multiple points of view and seeking to verify reasoning. This process can help learners to construct knowledge while revising the interpretations of these experiences in order to gain new knowledge. To strengthen this point, Mezirow (2000), defines adult learning as “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 5). Essentially, it is the way adults make sense of their life experiences while changing and/or modifying their analysis of those experiences through reflection.

Mezirow’s psycho-critical view of transformative learning assumes that people will bring their experiences and prior knowledge to the learning environment in order to be able to reflect and learn from them. According to Mezirow (2000), transformation occurs when adults learn by incorporating past and present experiences. Therefore, experiences that learners bring to the learning environment are instrumental in the
learning process. Furthermore, transformative learning assumes that adults learn by adding to existing frames of reference, or the meaning perspective, a person might have in any given situation. People “tend to embrace frames of reference that complement each other” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17), mostly because there are certain beliefs that might assimilate from their culture. Therefore, we can define a frame of references as “the results of ways of interpreting experience” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). However, adding to a person’s frame of reference might not necessarily be considered transformative learning. Because students typically have prior experiences before engaging in learning experiences, it could be argued that newly acquired information has the potential to enhance and elaborate these pre-existing frames or influence a learner’s thinking, beliefs, and actions (Taylor, 2008). However, not everyone has the same type of learning experiences and it is undetermined if students reflect on the same issues that their peers and colleagues reflect upon. Because of this, it is also unclear if true transformative learning will take place because of the different types of personal experiences set forth in the learning environment.

In order to transform a frame of reference, learners need to be “critically reflective of their assumptions and aware of their context—the source, nature, and consequences of taken-for-granted beliefs” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). Critically reflecting on learning experiences allows students to assess various aspects of learning. “To reflect critically, we must examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect how we make sense of the experience” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 145). To take this one step further, Cranton (2006) illustrates three different types of reflection in regards to Mezirow’s theory: content, process, and premise. Content reflection is about asking
oneself what the problem at hand might be. While thinking about this problem, individuals are also examining the content of this problem and thinking about the descriptions of this problem. By doing this, learners are reflecting on the actual content of the problem. Process reflection is about thinking of the strategies that might be used to solve a problem. Going back and analyzing the steps that a person took to solve a problem is a useful strategy in process reflection. It helps them to try and understand and reflect upon the course of action in solving a problem. “Content and process reflection may lead to the transformation of a specific belief, but it is premise reflection that engages learners in seeing themselves and the world in a different way” (Cranton, 2006, p. 35). Premise reflection is an examination of the problem and challenging the basis of this problem. This type of reflection has the potential to lead individuals into a transformative experience because they might be challenging their previous assumptions, beliefs, and values. Furthermore, they may see themselves and the world differently after reflecting in this type of way.

Becoming critically reflective in this transformative process also involves justifying these new perspectives through communication and discourse with other individuals. Mezirow sheds light on this by stating “that we can learn simply by adding knowledge to our meaning schemes or learning new meaning schemes…and it can be a crucially important experience for the learner” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 133). The process of adding new knowledge to existing schemas assumes that learning is facilitated through discourse.

As stated before, discourse “is the process in which we have an active dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of an experience” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 14).
This discourse is the key to understanding that meaning is constantly being constructed and changed through the process of transformative learning. However, a critique of this is the idea that perspectives are changed through the process of discourse and dialogue. Therefore, this dialogue is crucial for the process of transformation to occur because it provides “a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10). It is assumed that through this theory, perspectives can sometimes change through dialogue. Conversely, perspectives can also change without dialogue, yet this theory may not take this into consideration.

Concerns of this learning theory are that it is hard to define this type of disorienting dilemma and not all learning is transformative. A disorienting dilemma, or a perspective transformation, can be identified as “a series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes or as a result of an acute personal or social crisis” (Taylor, 2008, p. 6). Most of these experiences can be (but are not limited to) stressful or painful, but by engaging in dialogue with colleagues and critically reflecting on these experiences, students might be able to construct meaning through this process of transformation.

Further, since there are many characteristics of adult learners, the rational definition of the transformative learning theory may not apply to these individuals. Because people are diverse human beings, their learning styles will also be different from one another. “Bubbling just beneath this technical-rational surface is a continual search for meaning, a need to make sense of the changes and the empty spaces we perceive both within ourselves and our world” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 79). Thus, further analysis of the transformative learning literature suggests that there are “significant shortcomings in the
dominant model of transformative learning” (Taylor, 2005, p. 463). This analysis has helped to identify other perspectives of transformative learning.

While there are always rational components to transformative learning, the extrarational “perspective stresses a kind of alchemical transformation that seems to extend beyond our reasoning, rationality, thinking, or even critical reflection (Lawrence & Dirks, 2010, p. 1). In particular, the extrarational perspective discusses diversified issues; however, the lens that is used to view transformative learning is dependent upon the context in which transformation is used. Thus, there are also extrarational components to transformative learning as well, which are discussed next.

**Extrarational Approaches to Transformative Learning.**

Cranton (1992) describes transformative learning as “a process of critical self-reflection, or a process of questioning the assumptions and values that form the basis for the way we see the world” (p. 146). This view of the transformative learning theory discusses the importance of the process of critical reflection to meditate the learning process and ways of knowing. While critical reflection is a very important aspect of this view of transformative learning, the extrarational approach expands Mezirow's work by providing three alternative ways of knowing. The process of individuation, emancipation, and imaginative and emotional ways of knowing will also be depicted in the following sections.

**Individuation.** Cranton (1992) highlights the importance of individuation as a component of transformative learning, drawing on the work of C.G. Jung. According to Jung (1971), individuation “is a process of differentiation having for its goal the development of the individual personality” (p. 448). To highlight this definition, Cranton
and Roy (2003) mention that “Individuation is the process by which we become aware of who we are as different from others” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 91). It is apparent from these two definitions of individuation that it can be connected to the extrarational perspective of the transformative learning theory because it focuses more on individual personalities and how transformation helps to differentiate them.

However, in order the process of individuation to evolve, individuals must be aware and consider the “psychic structures of anima, animus, ego, shadow, and the collective unconscious” (Cranton, 2006, p. 51). According to Jung (1971), the collective unconscious is a concept that demonstrates how ideas and feelings are a product of a person’s culture and past experiences (Cranton, 1992). From his perspective, becoming aware of one’s unique abilities is an intuitive and emotional journey which is not voluntary, according to this framework (Cranton, 2006). This awareness can happen unconsciously, however, when people begin to understand individuation from a conscious and imaginative perspective, they are more open to expand on their sense of self (Cranton, 2006). In order for this to occur, learners will have a dialogue with their inner selves, not just with other people (as in the more rational approach). When this has emerged, it is important to embrace this inner dialogue [the conversation between your brain and the “shadow side of the soul” (Cranton, 2006, p. 91)] and then learn from it. Once an individual is aware of this dialogue and understands their place in the world, then the journey of individuation can be a rewarding one. Therefore, “as we learn who we are, our psychological preferences become clear, natural, and integrated into our way of being” (Cranton, 2003, p. 151).
As individuation emerges, it is assumed that people transform their ways of thinking and look at their lives through a different lens. This phenomenon might have various impacts on their lives and their views of the world could be transformed. For example, their associations with people might change slightly because they will begin to look for “like-minded people” (Cranton, 2003, p. 240) that help them to confirm their own understanding of themselves. However, it is important to note that people should not lose their sense of who they are as they begin to communicate with other individuals. “In fact, Jung both accepts the fact that individuals construe their own meaning of the world and attempts to classify those differences without losing complexity” (Cranton, 1994, p. 94). By being aware of who they are and linking this to new experiences, individuation may help students to create a type of self-awareness which will also help them to become authentic learners.

While it is very important for colleagues to discuss their significant teaching and learning experiences with one another, it is also important for them to not lose sight of the personal reasons associated with their teaching and learning experiences. These personal experiences help to create the individual person and they are an important part of who they are. In my study, I am interested in the extent to which the teachers have had a dialogue with their inner selves in relation to teaching ESL students. By asking these teachers to highlight a significant teaching and/or learning experience, this might have made them think differently about being a teacher, which is part of the individuation process of becoming aware of who they are. In turn, this might help to transform their ways of thinking and look at their lives through a different lens.
**Emancipation.** To be more specific on this type of transformative learning, the emancipatory approach to transformative learning is relevant to mention because it is concerned with developing and understanding and knowledge about the nature of circumstances in order to promote social change. As an advocate for social change, Paulo Freire (1971) was an educator from Brazil who made it his mark to help the oppressed live in a world that was equal for all. Because he was faced with poverty and hunger at such an early age, these influences were the basis that helped him dedicate his live to improving the lives of the poor. Yet, he also believes that the unjust must also take action in overcoming their circumstances and regaining their sense of humanity:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

In turn, he believes that teachers and students must be aware and learn about the changing politics surrounding education. He believes that through learning, students, “can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves and beings capable of knowing—of knowing that they know and knowing that they don’t” (Freire, 2004, p. 15).

As stated earlier, critical reflection is a key component to the rational part of the transformative learning theory. Freire also believed that critical reflection is a central component to this learning theory because it helps the learners to identify a problem and have a dialogue in order to see that there is a potential for change. Yet, it goes deeper than on just the surface. This type of critical
reflection is a way of challenging the power and politics of a society and being able to envision a future that can transform both individuals and society. Emancipatory learning is important to note because of the change that it can bring to an individual or society.

**Imaginative and emotional ways of knowing.** According to Dirkx (1997), the rational view of transformative learning represents a more logical way of thinking and learning. This “voice of reason” can also be referred to as “logos” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 81). He believes that this ego-based view of learning gives a partial understanding to other ways of learning that include self-discovery, the process of change, and social critique. To truly understand transformative learning from an affective, emotional, spiritual, and transpersonal viewpoint, it is also important to notice transformation through mythos rather than logos. “Mythos reflects a facet of knowing that we can see in symbols, images, stories, and myths” (Cranton, 2006, p. 50). As noted here, powerful images can be magical experiences that help to transcend rationality. “Images bring us closer to learning through soul, giving voice to underlying myths that, when recognized, can illuminate aspects of our world not visible through the language of logos” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 81). Through images and other experiences of mystery, learners might be able to notice something greater than themselves in an unconscious way. They might also help to give “depth, power, mystery, and deep meaning to the connection between the self and the world” (Cranton, 2006, p. 50).

Acknowledging the soul can help people to see the world through their experiences and emotions. Through this imaginative and emotional way of knowing, Dirkx (1997) mentions that the soul needs to be nourished in order to “recognize what is
already inherent within our relationships and experiences” (p. 82). Although Dirkx (1997) does not clearly define how to recognize the soul, he provides examples of common experiences that help the reader to understand his concept of the word soul. Some examples include a magnificent sunset, the moon rising, the helplessness a person feels for an abandoned child, scenes from a movie, reading, listening to music, and mysteries. Once a person can recognize the concept of the soul through certain experiences, the soul can then be acknowledged. From this, it is assumed that there will also be a sacred message that will surface from this experience and that this message must be respected. Dirkx (1997) mentions by giving these messages respect, a person must also learn how to give this soulful message a space and a way to consider its meaning. When all of these aspects are aligned correctly, it is then the appropriate time to provide this message with a “voice through which to be heard” (p. 82). Engagement with the unconscious can foster imagination, intuition, and creativity through the use of “sculptures, paintings, poems, short stories, music CDs, quilts, stained glass works, kaleidoscopes, and colleges” (Cranton, 2006, p. 70) to name a few. Other activities might include drawing, dancing, writing, reading, or even photography. It is also assumed that by nurturing the soul in these ways, the unconscious will represent the primary source of wisdom and creativity in our lives (Dirkx, 1997).

In this study, teachers were asked to think about a significant teaching and learning experience. As they consciously thought about these experiences, they were also asked to consider a metaphor, image, or picture that comes to mind as they think about those significant experiences, therefore drawing on these imaginative ways of knowing.
Sometimes these imaginative and emotional ways of knowing are referred to as other ways of knowing. It is important to address this topic because it is still unclear how this can relate to an ESL endorsement program. In his 1998 monograph, Taylor argues that other ways of knowing can be summed up as intuition, affective learning, extrarational knowing and the guiding force of feelings. He further suggests that learning through relationships can also be an aspect of other ways of knowing within the transformative learning theory. In his research, he found that trust, friendship and support were three key elements among the studies, even though Mezirow gives minor attention to this in his rational theory. Taylor (1998) says:

This omission is demonstrated most directly in his discussion of the ideal conditions for fostering transformative learning. It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation. Without the medium of relationships, critical reflection is impotent and hollow, lacking the genuine discourse necessary for thoughtful and in-depth reflection (p. 37).

Taylor also discusses that perspective transformation can occur through unconscious developments of thoughts and actions that might occur without critical reflection. A final perspective he highlights within other ways of knowing is the perspective of alternative narratives, or ways in which individuals narrate their lives in relation to a particular cultural narrative.
Through their extensive research, Taylor and Cranton (2012) take it one step further to say that embodied learning, emotions, and positionality can also be included in other ways of knowing.

**New Theorizing in Relation to Transformative Learning**

As there continues to be more and more research relating to transformative learning, there also continues to be more questions. Taylor and Cranton (2012) state, “despite these commendable efforts, most research on transformative lacks a thorough theoretical analysis” (p. 559). With more emphasis on new ways of theorizing transformative learning, this theory can be significantly strengthened. For example, Taylor and Cranton (2013) highlight the importance of three “central constructs within transformative learning—constructs that are ever present but rarely deconstructed or explored in depth. These are experience, empathy, and desire to change” (p. 35). As we will see in Chapter Four of this study, empathy is a key theme that captured some of the experiences of the participants in the study. Thus, empathy can be described as, “acquiring another person’s perspective” (Chen, 2013, p. 2267).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature that explores significant teaching and learning experiences of certified ESL teachers, that could potentially connect to transformative learning, but that is also related to issues of culture and language, since that is a large part of ESL education. Therefore, the review of the literature that continues below focuses on issues of culture and language that are related to ESL teaching and endorsement programs.

**ESL Endorsement Programs:**

**Examining Culture and Language**
ESL endorsement programs tend to emphasize issues of culture and language because most P-12 ESL students are from different countries and need to learn to speak the language of English, hopefully in a way that honors their first language. Thus, this section will begin by first considering major issues and developments in ESL endorsement programs in general, and then will discuss the specific research related to language and culture in ESL programs that are most relevant to transformative learning.

**ESL Endorsement Programs**

As discussed in Chapter One, the population of P-12 ESL students has dramatically increased over the past decade. This consistent and significant increase has transformed America’s schools, the instruction of its students and the teacher preparation programs (Antunez, 2002). Because of this increase in second language learners, there must be more teachers who are highly qualified to teach them. There are a variety of endorsement programs that can assist teachers in developing the skills and strategies needed to teach ESL students and the program that is currently in high demand is the ESL Program Specialist and Leadership Certificate Program. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) discusses the framework for the ESL Program Specialist requirements and highlights the importance of this program of study and experience, not only for educators, but for the benefit of the growing ELL population. In this framework, they state on their website:

> As the number of English language learners in the state of Pennsylvania increases, so must the level of expertise of all educators who work with them…well informed, prepared and highly competent ESL Program Specialists are required to
bridge the complex cultural, linguistic, instructional and social barriers faced by ELLs and their parents in schools and the community (PDE, 2013, p. 4).

In speaking about ESL teachers, Darling Hammond (2006) argues that these teachers must, “understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students” (p. 302). Additionally, she highlights the importance of designing programs that transform the kinds of settings that help educators learn a particular skill. In essence, she is arguing that in order to teach ESL teachers, schools of education need to create transformative learning settings. Nguyen (2012) further argues that in these learning settings, teachers should be given opportunities to collaborate with their peers as well as practice and apply their coursework in field-based experiences in order to help them connect theoretical knowledge to practical applications. This could connect to transformative learning because the ESL teacher candidates would be drawing on multiple domains of learning which might help them define their practices and, in turn, define who they are.

As ESL endorsement programs are increasing and more teachers are entering into these programs, several states and organizations have addressed the issue of teacher preparation for creating standards that set the bar for what teachers should know and be able to do with their ESL students. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), there are competencies that are necessary for an ESL teacher candidate to meet in order to fulfill the ESL Program Specialist Certificate in Pennsylvania. The competencies are broken down into five different categories: Language; Culture; Observing, Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction; Assessment; and
Professionalism (PDE, 2013). The Language component discusses the structure and usage of the English language, along with the processes of language acquisition. Culture is viewed as a multilayered system that can impact the identity, values, and behaviors of individuals. When candidates observe, plan, implement, and manage instruction, they are expected to demonstrate the knowledge of their ELL students through standards-based ESL content instruction, which will then lead to the assessment piece of ESL instruction. This is where teachers will show how their students know, understand and can do what is expected of them. Since ESL teachers come from diverse backgrounds both culturally and academically, these competencies can help them to cultivate a common professional identity in the ESL field.

Over the years, as ESL teacher preparation programs have been and continue to be implemented, the completion of the ESL Program Specialist helps prepare ESL teacher candidates to effectively meet the linguistic and academic needs of the ESL population (Atnunez, 2002). Furthermore, it will increase the likelihood that teachers will become more culturally responsive when instructing their students, particularly if they are required to give serious thought to examining their underlying assumptions about culture and language. This will be taken up next.

With the growing number of ESL students in America, we have a strong need as a community to “develop, strengthen, and refine the teaching skills of preservice teachers associated with linguistically/culturally responsive pedagogy” (Cho, Rios, Trent, & Mayfield, 2012, p. 65). Thus, an emphasis on culture and language in the ESL curriculum needs to be addressed.

**Emphasis on Culture and Language in the Curriculum**
As stated above, there are a growing number of ESL students across America and in order to meet the needs of this population, teachers need to learn how to become culturally and linguistically aware. Yet, the way in which teachers learn how to become culturally and linguistically aware is not clearly defined. Many conceptual pieces of literature help to define the need for this awareness and the ways in which teachers can become culturally aware of their student population.

According to Martinez (2012), the need for teachers to be culturally responsive is crucial for the survival and success of the linguistically diverse population. The literature clearly defines some challenges that students face in classrooms today, which in turn, shows the need for teachers to learn how to become culturally and linguistically aware. One of the biggest challenges that these students face is the disconnect between their home language and cultures and the schools that they attend (Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). So often, ESL students arrive in U.S. schools with no knowledge of the American culture, and the same can be true of American teachers-they lack the knowledge of language and culture of these newcomers. Meeting these diverse needs could be one of the biggest challenges in ESL teaching. Faitar (2011) also highlights the fact that diversity is a major challenge in today’s classrooms. There is a majority of students of color and/or ESL students in classrooms and they change the “prospects of teaching and learning in the urban, suburban, and rural schools” (Faitar, 2011, pg. 6). But, what Faitar also suggests is that while there is need for teachers to teach to diversity and to be culturally and linguistically aware, the reality is that many teachers face even a bigger challenge: high-stakes testing and accountability. With these challenges comes a bigger need to increase highly certified teachers, including ESL teachers.
Martinez (2012) states that another challenge is the role that mass media plays in representing the linguistically and diverse culture. Since our world is more technologically savvy than ever before, social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, for example, are depicting images of cultures that are being racially stereotyped. Martinez (2012) suggests that this includes:

The portrayal of Black men as violent, Asian Americans as smart and compliant, Hispanic men as prisoners, and European American women as possessing ideal beauty. (p. 13)

Here, we see a media accepted version of what it means to look American. With access to this type of media-centered technology, it is no wonder why ethnicities are being typecast in society and in schools alike. This stereotype leads students to think that their expectations on academic ability should be lowered, but to avoid this threat, culturally responsive teaching needs to be implemented into classroom practices (Martinez, 2012).

But, the question still remains on exactly how teachers learn to be culturally and linguistically diverse while also being accountable for the success of all students in today’s media-driven society. Diaz-Rico and Weed (2010) clearly define what it means to be culturally responsive in schools today. They suggest that:

Culturally responsive schooling is defined as effective teaching and learning occurring while in a culturally supported, learner-centered context where each student’s culture is recognized and respected during learning and social activities throughout the school day. The cultural strengths, students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement. (p. 265)

Knowing this can have a great impact on teachers, especially ESL certified teachers.
ESL teachers should be the experts in the field of cultural awareness, making it imperative that they learn how to be aware of the diversity in their classrooms. Diaz-Rico and Weed (2010) and Faitar (2011) also imply that by catering to the needs of diverse students and recognizing their accomplishments, the students can then feel successful and be able to perform at their highest abilities. In turn, teachers can use their knowledge, along with the curriculum, in order to gear their teaching in a way that can enable students to be successful. This is also a part of culturally responsive education.

Similarly, Nguyen’s (2012) article about supporting ELLs with learning disabilities also depicts the importance of addressing the cultural needs of ESL students by teachers collaborating with one another. In teacher preparation programs, candidates should be provided with many opportunities for collaboration plus, time to engage in field experience. As Nguyen (2012) suggests, this will connect theoretical knowledge and practical applications of being culturally responsive. Further, she suggests that research-based strategies and methods should be used by teachers in order to provide the least restrictive environment for their ELLs. In order for pedagogy to be culturally relevant, teachers need to select literature from different genres and from authors with multiple perspectives. In turn, this can bridge the gap between the students’ academics and cultural identities. All teachers, regardless of their years of service, can all benefit from ongoing professional development in order to reflect on their own learning and teaching skills but also to provide the most effective methods of learning to their students. This assertion is also supported by the research literature, which is discussed next.

**Empirical Studies on Culture and Language in ESL Teaching**
In addition to the conceptual literature in the field of ESL involving culture and language discussed above, research in linguistic and culturally responsive pedagogy has led to insights into both what is happening within the ESL endorsement programs, and to what should be covered in them. The need to address language and cultural diversity in the ESL endorsement program is an important aspect of curriculum development and therefore is a significant area that researchers have explored. This section on the current and informative research relevant to this study will be organized according to their overriding themes and will address the issues related to ESL that deal with culture and language.

The literature that was chosen for this review consists of nine empirical studies. While there is considerable discussion about issues concerning culture and language in these articles, they all differ in the way attention to culture and language is implemented in the higher education setting, in Teacher Education Programs. However, the implications could inform the importance of addressing culture and language in an ESL endorsement program and provide answers to the questions concerning culture and language in the ESL program.

Of the nine research studies, three were mixed-method studies (Batt, 2008; Faez, 2012; Cho, Rios, Trent, & Mayfield, 2012), three were descriptive qualitative studies (Hickey, 2012; Johnson & Chang, 2012; Marcos, 2012), two were qualitative case studies (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Reeves, 2009), and one was quantitative (Moghaddam & Gholamzadeh, 2011). The participants in all of these studies varied significantly from one study to the next. Four studies (Cho et al., 2012; Faez, 2012; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Marcos, 2012) involved pre-service teachers or graduate level students at varying
institutions. These four studies mainly focused on how prepared teacher candidates are for their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs (Faez, 2012), how their perceptions of ELLs relate to their own personal backgrounds and professional preparation they received (Cho et al., 2012; Faez, 2012), and how their emerging identities as ESL teachers shaped their teaching practice (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Three studies focused on practicing teachers’ perspectives of culture and language in their previous ESL endorsement program (Batt, 2008; Johnson & Chang, 2012; Reeves, 2009). These studies varied in the types of certified teachers that they used for their research. Batt’s (2008) research centered on educators from rural counties in and around Idaho and Oregon and the participants were predominantly White with various educational roles in their school community. Johnson and Chang (2012) used part-time and volunteer instructors at a college, and the majority of their participants were female. Reeve’s (2009) study only had two participants, and they were novice ESOL teachers with limited second language learning experience.

While most of the studies focused on the teachers rather than the students, two more articles were reviewed to gather the perspectives of the ESL students in terms of language and culture (Hickey, 2012; Moghaddam & Gholamzadeh, 2011). Hickey (2012) focused on two elementary ESL students in the United States while Moghaddam and Gholamzadeh (2011) wanted to know more about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who were studying English in private language institutes in Mashhad, Iran.

There were three primary themes that resulted from the analysis of the articles located in the literature review: teacher preparation and collaboration, providing direct instruction for ELLs, and being Culturally Aware of the ELL
**Teacher preparation and collaboration.** Several studies that deal with culture and language in ESL emphasize the importance of teacher preparation and collaboration (Cho et al, 2012; Faez, 2012; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Marcos, 2012). The studies emphasize the need for teacher preparation and collaboration within an ESL endorsement program. The studies show that the growing number of ESL students outweighs the number of highly qualified educators.

Although Faez’s (2012) empirical study about 25 linguistically diverse teacher candidates took place in Canada, the results of report that participants in an ESL-cohort, regardless of their backgrounds, felt responsible for the learning and well-being of their ESL students, which included being advocates for those students who tend to be marginalized. Yet, the participants expressed many challenges about providing diverse related issues in their classroom and are insufficient for providing a targeted instruction for the ESL students in their classrooms.

Faez’s (2012) findings also suggest that while inclusion of teachers from a variety of cultural backgrounds is essential and crucial in addressing the needs of the highly populated ESL programs, it still is not enough to support the students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These teachers not only need to bring their diverse backgrounds and knowledge into the teaching field, they also need targeted and specific instruction to address the diverse needs of the ESL students in their classrooms. Exposure to appropriate ESL literature, ESL-inclusive pedagogy, and teacher collaboration is important to address diversity-related issues in the ESL classroom. Cho, et al. (2012) found that an ESL-inclusive pedagogy should include putting a high value
on students’ primary language development, using translated documents when possible, and including professional development opportunities.

Now more than ever, the number of ELLs in America continues to substantially increase, but the number of highly qualified teachers looks less than satisfactory. In their study of language diversity in the teacher education curricula, Cho, et al. (2012) show how the increase in the number of ELLs is disproportionate to the low number of highly qualified teachers and the need to address the preparation of teachers is crucial and necessary in order to positively support their ESL students. This study included 141 students in upper and lower level ESL endorsement programs and the purpose of the study was to track the evolution of teacher education curricula to see how to better integrate language acquisition concepts. It also aimed to address how teacher candidates describe their essential understandings of language diversity and their perspectives on teaching ELLs. The quantitative findings show that candidates were excited to work with ELLs, but candidates felt that solely immersing ELLs in the English language is not the best way to adequately instruct these students and support their learning. The qualitative findings of their research show that “candidates are moving (politically) from orthodox explanations of phenomena toward more transformative understandings” (Cho et al., 2012, p. 79). This means that their ideological perspectives about language diversity can change. They found that over time, candidates were committed to their ELLs and felt responsible for their education, they wanted to value and affirm their diversity in culture and language, support the instruction of their ELLs, and refine their own skills and abilities through professional development. They mention that there has been a recent
push to include ESL children in the mainstream classroom; yet, the teachers that are educating these students are not prepared to teach them.

Marcos (2012) did a qualitative study on 72 pre-service teachers to see how their understandings about ELLs evolve throughout ELL endorsement programs. As background to the study, in speaking about pre-service teachers in general, she notes, “the manner in which teachers are prepared lacks attention to teachers’ beliefs about ELLs and their responsibility to teach them” (Marcos, 2012, p. 40). Hence, her study included examining teacher beliefs about ELLS, with the assumption that the findings would help prepare teacher educators to best meet the needs of these pre-service teachers. She first asked her candidates in the ELL endorsement program to think about what comes to mind when she mentions the words *English Language Learner*. This baseline data provided her with an understanding of the thoughts that her students had and their definitions of ELLs. In the beginning of the study, she found that the students had a pre-conceived notion of ELLs and their understandings of ELLs were narrowly conceived. As she continued her study over time, and by implementing linguistically and culturally diverse curricula into the courses, as well as metacognitive practices, she found that the students became conscious of their initial thoughts about ELLS and broadened their previous definitions of ELLs. In turn, by providing pre-service teachers with the opportunities to seek and explore their thoughts about ELLs, they move from narrow-mindedness to a more comprehensive view of ESL students.

Kanno and Stuart (2011), in their case study of two graduate students in a Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, found that the transition from being a graduate student to being of a teacher is not quick and
automatic. They studied these teachers for a year and found that it was very difficult for these novice teachers to adopt the identity of a teacher. Here, they mention that there is a distinct difference between playing the role of a teacher and internalizing the identity of a teacher. They state that in order to take on the identity of a teacher, students need to arrive with extensive classroom teaching experience. Further, they mention that “practice shapes identity, whereas identity, in turn, affects practice” (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 245). They found that when these two case study subjects went through the process of learning-in-practice, negotiated their relationships with their students, and successfully used their teacher authority, they became effective second language teachers.

**Providing direct instruction for ELLs.** A number of studies highlighted the importance of providing direct instruction for ELLs. Batt’s (2008) mixed methods study of 161 participants, the majority of which were educators from Idaho and predominantly White, found that teachers who work with ELLs are not well-qualified to work with this linguistically diverse population. Nearly 20% of the participants indicated that one of the greatest challenges impeding effective education for ELLs is the lack of knowledge and skills needed to instruct them. Further, there is a low number of ESL and bilingual educators employed in the participants’ schools. Batt (2008) proposes that in order to meet the language needs of the growing number of ESL students, it is imperative that well-qualified ESL and bilingual educators work with them. Yet, in order to be effective and to narrow the gap between pre-service teachers and practicing teachers, there needs to be dialogue between the teaching professionals in schools and teacher education programs. Teacher education programs need to provide these professionals with coursework designed to meet the diverse needs of their learners. Further, they need to
learn and utilize appropriate language-teaching methods and best practices in order to make a significant contribution to the growth of their ELLs, both academically and linguistically.

As the research above suggests, the English language acquisition curricula for educators needs to provide pedagogical strategies that include language acquisition and multicultural education theory. By preparing these teachers to work with ESL students, they not only gain a sense of how to respect the diverse nature of their students, but it also helps to close the large gap between the number of students with diverse backgrounds and teachers who are highly qualified to teach them and their ways of thinking about themselves as a teacher and/or learner could have a transformative impact.

Johnson and Chang’s (2012) qualitative study of 13 instructors at a college aimed to address the way that educators deliver, modify, implement and provide instruction to a diverse group of adult learners. They also wanted to know if this instruction would reduce bias and stereotypes surrounding the issues of culture and gender within the ESL population.

What they found was that ESL instructors used many strategies when teaching their adult learners, but they encountered challenges when teaching culture and gender in their classroom. In this study, the participants defined culture as learning cultural meanings of a language as a way of gaining membership into a community. The participants knew that ESL students needed to have an understanding of the American culture and they related this to their own experiences of teaching and living abroad. Their experiences helped to shape the ways that they teach their own ESL students in terms of culture and it also aided in the development of teaching strategies in order to
help ease the transition of their students into the American culture. The participants’
teaching strategies also help to incorporate the students’ dominant culture within the
American culture, thus, preserving the students’ cultural identity. Yet, the findings also
suggest that while these participants were able to use their background and experiences in
order to relate to the cultures of their students, the success of the students is dependent on
how the instructor approaches the cultural and mainstream elements in the curriculum.
Some participants found it difficult to have class discussions because there were
underlying tensions, conflicts, and dilemmas surrounding certain topics. In these cases,
the instructors wanted to make a safe and respected environment where all students felt
comfortable in sharing their lived experiences. Yet, the findings suggest that the
participants were able to recognize the students’ needs and created an environment
conducive to learning.

The findings also suggest that the participants did not use specific strategies for
teaching gender in the classroom, but two participants did recognize that gender of their
students and their own gender both have an impact on teaching and learning. Another
participant mentioned that traditional gender roles have a great impact on the way that
she teaches and her students learn. She provided an example that in her classroom, there
is a mix of males and females and right next door is a daycare where the students can
drop off their children while they go to class. If one of the children comes out of the
daycare, it is the mother who goes out to get the child, not the father. In turn, the female
is the one who ends up missing more classes than the male. As stated above, the
participants did not provide strategies for teaching gender in the ESL classroom, thus, this
could be a potential research to study in the future.
Reeves (2009) did a case study that involved two early career ESL teachers with limited second language learning experiences and this study aimed to investigate these teachers’ linguistic knowledge for teaching. They found that the participants had a basic understanding of the English language, but it did not provide them with the knowledge about language that was needed to teach ESL students. Furthermore, since the two participants did not have enough experience with ESL students, their ability to understand the learning process of second language learners and to predict learner difficulties was very limited. Neither had the background knowledge to make sense of second language acquisition from a teaching perspective nor did they provide any evidence of their knowledge of acquisition theory. In terms of power, both participants depicted that their linguistic privilege was invisible to them. They both were aware that they entered the ESL field because of the need and to enhance their own marketability as a teacher. Yet, their linguistic identity was completely unchallenged by their ESL preparation programs, the schools in which they teach in, and their own learners. Thus, the ESL endorsement programs need to include more coursework in linguistics, second language learning, and critical language awareness.

**Being culturally aware of the ELL.** An additional set of studies emphasize the importance of being culturally aware of the ELL. As the research suggests, a student’s view of the American culture has must to do with how much they know about the targeted culture and how often they are given the opportunities to explore it. When given the space to discuss culture and to explore it, students have a more positive outlook on the aspects of the American culture.
Hickey’s (2012) qualitative study on two elementary English language learners addressed the ways in which students acquire language and the way they share their language. This phenomenological study helped her to re-examine her own language learning experiences as a way of connecting to her participants. She reflects upon her own assumptions and experiences as a language learner in order to be open to what her participants might teach her. Instead of finding answers to her research questions, she has found more questions. She found that by providing students with a space to talk about their own experiences might lead to more insights on how ESL students actually learn. Hickey (2012) explains that while this is not theoretically sound, so often the voices of these students are not heard and we need to listen to them in order to meet their linguistic and cultural needs. Furthermore, she suggests that previous assumptions can always be clarified as we listen to the stories of ESL students.

As the previous study suggests, there are still more questions into how an ESL student acquires language and culture. The next study reviewed took on a different approach to the way that students view culture. While this quantitative study was not done in the United States, Moghaddam and Gholamzadeh’s (2011) study in Mashhad, Iran provides us with information on the main stereotypes of learners towards the English culture. They also aimed to address the significant difference in between proficiency levels and a student’s choice of metaphor. There were 1,032 randomly chosen participants who were both male and female. Through investigating metaphors, the findings of the study show that culture should be a part of every EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. To some extent, the view of culture is gender-based, meaning that the male participants had some negative ideas of culture, but females had an interest
in the positive features of culture. In terms of a student’s choice of metaphor and their level of proficiency, it was found that beginner EFL students had a more pessimistic view of about second language culture. This could be because the more proficient EFL students view culture as being beneficial and valuable to them. Since advanced EFL students have more opportunities to use the foreign language, the findings suggest that they should be able to communicate, understand some cultural nuances within the foreign language, and become familiar with aspects of the targeted language.

**Connecting Transformative Learning to Culture and Language**

As the previous studies suggest, there is a connection between ESL teacher preparation, providing direct instruction to the ESL students, and being culturally aware of their needs. Yet, there is still much more to learn about the link between being culturally responsive education specifically around issues of language and culture in teaching ESL students and transformative learning. In discussing culturally responsive education in general, Geneva Gay (2010) proposes six characteristics to the meaning of culturally responsive teaching. One of these six characteristics is that teaching needs to be transformative, though exactly what Gay means in regard to the term “transformative” is unclear. Nevertheless, she explains that in order for students to be able to navigate successfully in society, teachers have an obligation to teach for change. In doing so, she suggests:

> Students must learn to analyze the effects of inequities on different ethnic individuals and groups, have zero tolerance for these, and become change agents committed to promoting greater equality, justice, and power balances among ethnic groups. (p. 37)
Thus, teachers need to include what she refers to as a “transformative” curriculum in the classroom in order to promote equity and provide learning opportunities for children to enhance their critical thinking skills, according to Gay (2010). This curriculum can be two-fold with one side dealing with confronting and transcending the cultural hegemony within the traditional curriculum and with the other side focusing on developing ways for students to overcome prejudice, racism, and other forms of oppression. Phuntsog (1999) also found that “a great deal of consensus exists among educators and researchers that a transformative curriculum promotes equity in classrooms as it questions the basic premises and assumptions of school knowledge” (p. 107). Further, this transformative curriculum will not only help with their critical thinking skills, but also to help them analyze their learning situation and transform it with the language of possibility. While these authors don’t necessarily define what they mean by “transformative”, they at least imply that educators need to critically reflect on underlying assumptions if they are going to be able to promote equity in their culturally responsive classrooms.

There are a few studies that are specifically grounded in transformative learning theory that focus on the transformative learning process around issues of race, culture, and language. In their qualitative, longitudinal study on bilingual educators, Osterling and Webb (2009) explored the transformation process of 35 future bilingual educators and novice educators. They found that there was a distinct transformation and change in the participants’ initial teaching philosophies to their teaching philosophies at the end of the study. They mentioned that the transformation was influenced by the coursework, experiences, and various interactions that the participants had during their endorsement program. During this time, the academic and professional experiences that the students
faced during their pre-service education helped to challenge and question their philosophical views. The participants had educators that were willing to work with them in reflecting and analyzing their values and beliefs while assessing their own education.

Similarly, in her qualitative study, Curry-Stevens (2007) aimed to assist the transformation of privileged learners on issues of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender when they are in their pre-service classrooms. Twenty community-based practitioners explored these critical practices in order to understand their own transformation from a privileged viewpoint. The findings show that there are many changes that a privileged learner will go through during the transformation of their views of the critical areas mentioned above. The changes can be spiritual, ideological, psychological, emotional, behavioral, intellectual or cognitive. While transformation is emerging, Curry-Stevens (2007) depicts a model for privileged learners to become aware of their privilege. These steps include the confidence-shaking and the confidence-building processes. Within these processes, there are ten steps that a privileged learner must take in order to transform their views of the oppressed. In doing so, people of privilege can be advocates for change within the learning community and beyond.

In a similar study of transformative learning among teachers who were enrolled in a master’s program focused on teaching for social justice and drawing on an arts-based perspective over a two year period, Shockley and Banks (2011) found three different stages of transformative learning. In the first phase when questioned about societal beliefs about cultural groups in the first year of the study, participant answers were ambiguous, yet in general, they did not consciously associate themselves with the mainstream society. Here, the teachers blatantly discuss stereotypical beliefs about
cultural differences among groups. The findings at the end of the study show that teachers believed their attitudes about biases were changed due to the curriculum in which they were exposed. The safe spaces that were created (along with discussions, journaling, and artistic expression) helped teachers to think critically about their own biases. As a result of this, the authors noted that the teachers “now have very different attitudes about racial and cultural bias than do most people within the society” (Shockley & Banks, 2011, p. 235).

As the literature suggests, there are many issues revolving around transformative learning in some K-12 classrooms that are culturally responsive, yet it is still unclear exactly what is meant by transformation. Some of the studies are theoretically grounded in transformative learning theory that deal with culture and language as noted, but they are not specifically geared toward ESL teaching and curriculum. The following sections
highlight how transformative learning can be fostered in ESL teaching, along with the possibilities and challenges for ESL teachers.

**Fostering Transformative Learning in ESL Teaching:**

**Possibilities and Challenges**

Based on the above discussion it is clear that transformative learning theory can inform teaching of ESL educators. But this presents both possibilities and challenges to ESL endorsement programs. The following two sections will depict the possibilities for transformative learning for ESL teachers and the challenges in drawing on creative and metaphorical ways of knowing in an ESL endorsement program.

**Possibilities for Transformative Learning for ESL Teachers**

Transformative learning presents many possibilities for teaching adult learners who wish to obtain their ESL certificate. Fostering transformative learning with teachers as learners in general assists in making connections between prior and present experiences. In working with teachers, it is helpful to remember that “the heart and central focus of learning and change in professional development…is the self” (Dirkx, Gilley, & Gilley, 2004, p. 40). Further, it is “how prior experiences shape and influence one’s understanding of current practice situations” (p. 40). If teachers can bring their entire self in the learning process, there is a chance that they will be able to use their individual experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes in order to bring out these true feelings and beliefs. This signifies the importance of the learner’s prior experiences and how their imaginative creations can help to enhance their learning and create meaning. “This focus on self-understanding stresses the critical importance of meaning making in professional development” (Dirkx et. al., 2004, p. 40). This also empowers the learner
by making his or her role an active and vital part in the learning process because it creates a positive and conducive atmosphere in the ESL classroom.

Transformative learning is dependent on frames of reference and they are important because teachers are able to build on these frames by connecting prior experiences to new experiences. “Technical information required for one’s performance acquires meaning and purpose when filtered through the experience and existing understandings that the practitioner brings to the tasks as well as the sociocultural context in which these tasks are performed” (Dirkx et. al., 2004, p. 40). In an ESL endorsement program, it could be helpful if teachers incorporated certain activities to enhance learning and bring clarity to past and present experiences. By doing this, ESL teacher candidates can connect new information to existing knowledge in creative ways. It is important to “provide opportunities for learners within and outside the classroom to act on new insights in the process of transformative learning” (Taylor, 2008, p. 11). It could be argued that the frames of references will possibly create a type of disconnect between information and may or may not enhance creative ways of knowing, depending on how they are interpreted by the participants.

Transformative learning theory can inform teacher learning because it can enable ESL teachers to not only use dialogue to further understand and make meaning from reflection, but to critically reflect on their learning. “Critical self-reflection may not be linear or sequential, but it is essentially a rational process of seeing that our previously held views no longer fit—they are too narrow, too limiting; they do not explain the new experience” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 88). What could potentially explain the new experience is some sort of creative activity where the teachers can critically reflect and
then make meaning from this new experience. By using premise reflection instead of content and process reflection, teachers might be able to transform their previous assumptions, beliefs, and values. By doing this, they might change the way they look at themselves and the ways in which they look at the world around them. Giving them multiple experiences and providing them with time to critically reflect upon these experiences might help them to express their views of the new experience. Focusing on critical reflection is the key to create transformative learning; however, Cranton and Roy (2003) also mention that critical reflection might not lead to a transformation, however, when it does, the “frame of reference becomes more open and better justified” (p. 88).

This type of learning informs education because it provides learners a safe environment that can potentially foster transformation. Teachers can reflect through activities such as journaling and dialogue. Since creativity is an engaging way for adults to learn, the atmosphere in this environment has the potential to encourage dialogue which can lead to active participation. This theory addresses the significance of making connections between critical reflection, dialogue, and experience. If the researcher wants to promote transformative learning, it is essential to be aware that these three elements are interdependent of one another. Realizing the interdependency of the previous elements will assist in creating an environment that makes connections and fosters transformative learning.

In discussing individuation, it should be noted that “education must deliberately contribute to the growth of individual consciousness. If we do not develop a conscious sense of who we are, we can only imitate others and remain dependent on a collectively acceptable idea about who we should be” (Cranton, 2003, p. 238). For ESL teachers, it is
important not to judge students or have preconceived notions of who they are and how they should act in the classroom. With individuation, students have a better sense of who they are and how they are a special part of the learning community. Not only will this assist teachers in growing as individuals, but it might also help them to enhance their inner selves while bridging the gap between new knowledge and previous experiences. Furthermore, being surrounded by individuals that are similar to them, teachers will not be “pretending to be like the other in order to fit in” (Cranton, 2003, p. 244). Educators must recognize that everyone is an individual and brings many exciting experiences with them into the ESL classroom. By creating a space to bring out those experiences and make connections to new experiences, self-awareness and individuation will begin to emerge.

In endorsement programs today, it is unlikely that emotions, imagination, and fantasy are encouraged as ways of knowing. It is assumed that most educators present information and serious, rational discussion into this learning environment, avoiding any matters of soul (Cranton, 2006). However, emotional reactions (anger, fear, conflict, or despair) can help to express and become aware of the self and the relationship between the individual and his or her broader world (Dirkx, 1997). “Our emotions and feelings are a kind of language for helping us learn about these relationships” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 82). In terms of expressing these emotions and nourishing the soul, there are many ways that this could happen in this type of learning environment. Soul is nourished within our lives through story, song, myth, poetry, and the concreteness of our everyday experiences” (Dirks, 1997, p. 83). Furthermore, Cranton (2006) gives other examples of activities that could ignite a transformative learning experience in the ESL endorsement
program. Journal writing, meditating, candle lighting, artistic learning projects, music, and taking pictures can all be examples of projects that help to unfold a creative process that will eventually enhance learning.

There may also be times where teachers will be asked to have dialogue with others on certain topics. By interacting with others, the soul can potentially stir up feelings of both joy and despair (Dirkx 1997). As stated before, it is necessary to nurture the soul when these moments occur because it will help to “embrace the messiness and disorder…and enter more fully and authentically into the matters of the heart” (p. 84). These types of interactions can help to shape how individuals might feel in a given situation. As these interactive experiences occur, individuals may or may not be making their own meaning from these situations. By critically reflecting, teachers may have a transformative learning experience that may provide insight or a new perspective (Cranton, 2006).

In ESL endorsement programs, students are surrounded by images (both mental and physical) that make up their learning experiences. These images can also have an impact on how the meaning is shaped by moving from implicit methods of instruction to more explicit ways of nurturing the soul. Dirkx (1997) states that:

Learning through soul calls for a more central role of imagination and fantasy in our instructional methods and content. Stories, narratives, myths, tales, and ritual capture aspects of this world in ways not readily available through more traditional instructional methods (p. 85).

Traditional methods of instruction are usually seen in most endorsement programs because they seem to be the most effective ways for students to obtain information.
However, in these classrooms, there is rarely room for creativity, yet the soul needs these spaces in order to thrive. This denial of the soul in endorsement programs creates an absence of energy, enthusiasm, and vigor (Dirkx, 1997). Therefore, by creating these spaces in ESL endorsement programs, teachers and students can begin to nurture their souls in order to enhance learning. He mentions that this can happen by giving individuals the appropriate material to promote learning through the soul. Some might include novels, poetry, music, film, art, story, metaphor, and photography. While these reading materials might not seem appropriate for teaching content material, it will help students to focus on imaginative ways of knowing and it will arouse their soul. Yet, this is not typical for most ESL endorsement programs, therefore, the challenges of fostering creative ways of knowing in an ESL endorsement programs needs to be addressed.

**Challenges in Drawing on Creative and Metaphorical Ways of Knowing**

The previous paragraphs show how creativity can inform learning, however, there are also some challenges associated with this dimension of transformative learning type in relation to ESL endorsement programs. The biggest challenge is that most ESL endorsement programs do not promote creative ways of knowing into the curriculum and my make little use of creativity in the program. Further, even though transformative learning theory suggests that there will be a transformation in the learning process, it is not guaranteed that this will always occur in every given learning situation. The transformations that individuals might have may or may not include disorienting dilemmas (as discussed in the rational definition) and inner reflections, and this could influence the outcomes of creative ways of knowing. If individuals do not experience a transformation in the learning process, trying to enhance their learning through creativity
might not be the most logical activity. Here, the educator really needs to take notice of all of the dynamics in the classroom setting in order to make the best judgment in the learning process.

Furthermore, if learners begin to question their own attitudes, beliefs, and values, they may or may not want to creative ways of knowing as a means to expand upon these things. By asking individuals to revise their previous interpretations of certain experiences, educators hope that their thinking, beliefs, and actions will be enhanced in order to gain more knowledge. However, if they do not have this type of perspective change, the transformative learning theory will assume that learning was not a transformative process. Therefore, using creativity might not be the best solution to further enhance learning because if learners are unable to go back and revise their interpretations of an event, new learning through creative ways of knowing might not help them to critically look at situations from a different perspective either. For example, if individuals use photography as a way to uncover past experiences and learn from them and if there is no inner transformation or critical reflection from this, taking a picture of an object for learning purposes might just be a tedious act.

In thinking about critical reflection, this is truly one of the cornerstones of the transformative learning theory. If learners can begin to critically reflect upon previous experiences, they will be aware of how new learning experiences, such as creative ways of knowing, might enhance their learning. However, this theory does not address the extent to which an individual must critically reflect upon previous experiences. If critical reflection will help a person to make sense of a given experience, it is not known what will happen if this inner reflection does not occur. It can be assumed from this theory that
if there is no critical reflection, transformation of previous experiences onto new ones may not happen, yet, individuals’ frame of reference might become more open. Furthermore, it is noted that critical reflection might be much more valuable if people have dialogues with one another in order to consider multiple points of view. This type of discourse should make light of certain experiences, help to bring some perspective changes to some individuals, and verify reasoning. So, if this discourse is not evident in the ESL endorsement program, it is unknown if learners will actually reflect and make meaning from new situations.

If students do not participate in group discussions with others, it is also difficult to determine if they will develop true individuation amongst themselves. Since individuation should not be forced, educators must be careful not to set a standard for students to follow in order to meet certain criteria or curricular goals. This is why creative ways of knowing can be very useful in any classroom. Students are able to critically reflect with themselves and look at previous situations in a different light while also having a better sense of who they are. Bringing the self to the learning experiences through creativity can enhance individuation; however, not all students are capable of reaching true individuation. Cranton and Roy (2003) note that:

individuation is an ongoing psychic process that occurs in everyone whether we are conscious of it or not. When we participate in it consciously and imaginatively, we develop a deepened sense of self, an expansion of consciousness, and an engendering of soul. Transformation is the emergence of the Self (p. 92).
It is important for teachers to become familiar with the process of individuation in order to determine if creative ways of knowing can truly help a student to enhance his/her learning or if it will hinder learning or the self in any way.

As Dirkx (1997) mentions, an individual must first recognize their soul in order for soulful learning to happen. It is unclear how one can acknowledge and recognize their souls. This is not clearly defined in Dirkx’s framework, yet it is one very important aspect of this type of learning. Further, he mentions that it is unclear if imagination and fantasy play a role in the development and growth of self-knowledge. Therefore, if students use creative ways of knowing in the classroom, it might not help them to achieve success in terms of self-development. However, creativity can help to uncover some feelings and emotions that are associated with the experiences that individuals encounter each day.

As noted, there are many ways in which to foster transformative learning in an ESL endorsement program. The literature suggests that there could be potential possibilities and challenges to using transformative learning within this framework. Yet, there needs to be safe spaces within an ESL endorsement programs for individuals to explore their own beliefs and attitudes about issues of culture and language. By creating these spaces, individuals can begin to uncover the ways in which their experiences can have an impact on their own teaching and learning.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the theory of transformative learning, the literature on language and culture as it relates to ESL endorsement programs including an analysis of the relevant research literature, as well as an overview of the
literature on the possibilities and challenges of fostering transformative learning in ESL endorsement programs. The literature shows that up to this point, little research has been conducted using transformative learning theory in regard to studies about ESL teachers. The proposed study hopes to make a contribution to remedy this lack.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of a qualitative study that explores significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers who have been certified in the last five years. Since methodology is guided by the purpose, this study appropriately utilized a qualitative research design. In order to provide an appropriate rationale for the chosen design of this study, it is important to first define and discuss qualitative research and the benefits that this methodology provides. Thus, this chapter begins with a brief overview of this methodology, highlighting the controversies and strengths of this particular research design that are apparent in the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the primary designs used in qualitative research along with an explanation of the particular approach chosen for this study. This chapter then provides a discussion of the researcher’s background, along with an overview of the participant selection, data collection, and analysis, and other verification strategies that were used within this study.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

In qualitative research, there are many assumptions that deal with the nature of knowledge, how one might understand knowledge and reality, and the task of acquiring new knowledge as researchers. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that, “the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based, is the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with the social worlds” (p. 97). It is important to understand the philosophical grounding of this research method in order to reflect on these assumptions and engage in research.
Qualitative research methodology, is embedded in an interpretive paradigm, and assumes that people make knowledge based on their view of the reality of a situation. This methodology focuses more on how the particular view of a phenomenon is understood in the particular context in which it occurs. What qualitative researchers are seeking are participants’ understandings of their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge in a given study (Patton, 2002). They are also trying to find out how people make meaning of a particular phenomenon, and what their view of the “reality” is of a given situation. Krauss (2005) points out that qualitative research is based on the assumption that “there are multiple realities constructed by human beings who experience a phenomenon of interest” (p. 760). Hathaway (1995) further notes “reality is constructed by those participating in it, and understanding the reality experienced by the participants guides the interpretive researcher” (p. 544).

In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument in that he or she is conducting the interviews, or observations. One important component to qualitative research approaches is the researcher’s background knowledge of a particular phenomenon and how he or she might use this knowledge in order to help interpret a phenomenon or uncover essential insights in the research study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that in qualitative research the research context is particularly important. The researcher must understand that everyone brings a range of constructed truths and realities to the learning environment or other research context and this might influence the study in a variety of ways. “For this reason, universal law and generalizability is limited because reality is a constructed concept and a researcher’s interpretation is also a constructed part of the reality observed” (Hathaway, 1995, p. 545).
There are three main types of data collection techniques in qualitative research: interviews, observation, and analysis of documents and artifacts (Patton, 2002). Researchers typically collect data in this way and then analyze the data and create themes of the study while also trying to understand the study from the participants’ viewpoints. The assumption in qualitative research is that reality is constructed, so the researcher must try to understand how the participants try to understand and make meaning from the experience and construct their reality. This is a crucial part of this methodology because it helps researchers to critically think about the nature of the study, and the themes that can emerge from the study must be based on participants’ experiences and perceptions, rather than the researcher’s. Further the researcher needs to provide thick, rich description by providing direct quotes or direct citations from field notes to support the themes of findings. This lends support to the fact that the themes that emerge from the study are based on participants’ experiences. This is how the researcher provides some “empirical evidence” (Hathaway, 1995, p. 553) for the support of the themes. However, one thing that might influence the outcomes of the study is the subjectivity and pre-conceived notions that the researcher brings to the study because it can be difficult to separate one’s perceptions and beliefs from the analysis of the data. The researcher after all does the data analysis in light of the theoretical framework of the study and the researcher’s own understanding of the phenomenon; thus, in what follows I discuss my own background as the researcher conducting this study.

**Background of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument in the sense that the researcher is asking the questions and creating rapport with the participants
(Merriam, 2009). Hence it is important to talk about my background relative to the study, and how who I am may affect the research process.

This research study is about ESL teachers and their learning experiences in an ESL endorsement program and their teaching experiences in light of what they learned. I can identify with the role of the ESL teacher because I also went through an ESL endorsement program and am an ESL teacher in an elementary school setting in my practice. Thus, I can relate to participants’ stories about the program and how they might have struggled with the application of strategies they were taught into their own teaching practice. In terms of the impact on this study, I assumed going into the study that because of my own background, participants would speak more freely to me. I also teach a few of the ESL endorsement courses at a local university, and have been doing so since 2007. I knew it was possible that some participants may have had me in some of the classes. In fact, all of the participants in the study had me for at least one class throughout their time in the ESL endorsement program.

These factors—the fact that I have been through the program, am currently an ESL teacher in an elementary school setting, and have been teaching as an adjunct in the program—are likely to have had some impact on the study. In going into the study, on the one hand, I knew the participants could possibly be hesitant about offering any information that they think would impact my job, the way I teach my courses, or my opinion of them. On the other, I thought that they may talk to me more freely because they knew how familiar I am with the program. Because this position had potential influences on the outcomes of responses, participants might have had varied levels of comfort discussing their experiences with me. Still, I believe that in general they felt
comfortable doing the interviews because of having some prior relationship with me, but it is possible that some were less comfortable. One’s positionality (gender, race, class, language, culture) always shapes one’s view of the world. I am a white, middle class female who teaches ESL and I recognize that these factors may have influenced my interpretation of my participants’ stories. However, because my positionality is similar to most of those who I interviewed, I believe that my interpretations of their stories were quite accurate. Nevertheless, I conducted member checks with the participants in order to guard against possible misinterpretations. The procedures for this will be discussed later in the strategies for verification section.

Since I have been involved in both the teaching and learning aspect of ESL endorsement programs, I have particular biases about the ways in which these types of programs are conducted within this context. I believe that within these programs, there are many strengths and limitations that might influence student outcomes in their own teaching practices. Within these limitations, there is a sense that adult learners do not have practical application with the teaching strategies and may find it difficult to actually use these strategies in their own classrooms. While I feel that it is important for ESL teachers to learn important information about the process of language acquisition in ESL students (which is one class that I teach), I came to the research questions guiding this study based on an assumption that the teachers may or may not have or may not notice a “perspective transformation” (discussed in the transformative learning literature) when they come out of these endorsement programs. Within these ESL endorsement programs, we have an obligation to teach for change in order to promote equality, justice, and power balances among the different groups of people in our classroom, though it is unclear
whether or not we are really teaching for transformation. We are not consciously or intentionally presenting the students with “disorienting dilemmas” per se, yet we are teaching so that students examine issues of language and culture which may or may not present disorienting dilemmas for them. Teaching in this way certainly presents greater opportunities for reflection. In her chapter about Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative learning from 1975-present, Baumgartner (2012) mentions that “the most notable addition to the theory was Mezirow’s continued refinement of reflection” (p. 105). As we teach the students to reflect upon what they learned about culture and language in the ESL classes, it is possible that we are teaching for transformation over time. I went into the study wanting to know more about their experiences as both teachers and learners. By further asking the participants to use creative or metaphorical ways of expressing themselves, I was hoping to learn if they did in fact have some type of transformation because of the program, and the extent that this is or can be expressed through creative expression.

As a researcher, it is important that I examine the biases of my perspective, along with the previously mentioned factors that impact who I am and how I see the world, into consideration when examining my role in the process. The study could have been affected because of my ability to see both the adult learner and adult educator perspectives of the participants. Since I have experience both of these scenarios, I needed to examine my role in the research process as to not let either one of these experiences influence the outcomes of the interviews. This, however, is the theoretical framework of the study, and is the lens through which the data will be analyzed.

**Participant Selection**
Since the goal of the qualitative analysis of this study was to conduct an in-depth exploration of the significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers, the sampling strategy employed within this study was purposeful. Purposeful sampling is a widely used sampling method where the participants of the study are selected by the researcher for the particular study, by including participants that meet specific criteria (Polit & Hunglar, 1999). Qualitative research makes use of purposeful criteria in order to select participants who will offer information rich data (Merriam, 2009). Sample sizes are typically small and specific, focusing on the particular in depth. Selecting information-rich cases for the study enables researchers to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. For qualitative reasons, purposeful sampling is a way for researchers to understand the phenomenon in-depth as opposed to the very surface over a large random sample. The emphasis of purposeful sampling is to gain an in-depth understanding of the fundamental properties of the phenomenon. (Patton, 2002).

The specific criteria that was used to attain a purposeful sample for this study was that participants (1) had to be certified from the ESL Specialist Program from a local university; (2) completed their endorsement within the past five years; and (3) be working as an ESL teacher, or have at least had some experience with working with ESL students. It is not imperative that they have had me as an instructor; however, more than likely, the participants would have had me for at least one class. In fact, after the participant selection was complete, it was determined that all twelve participants did have me as an instructor for at least one class. It is crucial for these teachers to have graduated from the program within five years because the particular content of the more current
classes might have a huge impact on their teaching and learning experiences. It is important that each participant was a teacher in a school setting or had experiences working with students in a learning setting, because the goal of the research was to understand their teaching and learning experiences. Since the ESL endorsement program focuses on teachers who work in classrooms from pre-school to grade twelve, it is in the best interest of the research that the participants work with students.

While there are several different strategies for purposefully selecting participants that yield rich information, the particular strategy that was employed in this study is a criterion sampling. In criterion sampling, the researcher picks the cases that meet the criteria mentioned above. “The strategy for criterion sampling involves selecting a sample based on the prime focus of the study, thus cases meeting the set criteria are included in the study” (Gray, 2004). This method is very strong in quality assurance because it helps to select the participants that best match the criteria in order to give the research more depth and the outcomes can help to decipher key themes to the research. As the participants met the selected criteria, they were considered to join the research project. For this particular study, there were a total of twelve participants. Three of them were men and nine of them were women and they will all be introduced in detail in Chapter Four.

**Data Collection**

As a way of further legitimizing qualitative research as a paradigm for acquiring data on ESL teachers, there are various approaches to conducting qualitative research, but within this study, qualitative research was conducted primarily as a way to gather
information on the significant teaching and learning experiences of certified ESL teachers.

In order to gather information on the significant teaching and learning experiences of certified ESL teachers, in-depth semi-structured interviews were completed, along with the collection of documents and artifacts. As Merriam and Simpson (2000) point out, these are three modes of data collection typically used in qualitative research: interviews, observations, and analysis of documents or artifacts. For this particular study, individual, in depth semi-structured interviews and the use of a metaphor, or photograph (as an artifact) were used as the main data collection methods.

**In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews**

As previously noted, interviews help make sense of how people make meaning from a particular phenomenon. The researcher should strive for quality in the interview. An advantage of using an interview is that it will gain in-depth information (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Interviews served as the primary means of data collection for this study. These individual interviews lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half in length. During this time, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The questions that were asked during the interview related to my research questions and they helped to explore more about the experiences of the participants. In order to shed light on the key significant learning experiences that these teachers had in the ESL endorsement program, they were asked direct questions about their learning experiences in the ESL endorsement program. To be more specific, I asked them to particularly hone in on the issues surrounding culture and language, since that was a big focus of the majority of the coursework for the program. The importance of culture and
language is an important piece in the interview process because it helped to explore how teachers learned to become culturally and linguistically aware. Further, the exploration of what they learned as an ESL teacher was a significant part of the interview. From working with culturally and linguistically diverse children in an ESL setting, teachers shared experiences that draw on culturally responsive teaching. Finally, as a way to draw in on creative or metaphorical ways of knowing during their teaching and/or learning experiences, they were asked to bring in a symbol or metaphor, photography, or some other means of creative expression of something that signifies their experiences. This was either an object that they thought about in their current state of mind or something that held meaning to them as they went through the ESL endorsement program. In essence, because this study focused on the possibility of transformative learning particularly around issues of language and culture, and the extent to which creative expression was involved in the process, the questions for the study focused in particular on these issues. The specific questions are outlined in the Interview Guide in the Appendix.

**Art, Metaphor, and Photographs as Artifacts**

In qualitative research, the use of metaphors, creative expression, photography and artifacts are helpful in receiving rich data from the participants. They help to enliven and enrich (Patton, 2002) the words that the participants use. Patton (2002) also mentions that “photographs can help in recalling things that have happened as well as vividly capturing the setting for others” (p. 308). For participants to make further meaning of their experiences, prior to the one-on-one interview they were asked to bring in a symbol, metaphor, photograph, song, poem, art, or some type of creative expression
that signified their teaching and learning. To some extent, this symbol or metaphor is an arts-based form of inquiry and can address creative ways of knowing in an ESL endorsement program.

Photographs, which are often symbols, can be ambiguous. Although his research is slightly outdated, Schwartz (1989) mentions that the use of photography in qualitative research often triggers meaning that is already in the viewer and that the viewer can construct this meaning. Furthermore, it is not only the camera and the picture that helps to uncover these truths, but the words and analysis associated with the pictures. They provide the contextual data that is necessary to discover the reasons for the pictures taken and symbols chosen. Therefore, “The viewing process is a dynamic interaction between the photographer, the spectator, and the image; meaning is actively and socially constructed, not passively received” (Schwartz, 1989, p. 120).

As discussed earlier, interviews are a key component to understanding multiple perspectives. As Patton (2002) suggests, “the purpose of interviews is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341), and asking participants to bring some sort of metaphorical artifact that symbolized their experience in learning and teaching ESL and discussing it added another dimension to the interview. Patton (2002) highlights the fact that the researcher must deal with “the challenge of making it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (p. 341). I used the idea of creative expression not only to try to get into the world of the interviewee, but also to bring another dimension to the meaning making process. To
some extent, I used this means of metaphor or creative expression as a prompt to ask further questions that might cast light on participants’ experiences.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis begins with the first interview (Merriam, 2009). The most commonly used technique for analyzing qualitative data is the constant comparison analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). Originally intended for the grounded theory, this method is now used for a variety of methodologies. For this particular study, this method of analysis helped to develop the themes for the study. This method involves breaking down the transcribed interviews into chunks, which are then coded with a meaningful descriptive title. These codes are then grouped into themes based on the similarity and connection between the codes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). The following represents how this was facilitated within this particular study.

After the first interview I wrote analytic memos outlining what stood out for me about the interview. I noted particular points of attention to the language of transformative learning, particularly in regard to issues of culture and language, and to the potential role of metaphor or creative expression in the further meaning making process.

Once all interviews were completed, and participants provided their metaphor or creative expression of their learning, I conducted the next stage of the analysis of the data in order to find the essential themes of the interviews (Merriam, 2002). Flanagan notes that “The purpose of the data analysis stage is to summarize and describe the data in an efficient manner so that it can be effectively used for many practical purposes” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 345). The transcribed data were coded by writing in the margins and
categories were generated. For example, after reviewing the transcribed interviews, I looked for key words or phrases that kept reoccurring or that related to my research. These words and phrases were then noted in the margins. Next, I attempted “to integrate categories and their properties” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 116). By reducing the similar categories to a smaller number of categories, data collected was checked again to see if it was appropriate in the overall framework of my study, and the final themes were developed. The artifacts/metaphors and other means of creative expression were used and kept as a way for the researcher to grasp key components of the interviews and were used to support the themes.

**Verification Strategies**

In qualitative research, verification strategies need to be addressed in order for the actual research to be of value. Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) state “Verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study” (p. 9). The authors further mention that “without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility. Hence, a great deal of attention is applied to reliability and validity in all research methods” (p. 2). In order to ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative research paradigm, criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability need to be carried out in the development of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within the qualitative realm, researchers need to discuss these issues in order to address the overall topic of trustworthiness in order to ensure congruence among all aspects of the research. Verification strategies also help the researcher recognize when the process of the research needs to be modified in order to
achieve reliability and validity (Morse et. al., 2002). Since this research employed a qualitative design in terms of collecting and analyzing data, it is appropriate to discuss verification strategies for the data collection and analysis.

**Confirmability**

In qualitative research, it is assumed that researchers bring unique perspectives to the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that confirmability is when the data and interpretations of the study are positioned within the events of the study rather than the researcher’s viewpoint. The degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others also describes confirmability. In order to enhance this strategy, researchers can keep track of the study through an audit trail in which they document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Any materials used in this study for the purposes of taking notes and keeping records were used to address confirmability. To ensure this in my study, the advisor was also an active role in making sure that the procedures of the data collection and analysis were followed.

**Credibility**

Credibility involves establishing that the results of the data are believable or credible from the participants’ perspectives. “Credible data also come from close collaboration with participants throughout the process of research” (Cresswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Not only is it credible to obtain credible data from the participants, it is also important to describe the setting, participants, and the themes of the study in rich detail. The purpose of giving the details is so that people who read this narrative account could be transported into the particular phenomenon of study (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, by integrating member checks into a study, participants can view the initial
interpretations of the researcher in order to ensure they match the perspectives of the participants. Member checks happen when the researcher makes a constant effort to restate and summarize the information in the form of a question. This helps to ensure that the observations and understandings of the phenomenon are in alignment with that the participants wanted to convey during the interview. During this study, member checks were conducted periodically to ensure that the data collected is understood and that their photographs were interpreted in the meaning the participants wanted to convey. This included a process where during the interviews and discussions, as the researcher, I made a constant effort to restate and summarize information instantly in the form of a question to make sure my understandings were in alignment with what the participants wanted to convey.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the reliability and the concept of consistency within quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Clont, 1992; Seale, 1999). The idea of dependability emphasizes the need for researchers to account for the changes that might take place within the research. Describing these changes that occur in the research setting can affect the way that future research can be approached in similar studies. One method to enhance the dependability of the qualitative research is an audit trail, or an inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As stated before, this type of method was employed in this study in order to examine the materials and the data that is used within the research.

Dependability also requires the use of triangulation, or multiple means of enhancing dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During this interview, there was more
than one method of data collection, including interviews and the use of artifact. Thus, the use of triangulation was important because it was a way to further enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the data collection.

**Transferability**

Transferability can also be thought of as the degree in which the results of the study can be transferred to other contexts. If the research study is a high quality study, Stenbacka (2001) suggests that this may lead to a more credible result that might increase the validity and trustworthiness of the research. In order to enhance the transferability of a study, the qualitative researcher should describe the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research very carefully, so readers can determine if it is applicable to similar settings in which they might be teaching. One way this can be addressed in this particular study is through the use of a purposeful sample. As discussed previously, this sampling method was used in order to understand how the results of the study were generalizable to other contexts similar to this particular study.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, the purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the methodology that was used in this study, which focused on the significant teaching and learning experiences of certified ESL teachers. In addressing this goal, the chapter began with an overview of qualitative research. Next, the chapter highlighted the background of the researcher, which was followed by an explanation of how participants would be selected, as well as how data would be selected and analyzed. This chapter concluded with an overview of verification strategies that were used while conducting this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to better understand the significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers around the issues of culture and language. Twelve certified ESL teachers participated in this study and they were each interviewed one time. The data from all participants were used in the analysis and identification of themes that better inform the guiding research questions of this study. These questions included:

1. What are key significant learning experiences that teachers had in the ESL certification program, particularly about issues of language and culture?
2. How have they incorporated the key elements of the ESL certification program into their teaching practice?
3. What are the ways that teachers draw on creative and metaphorical ways of knowing in their learning or teaching experiences, or their further meaning making processes about working with ESL students?

This chapter first introduces the participants in the study, and then the following two sections deal with the findings as organized around two primary areas, namely: what the participants learned within the context of the program; and the dimensions and limitations of transformative learning.

Introducing the Participants

There were 12 participants in this study, including 3 men and 9 women. Listed below are the descriptions of each participant.

Alicia
Alicia is a 32-year-old white female with 11 years of teaching experience and 5 years of experience teaching ESL students. She indicates that the most significant thing she learned about her culture and language is the appreciation of where she came from. She also respects people who do not share the same beliefs that she does.

Alison

Alison is a 36-year-old white female with 14 years of teaching experience, and has many years of experience in working with ESL students. In describing her own background, she identifies with the Italian and Pennsylvania Dutch cultures. In talking about what she learned about her culture and language, she mentioned that people are complacent here in America, they do have accents, and talk with dialects, but it is still a unique place.

Anna

Anna is a 31-year-old white female with 8 years of teaching experience, and many years of teaching ESL students in her classroom. In terms of her language, she learned that the English language is very difficult language to acquire and understand and it has a lot of irregularities. For culture, she thinks culture does not necessarily have to be the American culture, but just a person’s own culture.

April

April is a 30-year-old white female with 8 years of teaching experience and 2 years of teaching ESL students. In describing her own background, she identifies with the Italian and Polish cultures. In talking about what she learned about her culture and language after taking the ESL courses, she indicates that it made her reflect about her family. Her dad came to America when he was around ten years old. The courses made
her reflect on his experiences and the experiences of her extended family members who learned how to speak English. The ESL program also made her think about the challenges the ESL kids face and how they need support to overcome and go beyond these boundaries. Working with ELL students made her reflect on her own experiences.

**Cathy**

Cathy is a 62-year-old white female with 20 years of teaching experience, including 3 years of teaching adults and many years of teaching ESL students. In discussing how the ESL program made her aware of her own culture and language, she admits that she has an accent from New England and she pronounces words differently. Yet, she does not really think about it when she talks. She assumes that, culturally, her students know more about Americans than Americans do. She admits that she makes a lot of assumptions about people who come here, and they have a lot of the foundational understandings about our culture and the English language.

**Farrah**

Farrah is a 35-year-old white female with 6 years of teaching experience and 7 years at the administrative level. She has been supervising the Title III program (a federal grant program to improve education) in her school for the past 2 ½ years, thus, she does work with some ESL students. In discussing what she learned about her culture and language throughout the ESL program, she expresses that the American culture is quite egocentric, either because they were the first ones here or because this is the way it has always been and the way it should be. She says that since the world is changing, expectations are changing. But, people need to expand their views of what life can be and create more of an environment where they can embrace differences either with
languages or culture. She continues to embrace and grow in her efforts towards making that a reality.

**Ian**

Ian is a 44-year-old white male with 6 years of teaching experience and 1 year of teaching ESL. He recalls the things he learned about language and culture from going through the ESL program. He admits that the way we speak in America now is going to be different one hundred and two hundred years from now. He learned this by going through the modules within the Linguistics course. What people call Old English now was called Modern English back in time, and what they call Modern English now will be something different. He goes on to explain that dealing with the students in his class was challenging, because there were many languages spoken in the classroom, and he tried to understand different words in his students’ languages (i.e., hello and goodbye). He states that if you do not use these languages for a while, you forget. He says that when it comes to culture, culture is always changing and language always evolves. So, as new people come to our country from other countries, they bring different cultures with them and they might lose some of their own culture, but they will keep some. Therefore, cultures will mix.

**Jennifer**

Jennifer is a 32-year-old white female and has been teaching for nine years. In regards to ESL students, she has been working with them for about two years. In describing her own background, she identifies with the German and English cultures. When speaking about what she learned about her language and culture through the ESL program, she explains that there is so much bias in regions and the way you speak
definitely creates an image. She says that it might be unfair, but if you speak and dress a
certain way, people might think you are less educated, or if people speak in Ebonics, the
bias is that they are not educated. She admits that all of the things you see on TV play on
the bias of language.

Jessica

Jessica is a 32-year-old white female with 10 years of teaching experience, but
she currently does not have ESL students in her class. In describing her own background,
she identifies with the Slovak culture. In discussing what she learned about language and
culture after going through the ESL program, she explains that it is important to choose
words carefully when speaking to people no matter their culture or language. Yet, she
explains that the American culture is crass, but she appreciates the students she works
with, because even though they speak multiple languages, they are humble and
Americans are not. She thinks Americans are not interested in learning new language or
learning about new cultures and says it seems they are self-centered in comparison to
people from other cultures. From these experiences, she learned to be more open,
accepting, and friendly to other cultures and not to be judgmental. Getting to know
people from other cultures is exciting and fascinating.

Joe

Joe is a 46-year-old white male with 15 years of teaching experience and 2 years
of experience with teaching ELLs. In describing his own background, he identifies with
the German and Irish cultures. Joe talks about what he learned about his language and
culture by saying that it is just his and there is no right or wrong culture. People need to
respect everyone’s beliefs and understand that even though people are different, they are
the same. He mentions that even though he was born a Caucasian man, it does not mean that it is the right way, but people just need to have respect and understand that everyone is different.

**Kevin**

Kevin is a 32-year-old white male who has been teaching for almost 3 years and has worked with ESL students for 4 years. In discussing what he learned about his language and culture, he explains that culturally, he has learned that many Americans are ignorant and rude. People from other cultures seem to act more appropriately and are more respectful. Through teaching students with various backgrounds, he has learned that most foreigners know about and can relate to the culture of music, so this is something that is a world-wide phenomenon. For language, he has learned that Americans talk very fast and when he talks to his students, he makes a conscious effort to speak slowly.

**Lillian**

Lillian is a 32-year-old white female with 10 years of teaching experience, but she currently does not have ESL students in her class. From taking the courses, she mentions some of the things she learned about language and culture. She states that when she learned about the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in her Linguistics class, she also learned a great deal about her own language when she did the readings and class assignments. She learned that English is made up of a lot of multi-faceted components and that Americans are so diverse. She continues to state that people are so engrossed with the culture that surrounds them that they do not really spend a lot of time in the day
thinking about how many people are American citizens who come to the country with their own culture.

**Introduction to the Findings**

The findings are organized around two primary areas, namely: what the participants learned within the context of the program; and the dimensions and limitations of transformative learning. The main findings in regard to what the participants learned within the context of the program are: negotiating the online learning environment and the disorientation in the English Language Structure course. The findings related to the possible dimensions of transformative learning center on: a deeper understanding of language and culture; and the communicative dimensions of learning. In addition, there was limited use of creative and metaphorical ways of knowing. Each of these areas have subthemes. A data display appears on the next page, and the findings are described in the pages that follow.
DATA DISPLAY

I. Learning in Context

A. Negotiating the Online Learning Environment
   1. Managing time
   2. Valuing camaraderie and collaboration
   3. Gaining practical teaching experiences

B. The Disorientation of the English Language Structure Course
   1. Finding benefit and satisfaction in the challenge
   2. Some dimensions over peoples’ heads
   3. Realizing understanding requires more time

II. Findings Relating to Possible Dimensions of Transformative Learning

A. Deeper Understanding of Language and Culture
   1. Reflecting on their own background and context
   2. Attending to the individual cultures of their students
   3. Empathizing with ESL students in light of online learning
   4. Significant cultural learning from ESL students

B. Highlighting Communicative Dimensions of Teaching and Learning
   1. Building relationships with families
   2. Communicating through advocacy
   3. Learning through dialogue

C. Limited Dimensions of Artistic and Metaphorical Ways of Knowing
   1. Symbols relating to the world
   2. Food Metaphors
   3. Metaphors with emotion from experiences with their own students
Findings Related to Learning in Context

In order to better understand the learning process of ESL teachers, it is important to describe the online learning component of the ESL program. In order to obtain their ESL certificate, learners must complete an online program that consists of six courses: Foundations of Teaching English as a Second Language, English Language Structure, Language Acquisition, Teaching Methods and Assessment, ESL Leadership, Research, and Advocacy, and an Internship. Most of these courses are completed online; however, there is a small component that requires students to work with ESL students in a face-to-face setting. The two main findings in regard to what they learned within the context center around: negotiating the online learning environment itself, and the disorientation in the English Language Structure course.

Negotiating the Online Learning Environment

One important aspect of the ESL program specialist certificate that was used in this study is that most of the coursework is completed online. Thus, the first finding centers around their learning to negotiate the online learning environment, which was quite foreign to most of these particular participants. For example, April states that: “I think I was a little bit nervous about how that [online learning] kind of all works, what I would actually get out of it.” She continues to admit: “That was the first one [online class] I took so I was definitely a little apprehensive about taking a class online. I’d never done it before.” Similarly, Farrah says that: “I remember at first it seemed a little bit overwhelming just because it was the first online class for me personally. But then there was also probably a learning curve on my end of adjusting to online learning as well.” Anna also mentions that: “I’m a very hands-on auditorial learner, and I need to be
there in presence. It’s easier for me to interact with my students and the professor versus doing it on a computer.”

Overall, the participants had some eye-opening experiences with negotiating the online learning environment of the classes. Within that learning environment, they also were faced with a number of both positive and negative challenges to overcome, though they did adapt over time. Some of the positive experiences the participants discussed were the teaching strategies that they could also use in their own classroom. Some also mentioned that the camaraderie and collaboration with the other students was something that kept them going for the remainder of their classes. Each of the subthemes for this section are discussed below. They are: managing time, valuing camaraderie and collaboration, and gaining practical teaching experiences.

**Managing time.** While it seems as though some of the participants in this study were somewhat concerned and worried about how to negotiate the online learning environment, once they were able to figure out the time management piece of it all, they really learned how to navigate the system and learn more about ESL students in the process. For example, April mentions that:

> I was pleasantly surprised that with setting a timeline and completing things on time really helped…so, once I got a schedule together and the time management skills down, I was able to be successful at learning in the online class.

Similarly, in discussing her learning experiences in taking an online class, Alison mentions that:

> Well, oddly enough I learned that I can take an online class and that you have to be disciplined to do the work on your own. It’s a little more independent, so I
learned to pace myself and that I can do things without sitting in a classroom and more on my own.

To mirror on Alison’s statement, Ian also admits that:

I surprised myself…I did a lot of stuff ahead of time. I usually procrastinate and try to get it [the work] done at the last minute. But, for the most of the work that I completed throughout the program, I worked ahead of schedule.

In discussing her thoughts about what she learned about herself as a learner, Farrah said:

Through an online program particularly, I learned that it was almost really important that you had to be strategic about making time to read those postings of your peers and to really, really make the learning very personal. Because I’m so used to being in a classroom setting where you gain so much from the dialogue that you have back and forth with the other peers. In this type of setting you have to make that a priority and you have to really spend the time, invest the time to get the same thing out of it.

Participants were also asked if the found anything challenging within program. In the next example, Jennifer was talking about the one class where she had to do a research project. In this class, she had submit a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to continue with her research. She mentioned that:

Of course the research part was tedious, but that’s expected. Trying to be very specific about who you know, the people, or the numbers and the timeline and stuff…but, that was expected. It was more time-consuming and tedious than it was challenging. To deal with that, I did the best I could at that moment in time.
Kevin also talked about an experience in the program that was challenging to him. He mentioned that:

The time commitment and even though it wasn’t really mental, the second to last semester it seemed like the reading was much more intense. It was just kind of challenging to balance that student-life to the professional life and having a life on top of that. In order to deal with it, I had some long nights, I guess!

Part of the research was looking at the learning experiences that the participants had in the program and asking them if any of these experiences helped to further define who they are as teachers. Lillian admits that:

The whole thing really helped me to manage my time online and check the posts and our assignments throughout the week rather than just show up at a class and have everything done for that one particular class. It was kind of an on-going weekly check-in.

Valuing camaraderie and collaboration. Students came to value the camaraderie and collaboration that was the result of having to participate in online discussions. Within each course of the program, the students are obligated to participate in weekly online discussion forums. Here, they need to go online and respond to a question that the professor posts then they need to read what other students have written and respond to one of their peers. April said:

It was nice to have the discussion with the other students in the class and even gain ideas from them also…when something becomes difficult or challenging, I find it most beneficial to talk things through with someone…You’re not in a classroom with the other students there guiding you along, but still I felt the
connection, I think, with the other students because of the discussions and things like that. And, definitely from the interactions with the teacher just kind of guiding us and helping us along with that…I was worried that maybe I wouldn’t necessarily get as much out of the online classes that I would in a traditional classroom setting, but I really felt like I really truly got a lot out of it. I think it causes you to reflect even more on things.

Jessica also mentions that:

I really enjoyed being able to talk to other teachers and peers, people who were working through the program with me. Through the discussion boards and email, they’ve been a great resource to me throughout my teaching. So, collaboration with students and professors was the biggest learning experience…collaborating with my peers has increased my willingness to work with adults in my building and just gave me better tools to collaborate.

Ian spoke specifically about the online discussion forums, and in discussing his thoughts, he states:

In each discussion forum I would read a lot of things that I was going over and thinking and answering that was similar to theirs [his peers]. So I felt relief like I’m not out there on an island by myself, thinking all of this by myself. Other students, when you read their forums, you see what they’re reading and there is commonality there. We’re in the same area of thought. So, once I read a couple of those, I thought that this isn’t going to be that difficult. I was on the same page and even if something that I wrote was a little different, there was commonality throughout the questioning to my discussion with my other colleagues.
After talking a little more about his experiences in the program, Ian goes on to say that he had a difficult time with one of the activities. To overcome this issue, he: “kept going through and working through it. I made some contact to the teacher that I had for that and he reassured me that everything is fine, you’re doing great and I made it through.” To highlight Ian’s comment, Lillian also had the same kinds of issues with a certain activity. To overcome her challenge, she admits that, “I remember emailing a lot with my instructors at the moment and once I could understand why we were doing it [completing a form] it made it connect to me a little better, but it still was very challenging.”

In another example, Jennifer mentions that she had a difficult time understanding the Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTII) activity that she had to do within one of the courses. RTII refers to a standards-aligned, multi-tiered system of support for implementing learning standards in Pennsylvania’s schools. The activity that she describes below was meant to help the participants in understanding how each of the tiers in an RTII model can be used as a way to differentiate instruction for all students, including ESL students. She describes that she needed to show how instruction for ESL students could be differentiated within each of the three tiers of the RTII model. She says that:

The RTI model was really difficult for me to understand…I think one of the assignments were to make a mock run of three students in various stages of RTI and I didn’t do well on that. I think it helped me realize I didn’t do a very good job. To overcome this, I might have asked another student in the program [for help] and we would talk a lot about the stuff…I would also communicate with the
professor and he gave me a chance to revise and resubmit the assignment. Then I got a better grade.

The ESL endorsement program consists of cohorts of students that progress through the courses as a group. This model of learning assists in making collaboration and camaraderie essential components of the program. In talking about the collaboration of the other students in her cohort, Farrah also says that she appreciated:

Hearing what other students [in her cohort] were doing and what their ideas were, just that collaborative piece…I felt like a lot of people had great ideas that maybe I hadn’t considered. So, it was nice to have that opportunity to learn and share.

On a related note, Jessica also says that: “I really enjoyed being able to talk to other teachers and peers, people who were working through the program with me. Discussion boards and email and they’ve been a great resource to me throughout my teaching.” She goes on to mention that: “Collaborating with my peers has increased my willingness to work with adults in my building. It [the program] gave me better tools to collaborate.”

While it seemed like most of the students enjoyed the communication within the discussion forums, Lillian mentions that:

Instead of answering a post and writing a post and then answering a classmate’s post, it seemed like once we made those posts, we never got to continue the discussion. It was just like once and done. So, for me, as a teacher, I would want to make sure that we would have a discussion [with her students] so that we could go back and forth several times, if necessary.
Lillian also goes on to mention that she had a challenging activity within the program and to overcome this challenge, she would email the professor to get some answers.

However, she says that:

I would email my professor and then that always brought up frustrations because I couldn’t just talk to the professor, I had to always go through email and that was frustrating for some of the personal input... In the email, I’d ask the question and then a day later get a response and I’d have to write another question. Then two days later, I’d get that response. It’s just the nature of emailing.

**Gaining practical teaching experiences.** Participants seemed to really enjoy all of the strategies that they learned within the program, and spoke specifically of learning practical teaching strategies that they could apply in their classes. These are things that they can also use when they teach their own ESL students. April admits that she: “had a wonderful experience with the ESL program. There were a lot of very practical things that I learned that I could use directly in my classroom.” She continues to mention that she took the strategies that she learned from the ESL program and applied them into her own classroom. Further, the

Collaboration with the other students in the classroom [ESL online program] really helped further my instruction [of her ESL students]... I definitely applied a lot of the strategies that we learned in the classroom. Just taking those strategies that we learned and immediately applying them with the students in the classroom. It was beneficial having the ESL students in my classroom because I immediately got to take what we were learning and apply those strategies to
figure out what worked and what didn’t and then go back and try something else if it didn’t work.

Alicia also admits that:

I was able to use the information, not just with ESL students, but with even other students that would need support…The different strategies, the accommodations, and all the different things I learned in the ESL program helped me in my classroom because I not only have ESL students but students from many varying backgrounds and a lot of lower poverty students and students who just don’t have as many experiences as others. I think it helped me as a teacher because I was able to meet so many students’ needs and not just my ELL students. They definitely needed it, of course, but within me providing that to them, the other students gained more learning too. So, it was really helpful to just my whole classroom of learners.

Ian also says that: “it was very informative and it brought to light some things that I didn’t consider when teaching students. It brought some additional strategies that helped me with my low reading students that I teach currently.” When asking him about a significant learning experience, he said he enjoyed: “the additional strategies that we went through in one of the cohorts just different techniques, especially the reading strategies they gave us.” He further states that:

I use word walls now consistently. That was on my research [from the ESL program]. It does help the students, not a whole lot, but it does help them enough that I see and it increases their acquisition of vocabulary. I used the reading strategies and we do like to write. I do have the students write a lot. It’s not
always content writing just writing about things like, ‘Hey what did you do this past weekend? You have three minutes to write down a couple sentences about what you did the past weekend and then we’ll share amongst the class.’ The class that I teach now has students that come from various backgrounds and various economic backgrounds, so when I read their papers out like, I don’t say names or anything like that, I’ll just read them out loud and the kids will say, ‘hey I did something like that, who did that?’ And some other kids will say, ‘Yeah, that was me, oh I did that, I was there that weekend, I went there this weekend too!’ Kids will go camping or fishing or go to the beach because we’re only a few miles from the ocean down here so we get a lot of that. It brings an environment into the classroom where the students can relate to one another. They see what kids’ lives are like. A lot of times kids will go see the football game because football is pretty big here. And a lot of them will get into a five minute discussion on, ‘What was the problem in the football game last week?’ Doing things like this, they learn through the ESL program and it helps the environment of the classroom where the kids can relate to one another…it’s not just the learning environment but it’s a comfortable place where they can be relaxed and talk about things that are important to them without thinking that they’re going to be chastised or anything like that.

In talking about learning experience that helped her further define who she is as a teacher, Anna says that: “I think learning about the different types of services that are out there and those types of things and the different types of accommodations that can be made. I’ve even sometimes gone back to them or thought about them when I’m
interacting with the students.” She also discusses the different ways in which she applied what she learned into the ESL program into her own practice. She mentions that:

I had one student, well, my two students are ESL learners and one student is at a different proficiency level than the girl. The girl has many more language barriers and my other student will every now and then ask what a word means. But besides that, he speaks Spanish at home, but his background is much more broad than my other student. My other student, she came here from the Dominican and she is still grasping the language. I fear, though, that my experiences, maybe even my teaching, reading experiences, and just how they learn languages from the very basic (what the letter sounds like)-those types of things is what I have put into place the most. When they are taking an assessment or doing something like that, I’m very, very very aware of the language that I’m using or when I’m trying to explain something, I’ll try not to confuse them. I learned these accommodations through the ESL program.

When talking about a learning experience in the program, Kevin talks about one of the research projects in his last class and mentions that: “the research showed me a lot of different strategies and I still use a lot of those today that I picked up while I was doing the research.” He also admits that:

One of the other things that we had to do that really stuck out to me was the morphology. I don’t even remember what semester it was but we just learned about how we say words and that kind of stuff. I use that all of the time. Many of my students, not only are they ESL, but they come from languages that are unlike English so they won’t make the same sounds that ours do. And, my tongue
doesn’t make the same sound that theirs do. So, the morphology semester, I use that all of the time and to help us pronounce different words. For example, many of my students were from Nepal and they don’t have the /th/ sound in their language. So, when we’re doing a unit on government, to say a word like oath like to give an oath to something, they can’t make that sound and it comes out oat. So, they just don’t know how to do it. It took me a good solid week of having the kids try to say this word over and over and over again. And, trying to explain to them how they needed to move their tongue and where they needed to push the air from and that kind of stuff in order to be able to say it correctly. They don’t have the /v/ sound in their language so vote comes out as boat. Every /v/ is a /b/ sound. So, instead of saying Shiva (I had a girl in the class named Shiva) and all her friends call her Shiba. So they don’t have that sound. And, my Arabic students, there’s a ton of words that are very difficult for them to make the sounds because they’re not used to making their tongues do that sort of stuff. So, yes, the linguistics class was very helpful to me.

There was another aspect that most of the participants mentioned were both positively and negatively challenging for them: the online learning within the second course of the program. This will be described in the following section.

The Disorientation in the English Language Structure Course

The participants overwhelmingly discussed the required linguistics course titled “English Language Structure” as very learning intensive, and being somewhat disorienting. It relies heavily on the textbook and online portions of learning and it presented both positive and negative challenges to the participants in this study, noted in
the subthemes. They are: finding benefit and satisfaction in the challenge, some
dimensions over peoples’ heads, and realizing understanding requires more time.

**Finding benefit and satisfaction in the challenge.** In spite of the difficulty of the
course, the participants found both benefit and satisfaction in the challenge. As some of
the students mentioned, the Linguistics class presented to be a very positive experience
for them. Cathy says that:

> It was a real challenge and I really had to study it a lot to learn it. But, I thought it
> was really valuable…it gave me that overview of something I had never
> encountered…it was significant in that I’ve been able to use the information that I
> learned.

To mirror Cathy’s statement, Jennifer also depicts this class as:

> The most difficult and tedious class, but I think it was one of my favorites because
> it was so academic. I had never experienced that part of Linguistics before. It
> was really academic and the other ones [classes] were a lot of strategies and stuff,
> so it was really different. I felt like I was taking a theory class again, which is
> kind of interesting. But then, on the flipside, it also helped and had practical
> applications to culture and linguistics and how people speak and the science of
> speakers’ mouths. And how we pick up certain codings and different things like
> that.

In talking about one activity in the Linguistics class, Ian mentions that: “we had to listen
to the interview…and just to hear the differences in the speech and breaking down and
translating that interview, I really enjoyed doing that.”
**Some dimensions over peoples’ heads.** On the other hand, many of the students felt that the Linguistics class was extremely challenging and were very vocal in their interviews about it. While Cathy saw the course as a positive challenge overall, she also had a few negative challenges for this particular class. She said: “the book itself was very technical and involved. It wasn’t like an overview of linguistics, it was very detailed. It was interesting and challenging, but I thought the book itself was a little above where I was at.” Alison also admits that:

I thought the Linguistics course was a little difficult and I wasn’t clear on how the background on that is important. I didn’t make a clear connection to that with students who are learning how to speak English. For me, that’s just an area that I’m not very familiar with and so I felt like I had to work a lot harder to get through the text and sort of muddle through some of that. While it was interesting, it was a little more challenging for me.

Farrah also mentions that:

The linguistics class online had its own set of challenges. I think that the professor did the best that he could, given that it was an online format, but I just feel like the topic doesn’t really lend itself very well to online instruction because there’s so much with linguistics that you have to hear and experience (where the tongue placement is) so I think that made that particular class more challenging.

When asked about the learning experiences that were challenging, Joe mentions: “It [Linguistics] was confusing to me. I felt like that was more of a speech and language course as opposed to just ESL… it was overwhelming to me, it was out of my realm of comfort.”
**Realizing understanding requires more time.** While the Linguistics class presented both positive and negative challenges, many students expressed the ways in which they overcame these challenges. Cathy said to overcome her challenge, she explains:

I had to do a little bit of online reading then really study the book. I had to write out the definitions and go over them…I tended to keep a notebook when I studied something…I tried to make it easier for myself. I’d feel like sometimes I was rewriting the book…it helped me study. I would take a really difficult chapter and summarize it, paraphrase it, write out definitions, simplify it and draw pictures. I would draw when it was like, ‘How do you pronounce this? What part of the tongue?’ those kinds of things where you could draw a picture and then put the sounds next to it.

There were other participants who also stated that the Linguistics class presented them with many challenges. Alison says that: “I just spent more time with the material; I couldn’t just read through it, I had to break it into small chunks and read through it several time. It just took a little bit longer.” Joe also said that he “studied harder and practiced. I tried to memorize where different sounds come from in the mouth, how to position the tongue and lips and things like that.”

This Linguistics course deals a lot with language, but within the ESL program, both language and culture are important components. The next section will explore the possible dimensions of transformative learning they experienced, including developing a deeper understanding of language and culture.

*Findings Relating to Possible Dimensions of Transformative Learning*
As discussed in Chapter Two, transformative learning theory was the theoretical lens for this research because it centers on critical reflection and making meaning by drawing on multiple domains of learning which has potential for changing how ESL teachers might define themselves and others, as well as their own practices, after going through an ESL certification program.

Transformative learning presents many possibilities for teaching with ESL educators and can help them make connections between prior and present experiences. Yet, it is difficult to determine if people actually had a transformative learning experience. However, in the following portion of the chapter, the participants did have moments of learning that might have transformative dimensions. These centered around: developing deeper understanding of language and culture and highlighting communicative dimensions of teaching and learning. In addition there were limitations to the transformative learning that came from metaphorical and artistic ways of knowing.

**Deeper Understanding of Language and Culture**

Participants were asked about the most important thing that they learned about language and culture in general while going through the ESL program. Some mentioned that the readings and discussions from the classes made them reflect on their own cultures, which in turn, helped them to value and respect their own ESL students and the cultures they bring with them to the classroom. Further, most also admit that as teachers and learners themselves, they need to make more of an effort to be accepting of different cultures and to make connections with their students to build rapport. Participants also discussed how they empathized with their ESL students in light of the online learning of the program. Thus, the sections that follow will be: reflecting on their own background
and context, attending to the individual cultures of their students, empathizing with ESL students in light of online learning, and significant cultural learning from ESL students.

Reflecting on their own background and context. Reflecting on their own background was part of the program, and the participants did refer to the importance of doing so, but they didn’t necessarily directly refer to cultural issues in doing so. Rather, some did this in the most general of ways. For example, in talking about what she learned about language and culture, Alicia says: “I learned to appreciate where I come from and just everything about my family and myself.” Moreover, April also says that “it [the classes] made me reflect about my family…and it makes you think about what challenges these kids [her ESL students] face and how they need our support and things to overcome that boundary.” Similarly, Farrah also mentioned:

I found that looking at myself as a teacher and administrator and reflecting on it like the learning that I had [in the online program] was beneficial just to solidify some of those thoughts and ideas that I had going through the program. So, reflection was a really big piece for me.

Alison also discusses the most important thing that she learned about her own culture. She shares that:

We don’t really think of what we do as being ethnic or as a certain culture, but when you look at the scope of even just our country, you know, we do have our own dialect here, that we do have a unique culture here, you know, but to us, since we’re so complacent, it just made me realize that yes, we do have an accent, yes we talk with a dialect, you know we did that whole thing on even the variations of
English spoken just in Pennsylvania so it just opens your eyes to that this is unique, and it’s not just that other places are different, we’re different as well.

In these examples, it is clear that participants are speaking about culture only in a very general way, really without using the term “culture” or specifically examining dimensions of culture with any real depth. This may be because I didn’t ask them about specific dimensions of culture, and rather asked a general question, which in many instances resulted in a very general answer. Some did speak more directly though about the cultures of their students.

**Attending to the individual cultures of their students.** The participants did however refer to attending to the cultures of their students who may have different beliefs and backgrounds, but tended to focus on the students as individuals from different cultural backgrounds, rather than exploring any group or structural issues related to culture. Alicia, for example, says that she learned: “to respect other people who do not share the same beliefs as I do.” In a similar sense, Joe also believes that: “there is no right or wrong culture…respect everybody’s beliefs and ways…Even though we are different, we’re the same!” In discussing her cultural awareness, April mentions that: “it’s just getting to know your students, asking them questions…and getting to know the students on a personal level, just getting to know the families helps understand where these students are coming from and what their experiences are.”

In talking about how the ESL program helped him to learn about language and culture, Ian says:

It helped me to be patient, let them [his students] value their cultures…you have to introduce the U.S. culture and how we do things, but you got to let them still
retain their culture. As time goes on, they’ll start dropping some things from their culture and assimilate new things from our culture.

As she was discussing the most important thing she learned about teaching students whose language and culture are different from hers, Alison says: “each one is unique and special in their own way and to learn as much as you can because it just gives you a better understanding of that student.” Cathy mirrors this statement by saying: “I think it’s getting to know my students…a little bit more beyond teacher-student.”

Further, Anna suggests:

You need to be aware and open to different cultures and different rules and different ways of doing things. I think that as a teacher, you need to be very cognizant about those things. You need to be understanding…I ask lots of questions. I want to learn about their cultures and I want to be interested in their customs and their religion. Things like that that are different than mine. I think that in order to make a connection with your students, you need to be interested in what their life is.

Farrah was in discussing her first year as a teacher as a way to describe how she became culturally and linguistically aware of her diverse population of learners. She says that:

When I first started my career, the community was very agricultural and more and more they were bringing in migrant workers to assist with that. So, I was becoming more aware because I had to be. There were more and more of those [migrant] students who were being placed in my classroom and I wanted my
classroom to be a welcoming lace for them and I wanted to be able to be the best teacher I could for them, so I had to evolve as an instructor.

Jennifer was also discussing how she learned to be culturally and linguistically aware of her students. She mentions that: “It’s so important to get to know your students. It’s so important to make a connection.” Jessica also discusses her thoughts about culture and she says that we need to be: “more open and accepting and friendly, not judgmental…getting to know people from different cultures is really exciting and fascinating.”

In turn, the participants valued their individual student’s cultural context, but they did not discuss any specific structural issues, oppression, or privilege around culture.

**Empathizing with ESL students in light of online learning.** To some extent, the online learning environment is its own cultural environment that can promote critical reflection, building relationships, support, and discourse. But, it is an environment that may have assisted in developing empathy for ESL students. As previously stated, online learning was a challenge to some of the participants in the study, and some of the participants drew an analogy between the foreign nature of their online learning experience and what their ESL students likely experience when learning ESL; it seemed to promote some sense of empathy. For example, Lillian was discussing the experiences that she had with time management and meeting deadlines within the ESL endorsement program. When she was asked if these were skills that she took from the program and applied them to her teaching career, Lillian stated, “If anything, I would say I developed more empathy for my students because they have a lot going on in their lives and for me to remember that my class [the class she teaches] is not the only one that they have to
focus on.” Lillian later on discusses the important things that she learned about teaching students whose language and culture were different from her own culture. She says,

I think with my Spanish background, I’ve always really loved teaching students that were different from me, because it’s a huge learning opportunity for everybody in the room. But even more so, with some of the students who would be a minority group, I definitely realized that some of the ways that they speak was probably not from being poorly educated, as from the culture that they were a part of. It was more of gaining an empathy for my students. For example, I remember a couple years ago before I entered the ESL program, I had a student who had behavior problems in school, and he happened to be African-American, but I remember sitting in team meetings with everybody and the parents, and their language was AAVE [African American Vernacular English] and at the time (even being extremely open minded and trying to understand where they were coming from), I think once I took the class, (especially when I was reading all the literature and information about that subject) my immediate memory went back to that student, and that whole year working with that student and his family. Even though that had been several years prior, when I took the course, and we were going through it…a lot of my posts that I put on Angel always had my experience with that student in mind.

Jennifer also mentioned the empathy that she had with ESL students in terms of her linguistic privilege she has of knowing how to speak English. She states,

It requires me to be very self-reflective and to section my teaching in to the speaking, listening, reading and writing components and then to also have some
empathy with the students and not taking things for granted. For example, that I know this [word in English] and you should know this too. And, we don’t share these common experiences.

For some participants, the ESL program was the first encounter that they had with a program that was completely online. This proved to be an unfamiliar territory for them and they compared it to second language learning. For example, after going through this online program, Cathy mentions that: “Having the experience of taking quizzes online, writing papers online, meeting deadlines and having quantities of material to read myself, then I’m able to put myself in my students’ shoes a little bit more, having experienced what they’re experiencing.” Cathy later talks about what defines her as a teacher and she said:

Having a little bit of exposure to other cultures (because of some of the readings we did in the class that had to do with cultures) helped me with understanding my students. I think it makes me more accepting of where students are coming from and that they come from all different countries and different economic situations, different lifestyles, different family situations and some people lived by themselves. So, I think it made me a little more compassionate and aware that there’s a student sitting in a desk, so to speak.

Ian also saw his experience in an online environment being analogous to what his students might experience, and states:

One thing I liked about the program was (which I surprised myself too because I really don’t like putting things down for others to read) when we had to do the discussion forums where you had to talk about what you did. But, then you had to
respond to someone else’s and it was kind of interesting because I kind of felt like an ESL student myself because I don’t know what the other colleagues of mine are saying. ‘Am I thinking close to what they’re thinking?’

As the findings of the study show, some of the students were apprehensive in taking an online course. Yet, they seemed to shed light on this online learning environment by empathizing with what their students go through as they learn English as a second language.

**Significant cultural learning from ESL students.** Several of the participants discussed significant learning from ESL students and resultant satisfaction for themselves that seemed to be meaningful cultural learning experiences for them. Joe, for example, told the following touching story about one student that helped him make the choice to go into ESL and explains:

> I got an email yesterday from a girl that I had two years ago and she came from Hungary. She didn’t know anything and I worked with her. She was the one who really made me go in the [ESL] program. She was very touching to be because I’ve had many ESL kids and she just really stuck out. She was here illegally, I guess and so her parents had to take her out of the country. She went away for Thanksgiving to go visit a family member and never came back. So, it has been two years and she’s still staying in contact. So, obviously, I did something within the 8 months that she was here. She still writes emails and tells me how much she misses me. She wishes she was back here with me and things like that, so that’s kind of heartwarming. She still sends me emails on how much she misses school and me and wants to come back. So, I felt like I really got through to her, I made
an impact because she’s still sending emails across the country just to me and that’s cool.

While Joe’s experience with this particular student was very intense and significant to him, April also discusses a cultural experience that she had with one of her students that just came to her school from another country. This student did not have formal schooling, but April admits that even though he did not speak much English, she learned a great deal from him. She says:

This student came to our school not knowing how to hold a pencil or use scissors. So, I was going back and reflecting on my experience and things that I’ve learned and trying to remember that this child had no formal schooling before they came to us. That was a significant experience that I never truly thought I was going to experience, but I learned so much from that student. It was amazing how much he ended up learning just from being immersed in the language and talking to his peers and things like that.

**Highlighting Communicative Dimensions of Teaching and Learning**

Throughout the interviews, participants were asked to discuss any significant learning experiences with students or families and they were also asked to tell a positive story about them. These communicative dimensions of learning focused on the communication of: building relationships with families, communicating through advocacy, and learning through dialogue.

**Building relationships with families.** Several of the participants emphasized the importance of communicating and building relationships with families.

April mentions that:
I think that communication was one of the things that was most difficult for me. I didn’t realize how many students went home to families that didn’t speak any English. Communicating with those families was sometimes a challenge. So, I think that was truly eye-opening to me. We had a lot of wonderful, wonderful families but I think their comfort level of communicating with the school is hard when you speak in a different language. I think they feel like one they’ve made that connection with a teacher they can truly communicate with the school. I think it takes a little bit to build that connection with and we were really able to do that with some of our families this year. It’s amazing how much you learn from them and when they just start opening up and sharing things about their culture and experiences with you.

Similarly, Jennifer also discusses a time when her twelfth grader had just graduated and highlighted communicating and building relationships with the student’s family. She says:

This student had a very low IQ, but was very sweet and helpful. I was very close with her parents and I would email with them every other day about something that was going on either positive, negative, or just anything at all. We had a really close connection. They realized I really cared about their daughter and I also had their son too (who was younger). She even wrote something about me in a journal. We worked really hard because this was her last year in school….we worked a lot on almost life skills stuff. I think that was a really meaningful experience last year. I got a really nice email at the end of the year from her parents. It was really cool. It said, “Thank you for taking the time. You’ve
shown time and time again that you care about both our kids.” They were really really thankful.

In discussing a positive story about one of her students and their family, Alison emphasized that one of the most important things as a teacher is to build relationships with the families. She mentions that she had most of the children in this family in her classroom over time and now they recognize her even at public places like WalMart. She says:

They recognize me just from seeing each other over and over and you really build nice relationships with these families because they may have a number of children and you work with all those children because if you work with ESL kids, you work with those same families over and over through years. I just think it just builds nice relationships when you work with the same people for a long stretch of time.

**Communicating through advocacy.** Another dimension of communicative learning that participants discussed was the ways of communicating that focus on advocacy for the students, which means that the ESL teachers have found ways to break through barriers that limit student success. Anna mentions that: “The biggest learning experiences is how you are the liaison to things in life and that you are aware of things that they [the students] aren’t. We helped my one student get an art scholarship and her parents wouldn’t have the resources or even know how to fill the paperwork out to do those kinds of things.

Ian discusses a time when he had a new student for about a half of the school year. He talked about how this student was able to speak English very well and in her previous
country she had graduated high school, but her age was quite younger than a typical senior in high school. She was trying to take classes to become a nurse, but she did not have papers from her country to show that she had actually graduated. He described how he advocated for the student:

Unless she had her papers, she couldn’t move up because he had to be with the ninth and tenth graders. She was concerned about that and she was upset. So, her advisor and I met with her parents and a translator provided by the school and talked about it. They said, “Yeah, we’re missing papers that the school can’t find.” What I did was (I kind of surprised myself that I did it but) I ended up calling St. Vincent Health Center (that’s a hospital) and seeing if they had any nursing programs (because that’s where this girl wanted to be). They said, “Well, once she takes her test to show where she’s at academically, then things will be okay.” But right now, she was in my class and I gave the nurse the information for the nurse training program and she got in contact back with me. I gave her all the contact information on this girl after I called the parents and the advisor and we sat down and talked to her parents and said, ‘This stuff is coming to you and if you need a translator than she can help read this.’ I basically got her started in the nursing program as an intern to start and then I haven’t kept up in contact with her but that was three years ago, so I’m going to assume that she did well enough on her test. She was a very bright girl and she was very smart. She spoke English very well…So that’s one thing I’m proud of. Just that she was interested in what she wanted to be and I helped her get the information to get her into the internship.
Kevin discusses a positive experience that one could frame as advocacy. He had students that were musically inclined and since there was a talent show coming up, he pushed for them to try out for it. He mentions that:

They were pretty musically inclined. The one girl had a beautiful singing voice and her brother played guitar and he could sing pretty well too...the boy was like, ‘I don’t have my guitar anymore, I don’t have one anymore.’” And I had one and I let him borrow it and he ended up taking third place. His sister ended up taking first place in singing a country song in the middle of an urban school! I just thought that was awesome!

**Learning through dialogue.** A final way that students highlighted the communicative dimensions of teaching and learning was through dialogical learning in the courses themselves. We saw some examples of that above in considering how they negotiated the online learning environment. But participants also discussed how the online dialogue and discussion may have enhanced their thinking about issues. Farrah discussed what she learned about herself as a learner. She admits that:

I’m so used to being in a classroom setting where you gain so much from the dialogue that you have back and forth with other peers. In this type of setting, you have to make that a priority and you have to really spend the time, invest the time, to get the same thing out of it.

April also mentions that, “It was nice to have the discussions with the other students in the class and even gain ideas from them also.” She continues to discuss her experiences of online learning and communicating with other peers:
When you are online, you are not in a classroom with the other students guiding you along, but I still felt that connection with the other students because of the discussions and things like that, but definitely from the interactions with the teacher just kind of guiding us and helping us along with that.

Farrah also discusses her experiences with the collaborative piece in the ESL program. She says that, “I felt like a lot of people [in my cohort] had great ideas that maybe I hadn’t considered so it was nice to have that opportunity to learn and share.” Jessica also mirrors her statement when she says that:

I enjoyed being able to talk to other teachers and peers, people who were working through the program with me. The discussion boards and email have been a great resource to me throughout my teaching. So, collaboration with students and professors were the biggest learning experience I had.

**Limited Dimensions of Artistic and Metaphorical Ways of Knowing**

I specifically asked the students to bring in an artifact, or create one that might serve as a metaphor that described their experience of teaching and learning in the ESL program. This was relevant to understanding the online experience of learning ESL because it added another dimension to the interview and it served as a tool for students to express themselves in a different way. While this question or exercise was somewhat confusing for most participants, and seemed to be outside of the range of what they are expected to do as learners or teachers, each person was able to come up with a type of artifact as metaphor that encapsulated aspects of their teaching and learning experiences. The findings of the descriptions of their metaphors were divided into subthemes: symbols relating to the world; food metaphors; and metaphors related to their experiences with
their own students. It appears that only the metaphors related to their experiences with their own students relate to transformative learning.

**Symbols relating to the world.** In this section, there were two students who chose a metaphor or symbol that focused on figures from the world. In the first example, Joe discusses his neck tie that had different pictures of world flags on it. He describes the reasons for choosing this as a metaphor:

I wanted to choose something that just embodied the fact that we are not just secluded in America and that everybody’s going to be here, like the melting pot. And with ESL it is going to be exposed to kids throughout the world and every kid is going to confront different challenges and I can’t learn every language…but I like the tie! I was wearing it when I got hired, when I got my ESL job!

In the next example, Lillian discusses her metaphor as a globe and what she sees when she looks at the globe. She says:

Having the perspective that we live in a global community and a global society and people are going to be coming in and out of our lives that are from different backgrounds and cultures. I think that the diversity in culture encompasses what I see when I look at the globe.

While both of these are examples of use of metaphor or symbolic expression, they are not necessarily indicators of transformative learning in any tangible way.

**Food metaphors.** Four of the participants used food as a metaphor for describing their teaching and learning experiences. As mentioned above in the previous section, Joe discusses his neck-tie, but he also makes reference to food within the same metaphorical
representation. After discussing his tie, he also suggests that teaching ESL is like teaching abroad daily and that it’s as fun as pie. He mentions that:

It’s as rewarding as a regular classroom, but when these kids get something, they have overcome more to do it and they have larger barriers in front of them. They have higher obstacles and hurdles to jump over. It’s actually a life skill. If an English-speaking kid can memorize all the states, good for him. Is that really practical in life? It will help you maybe in a job if you’re lucky, but a little 4th grade girl just straight from China is just learning the names of her peers and doing sight words and starting to read, that’s the key! That’s a life skill she’s going to need and I like that challenge. It’s as fun as pie! Peanut butter pie! But, I mean, that’s something that she’s going to need in life. It isn’t, I would say, trivial, but she’s going to have those building blocks as a foundation to do anything. And, I’m responsible for that. So it’s a huge responsibility and I like to see the feedback that they get when they are getting it. I’m doing something successful!

Alison also talks about food, and uses a can of soup for her metaphor. In describing how it relates to her teaching and learning experiences, she notes:

It just made me think of our school in general because our school is very diverse and we do have a large number of ESL students. If I’m looking for a metaphor, I could use the same can of soup as a metaphor for the coursework too that we did because there’s a lot of different ingredients in this soup and I would say the courses we did were very different and diverse and the soup itself sort of encompasses the whole learning process, the whole ESL experience. So, I would
say I could use the same symbol just in a different way. I was using it as a way to represent the different students and how they are different and the soup sort of encompasses the school in general, how it puts it all together. I would definitely say for the courses, it’s the same thing because there’s a variety of courses you take and the soup sort of encompasses your whole learning, it just sort of encompasses everything.

When asked to describe a metaphor for her teaching and learning experiences, Jennifer picked a potato as her symbol. She mentions that:

You only know so much when you first join the program and then my brain likes to section things and organize things. The potato represents some bud of knowledge and then it grows and it’s kind of unseen at first. But, then whenever you pull them out, that’s when you pull out that knowledge and apply it to the classroom or to an experience with an ELL…With all the potatoes, it is like little nuggets of knowledge and when you pull them out of the ground, you are pulling knowledge and applying it to your classroom…my learning experience would be those potatoes growing in the ground and then my teaching experience would be like pulling them out and pulling that knowledge out and then having it grow again.

Kevin also uses a food metaphor for his teaching and learning experience. He describes:

There is a food, kind of like the national food of Nepal (I found out). The name of the food is called *momos*. They are basically like a dumpling, like a wonton wrapper and it has cabbage and ginger and chilies on the inside and onions. They
just kind of steam them and they eat them. So, it’s like a wonton or any sort of
dumpling from any country. But, the simplicity of that food and the fact that
every country kind of has their own little version of that is really interesting.
Polish people have pierogies and a lot of Asian cultures, they have their
dumplings and the Nepalese, they have momos. It’s all the same food. It just
kind of has a different name. It’s all the same...we may call it something
different but everything’s kind of the same. Like, all the blood is red. And, just
because something looks different on the outside, doesn’t mean that it’s a whole
lot different on the inside.

Just as in the case of the metaphorical use of the symbols of the world in the last
section, the use of food as metaphor might capture aspects of experience but there does
not seem to necessarily be evidence of transformative learning in any tangible way in
these uses of metaphor.

Metaphors with emotion for experiences with own students. Two of the
participants used writings and creations from their own students as metaphors for their
learning, and in doing so they spoke with a good bit of emotion.

Anna, for example describes a journal entry from one of her fourth grade students
as her metaphor of learning. The prompt of this journal entry was, “My Best Year of
Fourth Grade” and Anna describes why this student’s writing was so powerful to her:

I think the reason that it’s so powerful to me was that her [the student’s] growth
came full circle this year. At the beginning of the school year, she was not very
confident in herself and she wasn’t really confident in her own language reading
or reading in English. By the end of the school year, she wrote that she has
confidence in herself and that she can read now and I think that to me, it came full circle for her in both her ELL confidence and in her reading confidence in general. To me, this means that the strategies and the confidence that I helped her build and the strategies that I used (the proper ones) was working and it was the right thing.

The other example comes from Cathy who shares a poetry booklet that two of her classes put together. The title of this poetry book is called, “Where I’m From” and she mentions that it is based on a famous poet from the Appalachian Mountains named George Ella Lyon. She explains why this was a symbol of her teaching and learning experience:

It was one of the most emotional projects that I did with my students…She [George Ella Lyon] does a reading on her website about where she’s from and then for the lesson, I took a template and made all these blanks that they [the students] could fill in and it might be, “Pick something from nature, pick your favorite food, or pick someone you love at home” and then they personalized it from their own country. So we listened to the poem that she [George] read. There was a video that the poem was based on and then we read it out loud and then they wrote their own and they shared them. And, some people just cried as they read them about their home country. Other people cried because they listened to other people read about their home country. It was the most powerful lesson that we did and shared and all of that…the cover of the poetry book, a friend who is an English Comp teacher put it together for me and did the flag. We took pictures and then she put the picture on top of the flag and put the name of the country.
Then, each student that’s on the cover wrote a poem about their home country and it just delves down into the hearts and soul of their lives and it was just very powerful, very emotional and very connecting as well. Very bonding!

It appears that these experiences, the use of their students’ work as metaphor for their own learning, and the emotion they attach to it may indicate that there are transformative dimensions to their learning here. It is important to note that these examples also directly relate to their teaching practice.

In sum, this section focused on some of the creative and metaphorical ways of knowing within the participants’ teaching and learning experiences. While their answers were well thought out and well delivered, they had time to think about their metaphor prior to the actual interview. It is important to note that they did not really discuss specific forms of metaphorical learning relating to the ESL certification program per se; but more generally in relation to their work. But it seems to be that those experiences that promoted the most emotional or bonding experience with their students are those that are potentially transformative.

**Chapter Summary**

Data from this study were gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants who have all been through the ESL endorsement program. The findings of the study are presented in two major sections: (a) learning in context; and (b) the dimensions and limitations of transformative learning.

The first section focused on learning in the ESL online context. The first finding here focuses on how participants negotiated the online learning environment. They highlighted the fact that with time and organizational skills, they were able to manage
their time. While this was one challenge to many of the participants, most of them seemed to enjoy and value the camaraderie and collaboration that they experienced with both the professors and colleagues in their courses. Further, they were able to gain some significant and practical teaching experiences that they could use with their own ESL students. The entire online learning experience helped them to realize that by opening up their perspectives on this new learning experience, they could also see how ESL students may struggle with learning a second language. The second finding focused on the required Language Structure course within the ESL endorsement program, and its pros and cons. They mentioned that while the coursework was very intense and difficult at times, they needed to plan, study, and ask a lot of questions in order to make meaning from this course. While the context of the class seemed to be over people’s heads to some extent, many of the participants admit that they did learn a good bit of information from this class and they will not forget some of the activities that they did during this learning experience.

The second section focused on the possible dimensions of transformative learning, with three main categories of findings focusing on: a deeper understanding of language and culture; highlighting communicative dimensions of teaching and learning; and the limitations of artistic and metaphorical ways of knowing in this context. From a cultural and language perspective, participants reflected back on their own background and context in order to make meaning of their teaching and learning experiences. They also attended to the individual cultures of students, seemed to develop a greater sense of empathy for students, and had some significant cultural learning experiences in light of their relationships with students. The second finding in this section focused on the
communicative dimensions of teaching and learning that highlight aspects of transformative learning. These dimensions were a result of the coursework in the ESL endorsement program, the communication with their professors and colleagues, and with teaching their ESL students, the positive communication and relationships that they had with their students’ families, and in the ways they also became advocates for their own students. The third finding relates to the limitations of metaphorical and creative dimensions of learning. The participants were asked to bring in an artifact to create a metaphor to encapsulate their teaching and learning experiences. While it seemed as though the participants were excited to share their metaphors, it seemed to be a disjointed part of the interview because to many of the participants, this was a new way of expressing themselves, and there appear to be limitations in this context in relation to the extent that the metaphors were reflective of transformative learning. Those metaphors that indicated emotion and connection to their students as expressed by two of the participants might be indicative of transformative learning for them.

Chapter Five will discuss the findings of the study more specifically in relation to the literature that informs the study.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study is to better understand the significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers around the issues of culture and language. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are key significant learning experiences that teachers had in the ESL endorsement program, particularly about issues of language and culture?
2. How have they incorporated the key elements of the ESL endorsement program into their teaching practice?
3. What are the ways that teachers draw on creative and metaphorical ways of knowing in their learning or teaching experiences?

This chapter will begin with a brief summary of the findings in light of the theoretical framework followed by a discussion about language and culture in context in relation to transformative learning. The implications for theory, practice and further research will then be explained, along with some limitations within the study. Finally, the chapter will conclude with some of my final thoughts on the dissertation process as a whole.

Findings Summary

The study was grounded primarily in a transformative learning theoretical framework. The focus of the study was on the significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers around the issues of culture and language in an online ESL endorsement program. Data from this study were gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants who have all been through an ESL endorsement program.
As noted in Chapter Four, the findings of the study are presented in two major sections: (a) learning in context; and (b) the dimensions and limitations of transformative learning. The first set of findings focus on the contextual aspects of learning in this online ESL endorsement program. These findings focused on negotiating the online learning environments and on the required Language Structure course, which participants found difficult. In terms of how participants negotiated the online learning environment, they emphasized the importance of managing time and organizational skills to deal with the online content, they valued camaraderie and collaboration, and gained new insights from both the content and process and practical teaching experiences.

The second finding related to the contextual aspects of learning focused on the pros and cons of the required Language Structure course within the ESL endorsement program. The findings focus on how the students were able to find the benefits and satisfaction of learning in this course. They mentioned that while the coursework was very intense and difficult at times, they needed to plan, study, and ask a lot of questions in order to be successful in this course. While the content of the class seemed to be over people’s heads to some extent, many of the participants noted that they did learn a good bit of information from this class and they will not forget some of the activities that they completed during this learning experience. In particular, the participants felt that in order to understand the important concepts of the class, they needed to put in the time and effort.

The second set of major findings focused on the dimensions and limitations of transformative learning, with three main categories of findings focusing on: a deeper understanding of language and culture; the communicative dimensions of teaching and
learning; and the limitations of metaphorical and creative ways of knowing in this context.

With regard to gaining a deeper understanding of language and culture, to some degree they reflected back on their own background and culture; they were able to attend to the individual cultures of students and were able to promote useful strategies in the classroom in order for their ESL students to be successful and to learn. Some of the participants stated that they were able to empathize with their students in terms of juggling school, family, and social obligations. While the data from the interviews show that the participants did have some sort of empathy towards their own ESL students, only one of the participants actually had the desire to want to make a change in her students’ lives. Meanwhile, the other participants did see the significance in learning about their students’ cultures and had more of an awareness of their own cultures and backgrounds in light of the discussions.

The second finding in relation to the possible dimensions of transformative learning relates to the communicative dimensions of teaching and learning. These dimensions were present in the study in the development of their positive relationships with the ESL students and with their families. Further, as the participants made these positive connections with the students and families, they also became advocates for them when they were faced with certain barriers both in and out of the school setting. By continuous dialogue with students and their families over time, the dimensions of teaching and learning went beyond the teacher/student learning relationship and participants were able to learn in a way that a textbook could not teach them.
The last finding in relation to the possible dimensions of transformative learning relates to creative and metaphorical ways of knowing. This study showed only a limited dimension of these ways of knowing that were manifested partly because the participants were specifically asked to bring in an artifact that might serve as a metaphor to encapsulate their teaching and learning experiences within this online ESL certification program. While it seemed as though some participants were excited to share their metaphors, it seemed to be a somewhat disjointed part of the interview for others because this was a new way of expressing themselves. Nevertheless, the symbolic or metaphorical items shared fell into three different categories: symbols relating to the world, food metaphors, and metaphors with emotion from experience with their own students.

In general, the findings of this qualitative research study are consistent with the research literature. Transformative learning theory assumes that people will bring their experiences and prior knowledge to the learning environment in order to be able to reflect and learn from them (Mezirow, 2000; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Cranton, 2006; Freire, 1970). As we saw from the findings, many of the participants incorporated their past and present experiences to their learning experiences and reflected on them. Further, it was the dialogue with colleagues and instructors that helped them to understand the meanings of their experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Yet, questions still remain if these experiences were truly transformative.

There are still more questions that need to be answered within this study. While it seemed as though participants were able to reflect and use dialogue as a means to learn from their experiences, it is yet to be determined if they actually went through the process of individuation (Jung; 1971; Cranton, 1992; Cranton, 1994; Cranton, 2003; Cranton,
2006; Cranton & Roy, 2003). Since some of the research questions did not lend themselves to the awareness of positionality, the participants were not actually able to express their positionality in regards to the teaching and learning aspect of the program, and it is difficult to state if individuation evolved for them.

One area of difference between the literature and the findings was that participants did not truly embrace the ways in which other ways of knowing (creatively or metaphorically) could help them to have a transformation (Dirkx, 1997; Cranton, 2006). This could most likely be because part of the study was to have them bring in an artifact that might serve as a metaphor to encapsulate their teaching and learning experiences. It seemed to be a somewhat disjointed part of the interview because it was hard to determine if this artifact was a reflection of their current state of mind or something that actually helped them embrace other ways of knowing.

In terms of the ESL endorsement program in general, the findings show that this particular program stresses the importance of a culturally and linguistically diverse pedagogy (Cho et al, 2012; Faez, 2012; Hickey, 2012; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Marcos, 2012). Participants were able to use the activities from the classes in order to demonstrate how they felt they were culturally and linguistically aware of their students. As the literature showed, privileged learners need to view their own transformation from a privileged viewpoint (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Osterling & Webb, 2009; Shockley & Banks, 2011). Yet, it did not seem like this was the case in this particular study because the participants did not show how either their positionality or power was a factor in showing how they were advocates for change for their ESL students.

Understanding Language and Culture in Context in Light of the Theoretical Framework
The purpose of this study was to better understand the significant learning and teaching experiences of ESL teachers around the issues of culture and language in light of the theoretical framework. Therefore, it is important to discuss the ways the findings of the study relate to transformative learning theory in light of the study’s focus on learning about language and culture in context. This will be addressed in light of the importance of context in relation to transformative learning, the development of cultural understanding over time, the experience of transformative learning, and problematizing other ways of knowing.

The Significance of Context in Transformative Learning

The importance of context has been a key emphasis of transformative learning theory ever since Clark and Wilson (1991) took Mezirow to task for ignoring the importance of context in transformative learning theory when he initially published his study developing the theory in 1978. In particular, they highlighted: “Mezirow systematically seeks to remove the very element which brings meaning to experience: context” (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 76). While the significance of context was a shortcoming of Mezirow’s initial theory, both Mezirow (2000) and numerous others (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 2008) have acknowledged the importance of context since then. But here in this study, it is important to consider the significance of three significant contextual elements in this study: the online context; the language and culture learning context; and context related to the courses.

The online context. As noted, the coursework for the ESL endorsement program selected in this study took place online except for the times when the students met with the instructors at the end of the semester. In general, the online portions of the course
consisted of weekly discussion forums, assignments that need to be uploaded onto a designated webpage, online articles and books to read, and in some cases live chat rooms with professors or students. While participants initially found this disorienting, they were clearly able to adapt to it over time, and had some moments of deep learning in this online environment.

Discussion and reflection are two big concerns in any environment, particularly because of the uncertainty of where the conversations might lead to, but also because people might feel hesitant to share their deepest feelings with other members of their class. It might also pose similar challenges in an online learning environment (Smith, 2012). Yet, in an online learning environment, learners might “interact without the constraints of space and time” (Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2006, p. 304). For many of the participants, this new learning environment was challenging to them because they either were unfamiliar with the way the professors ran the class online, or this was their very first experience with an online class in general. Either way, the findings show that by reflecting on how to make sense of the program, they were able to use time management skills, organizational skills, and set realistic goals for themselves in order to finally overcome the challenge of online learning. Further, as they were able to collaborate with one another during the classes, they created their own unique online learning culture within the environment, which is a key factor in making a positive impact on learning the course material (Nitkin, 2005; Shaeffer & Farr, 1993). Discussion and dialogue are important aspects in transformative learning (Smith, 2012; Ziegler et al., 2006); hence the dialogical dimension of transformative learning was present in this context and helped participants to make sense of the new online learning culture. The
communication and camaraderie between the professors and students and also between the students themselves may also have helped participants with understanding the online culture of learning. The findings show that the discussion forums in class and the quick and easy technological aspects of the program (i.e. email, live chats) aided in the meaning making process. Participants stated that the collaboration they received in going through the program within a cohort was a benefit to the program and helped them make further connections within the learning environment. Collaborative learning as the one described here helps learners to “coordinate different points of view, which means that the students must consider alternative perspectives” (Smith, 2012, p. 415). These students did consider alternative perspectives by using the discussion forums as a way to read about the different ideas that their peers wrote about and then they responded to them by creating another discussion post. Further, the final projects for some of the classes required students to present their power point presentations to other members of the class by using a live chat room. Participants suggested that the dialogue used in this activity helped them collaborate in a way that helped them understand new points of view.

**The language and cultural learning context.** The learning context of the ESL endorsement program helped learners to develop deeper understandings of the contextual aspect of language and culture by reflecting on their own background and context, attending to the individual cultures of their students, empathizing with ESL students, and learning about culture from their own students. As Charaniya (2012) discusses, the role of the educator and the role of pedagogy and environment are two key factors for developing cultural awareness in the classroom. She mentions that adult educators can be vital to the process of transformative learning within a cultural context, by asking key
questions, and raising consciousness about the dimensions of culture. Educators who emphasize cultural discussions can “enable rich, collaborative openness to new ideas and unsettling cognitive challenges” (p. 240). Yet, she also says that if adult educators do not emphasize or are not very knowledgeable about multiple dimensions of culture, it can limit the extent that students can learn or engage in a deeper understanding. In this particular study, the participants seemed to value the cultural and linguistic components that they learned from the class and they were pleased at how the instructors were a prominent role in facilitating the awareness. It seemed as though the pedagogical components of this ESL endorsement program promoted cultural awareness to some degree.

As mentioned above, the role of pedagogy and environment is also a key factor to creating conditions for transformation in terms of cultural awareness, according to Charaniya (2012). She uses aspects of Daloz’s (2000) ideas on transformative learning in her discussion of pedagogy, who identifies four components for transformation (presence of the other, reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action). However, Charaniya (2012) adds to his list by stating a fifth and last one: an opportunity for holistic engagement.

Within the ESL endorsement program, there were many opportunities for these learning conditions to occur. First, as the findings show, participants were excited to be in a cohort where they were able to share ideas with each other. Since a major part of the coursework was the discussion forums, the findings also show that reflective discourse was an important key in helping to create at least a dimension of cultural awareness in the classroom environment. As stated above, both the pedagogical components and the
facilitation of the cultural aspects of the program were both prevalent in the ESL classes. Also, from what the participants said about their own experiences with their ESL students, it seemed as though they became somewhat more culturally aware of their students. While the participants did not necessarily call their peer/teacher relationships “mentoring” as Daloz (2000) does, they clearly appreciated the collaboration and camaraderie of their instructors and peers. Further as the participants pointed out in their interviews, they appreciated the communication and help that the professors gave to them even when they were struggling with some assignments. This is evidence of the mentoring relationship that Daloz (2000) indicates may be a part of a transformative learning experience. In terms of the participants being committed to action, they were able to directly use the information they learned within the context of the program in order to address some of the cultural and linguistic needs of their ESL students. This was key to the pedagogical and environmental factors in the ESL endorsement program. Finally, as Charaniya (2012) points out, there were some evidences of holistic engagement, particularly for those participants who discussed significant relationships with their ESL students and their families.

In a similar line of thinking to Charaniya (2012) in regard to cultural aspects of learning and multiple engagements, Goulah (2007) discusses what he refers to as “cultural transformative learning” of the adolescents and the role that viewing Japanese pop culture media played in their process of learning. As dialogue developed and progressed, participants were able to construct understanding and engage in transformative learning by viewing the movie and comparing their own lives in the areas of, “cosmology, spirituality, ecology, language, power, and identity” (p. 173). The
participants reflected on the film and had many engaged discussions about some of the film’s underlying themes about culture and language. The students in his study, “thereby developed a multimodal, cross-cultural, planetary literacy that met foreign language standards for cultural understanding and addressed transformative learning” (p. 173). Charaniya (2012) might refer to this as “holistic engagement” (p. 241). While the participants in my study did not appear to engage in cultural transformative learning to a great degree, in the sense that only a couple of them seemed to be able to articulate issues related to linguistic or cultural privilege, they certainly increased their cultural awareness. This could be because within the ESL endorsement program, there may not be opportunities for them to challenge their own privilege or positionality, or they may not be willing or ready to have this type of dialogue within this setting.

**Context related to the courses.** The third dimension of context that is important to consider in this study is the linguistic context of ESL learning. The findings from the interviews show how the English Language Structure (or Linguistics) course was a bit disorienting for the participants. A disorienting dilemma can be a result of a personal or social crisis. From what the participants said in their interviews, it seemed as though most of the disorientation in the program and the course was about the content of the course and its workload, which they had to complete in a short amount of time. The majority of the participants expressed that this personal dilemma was one of the most challenging parts of the course and felt compelled to discuss it in the interviews. Further, some participants were worried about having to complete such an intense class online and they feared that there would be limited support and much confusion. Yet, through reflection and dialogue, most participants were able to find the benefit and satisfaction
within the challenge of this course. They found that by communicating with one another through discussion forums they could figure out how to problem solve. This suggests that rich discussions involving problem-based learning or problem solving can potentially facilitate transformative learning, and to some extent these elements were present in this course (Smith, 2012).

The Development of Cultural Understanding Over Time

Participants were asked to discuss their experiences with language and culture while in the ESL program. As transformative learning theory suggests, reflection is a key component of the theory. Many of the participants in the study used reflection as a way to connect their backgrounds with their learning on language and culture to some degree. For example, the participants mentioned how they appreciated their families and where their ancestors came from, and most were able to reflect upon culture specifically in terms of their diverse population of ESL students. However, as the findings show, only two of the participants discussed their cultural and language backgrounds with any depth, in terms of really understanding how their own cultural background has shaped their thinking or was a form of linguistic or cultural privilege, or noted needing to really think about this in relation to their ESL students. These participants were culturally aware of their diverse students from the perceived difference in general, but they didn’t appear to have much awareness based on the interviews of issues of positionality or structural power relations based on language and culture. From a transformative learning perspective, it can be concluded from these findings that within the ESL program, there seems to be a disconnect between critical reflection and critical discussions around the issues of culture and language. While it seems as though the space has been created to
discuss these issues, many participants did not seem to take advantage of these spaces to further reflect and dialogue about the potential cultural transformation.

However, the participants did make an effort to get to know their students on a personal level, and making a connection with them was a key aspect of their cultural learning; understanding their students’ cultures was indeed a part of understanding their ESL students overall. Therefore, as the theory suggests, transformation is possible, “when the cultural and spiritual aspects of the learner’s identity are included in the learning process” (Charaniya, 2012, p. 236). What this could suggest is that the participants were able to use their own cultures and backgrounds as a way to connect with their ESL students and learn from them. In turn, they were able to appreciate their own heritage and cultures; as they gave voice to it, they were more open and aware of their own students’ cultural differences, and took those differences into account in their teaching.

While the findings show that most of the participants reflected on their students’ backgrounds and cultures and had moments of potential transformative learning, there were not too many glimpses of understanding of the components of power and privilege relating to issues of positionality in order to understand culture. Based on where one is positioned related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental abilities, it will help individuals to sort and categorize their world. Thus, our world can be “shaped by our social positions or societal locations” (Johnson-Bailey, 2012, p. 263). For the most part, the participants did not mention any of these social positions as a way to explain their cultural identities of themselves or of their students. This is not to say that the program lacks opportunities for learners to share their own ideas and viewpoints or understandings of culture, but from the findings, it did not seem like there were many
instances where the students really had to look at their positionality in terms of cultural and linguistic awareness. The elements of transformative learning were evident when the participants reflected on the cultural backgrounds of their ESL students, yet in terms of positionality, it did not seem like the participants were able to clearly articulate how it posed any type of cultural transformation. In turn, the participants valued their individual student’s cultural context, but they did not discuss any specific structural issues, oppression, or privilege around culture.

**The Extent of Transformative Learning**

As the central theoretical framework of this study, it is important to discuss the extent to which the participants might have experienced a transformed perspective. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Mezirow (2000) notes that the central premise of transformative learning is that meaning making is a fundamental human activity in which adult learners change aspects of their frames of reference or meaning perspectives. The beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions within a meaning perspective are the basic ways in which they view the world. Yet, through critical reflection, it can be assumed that individuals can learn to see these fundamental assumptions as a way to shape their perspectives about the world around them.

The experience of transformative learning in this regard encompasses three different facets that I would like to point out. First, while this is not necessarily the case within this study, it is important to point out that paradigm shifts are the largest changes associated with transformative learning; these changes are relatively unusual, because it fundamentally changes people’s understanding of their reality. Challenging these realities can be a difficult task, thus paradigmatic shifts do not occur often and they did
not occur in this study. Second, in the process of transformative learning meaning schemes related to learners’ beliefs and attitudes also shift. These are lesser changes than paradigm shifts, and these participants associated with the ESL program did exhibit some changes in meaning schemes. Finally, as they progressed in the courses, many of the individuals had a potential development of empathy that was a part of their transformation. All of these will be discussed in the following sections.

**The lack of a paradigm shift.** While it is important to mention paradigm shifts within transformative learning, it is also important to note that changes in paradigms and learners’ view of their world are unusual, according to Mezirow (2000). Paradigm shifts are assumptions that, “frame the whole way we look at the world” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 2). Here, individuals do not view their assumptions as actual assumptions, but to them they are a reality, so it is no wonder why a paradigm shift is one of the most difficult to achieve. In different circumstances, individuals’ thoughts can be a part of who they are and do not view them as actual assumptions. If we look at this through the lens of my study, it did not seem like the participants had a paradigm shift because the findings did not show a change in their consciously rooted beliefs about the world. Rather, their meaning schemes were slightly altered as a result of both the online coursework and their interactions with their ESL students.

**Transformed meaning schemes.** Central to adult learning is the transformative process by which individuals begin to examine their life assumptions and consider their validity. Meaning schemes, such as a person’s beliefs and attitudes, “suggest a line of action that we tend to follow automatically unless brought into critical reflection” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). Critical reflection acts as a way to question a person’s identity in
regards to previously assumed beliefs and attitudes. In this study, the participants seemed to have a change in such meaning schemes in terms of the culture of online learning. Furthermore, participants gained a deeper understanding of culture by not only reflecting on their own background and context, but through personal interactions with their ESL students and parents.

In this study, participants were asked to examine and question their underlying assumptions about learning within the ESL program. The findings showed that throughout the process of online learning, new assumptions evolved as a way for them to make meaning from this new learning environment. For example, it was clear that some of the participants were unfamiliar with the context of online learning and were hesitant at the start of the program. Throughout their career in the ESL endorsement program, they were provided with many opportunities to explore and question these previously held beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about online learning. Through the activities within the program, including collaboration, conditions were created as a way to promote critical reflection. Further, the semi-structured interview questions within the study were designed to highlight some of the assumptions and beliefs underlying their views about the culture of online learning. Because of these, it seemed as though some participants changed their initial views about online learning and were able to articulate the ways in which it helped them to become more organized, collaborate with peers and instructors, and also gain significant knowledge about ESL throughout the process.

Additionally, through reflecting on their own backgrounds and creating more opportunities to collaborate with ESL students and families during their time in the ESL endorsement program, participants were able to transform their ways of looking at culture
from different perspectives. The findings suggested that through the readings within the course and the discussions with peers, participants were able to reflect on their own cultures which helped them to value and respect their own ESL students and the cultures they bring with them to the classroom.

**Possible development of empathy.** The findings have some suggestions for the possible development of greater empathy in light of this online ESL learning environment. Some of the participants drew an analogy between the foreign nature of their online learning experience and what their ESL students likely experience when learning ESL. By comparing their own experiences with others, participants might have opened the door to the possibility of seeing the nature of what it might mean to be oppressed. Therefore, it could be argued that this type of empathetic experience might have led these participants to transformation in a sense. Taylor and Cranton (2013) state that, “empathy seems to be a necessary component of fostering transformative learning” (p. 35). Later they go on to say, “It is empathy that provides the learner with the ability to identify with the perspectives of others; lessens the likelihood of prejudgment; increases the opportunity for identifying shared understanding; and facilitates critical reflection through the emotive valence of assumptions” (p. 38). Some of the participants actually referred to having greater empathy with their ESL students because of working with them in the context of the program. Some of them talked about some of these meaningful experiences with some emotion as well. In order to make the most out of one’s emotions in the process of learning, a certain context needs to be present.

It is the context of dialogue, critical reflection and experience that the role of empathy comes to life. It is empathy that provides the motivation (altruistic
interest) to ‘listen’ to others; the means to better understand the perspective of another, and awareness of their feelings and understanding of their mental state, and the ability to accurately demonstrate that understanding (Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p. 38).

In this particular study, one participant mentioned classroom dialogue in the ESL endorsement program in relation to his empathy with his own students. He said that while completing discussion forums for the assignments, he often wondered what the other students in his class would write about because he was unsure if his answers would mirror theirs, thus he felt like an ESL student himself. As the discussion forums progressed, he found that it was beneficial to have that dialogue with them in order to solidify the accuracy of his responses to the forum prompts. It is important to point out here, that there was only one participant in the study that truly mentioned the dialogue within the ESL endorsement program as a way to empathize with his own ESL students who might struggle with similar issues. The other participants did mention a sense of empathy they had for their ESL students in light of what they were also going through in the program, but they did not exactly mention classroom dialogue in relation to their empathy. This could be because most of the participants might be familiar with how to navigate online discussion forums ever since social media has exploded. Within the discussion forums, it did not seem like the participants felt an overwhelming sense of despair like the one participant mentioned, however, they did begin to have a dialogue with me in the interview and that may have helped articulate this notion of empathy; thus, this could also be a component of dialogue that Taylor and Cranton (2013) refer to that can facilitate transformative learning. In terms of the role that critical reflection plays in
developing empathy, there were many participants who reflected on their experiences within the ESL endorsement program and they indicated how these experiences were analogous to what their ESL students might experience when learning English.

Another example in the literature concerning transformative learning and empathy is found in Goulah’s work (2007). For example, he refers to students in his study of cultural transformative learning in the foreign language classroom in terms of how his students experienced transformative learning about cultural issues. More specifically the notion of critical empathy, which is indicative of Freire’s (2001) view of students and teachers as transformative “dreamers of utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love” (p. 45). “Critical empathy” arises when students have open and honest discussions about critical issues and later describes how this unfolded in his study of their learning about Japanese culture. The participants “examined their own culture through a lens of the target culture and vice versa” (p. 169), which revealed a type of critical empathy towards humans, nature and the word after viewing a movie that dealt with ecological issue. The participants in my study did not seem to develop this same sense of what Goulah (2007) refers to as critical empathy; at least it is difficult to conclude if their feelings of empathy came from their class discussions with their peers or if they came from a critical reflective standpoint from relating with their students. This could be because there might not have been enough components of the program where participants needed to address critical issues through discussions with their peers.

Another notion of critical empathy is explored in relation to critical cultural awareness. Critical cultural awareness can be defined as taking, “a somewhat critical and analytical stance toward their experiences” (Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012, p. 22). In
their study about pre-service teachers, they found that the experiences of their participants, “seemed to coincide with moments where they seemed to reach the limits of their empathy” (p. 22), meaning that individuals have an emotional experience with a marginalized group and they acknowledge when there is a difference between their lives and the lives of the oppressed, yet they still have a desire to want to change something. In turn, this is the possible beginnings of a critical cultural awareness in individuals. In my study, there were a few instances where the participants mentioned that they felt some sort of empathy for their own ESL students because they were able to identify the similarities between the initial difficulties of navigating an ESL online course and the workload that their own ESL students have in the P-12 setting. However, only one participant mentioned that the ESL courses actually helped in encouraging her to find ways to help a minority student and that student’s family. This participant seemed to have a critical cultural awareness of her student because she was able to question her assumptions about culture, attitudes, and behaviors. The other participants mentioned that they did have some type of empathetic experience with their own ESL students and while it seemed as though these participants had some type of critical empathy towards their students, the critical cultural awareness piece seemed to be missing. Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012) might suggest that these participants may have reached their limits in terms of critical empathy, partly because they may not have reflected on cultural issues to that great a degree, and were not able to develop the skill needed for critical cultural awareness. Knowing this, it might be beneficial to include a type of activity in an ESL endorsement program where the participants are “shocked” (Washburn, 2008, p. 247) and then develop empathy and strategies necessary for teaching language
acquisition skills to ELLs. An activity that would shock students, “can stimulate thinking about strategies for improving communication across the language barriers” (Washburn, 2008, p. 248). Bringing this type of critical empathy into the ESL endorsement program has the potential to bridge the gap between feeling empathetic towards a minority group of people and actually wanting to do something to make the society a better place for that group. This could be the makings of a potential transformative experience if critical empathy and critical cultural awareness can be merged.

**Problematizing Other Ways of Knowing**

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the term “other ways of knowing” generally falls into what is more recently often referred to as “the extrarational” dimension of transformative learning. “These forms of knowing refer to ways of knowing other than critical reflection that have shown to be significant in the process of a perspective transformation” (Taylor, 1998, p. 36). Examples of this can include intuition, affective learning, feelings, and somatic and spiritual forms of learning. Yet, Mezirow’s (2000) initial view of transformative learning does not give enough attention to this topic (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Literature also suggests that “traditional classrooms, from kindergarten through higher education, have strongly emphasized reading and writing to the exclusion of other ways of knowing and learning” (Lawrence, 2012, p. 473).

In my study, it is difficult to determine if these extrarational ways of knowing were at all significant in participants’ learning, given that none of the participants made mention on their own of how these were incorporated into the ESL endorsement program. However, what is known from the findings of the research is that students did place a lot of trust in the online learning process, they created new relationships with colleagues and
professors, and they had support when needed. Taylor (1998) briefly suggests that perhaps relationships with the role of emotions may possibly be considered as “extrarational” and be incorporated into these “other ways of knowing.” Within this study, it is clear that emotion did play a vital role in many of the findings as we saw from Chapter Four. The participants were asked numerous questions about their personal experiences both as a teacher and learner and the responses seemed to have connections with their emotions, and the significance of this could possibly help shed light on the role emotions have within the extrarational ways of knowing.

Yet, it is still difficult to decipher the exact use of the terminology “other ways of knowing.” While Taylor (1998) clearly defines his interpretation of other ways of knowing in his 1998 work, he does not specifically mention artistic, creativity, and metaphorical ways of knowing. One has to wonder if creativity, artistic expression, and metaphorical ways of knowing fall into this same category. This sort of begs the question about what exactly scholars mean when they use terms such as “other ways of knowing” or refer to the “extrarational” component of transformative learning. It appears that scholars mean different things by the term. Transformative learning can occur by means of artistic expression either by individuals creating the art or by witnessing art created by others (Lawrence, 2012). She also points out that extrarational can be described as:

> a process of meaning-making expressed through symbol, image, and emotional expression. These ways of knowing—which all call upon our imagination (Greene, 1995) and our intuition (Lawrence, 2009) and come to us through dreams, meditations, and other unconscious processes—are often expressed through various art forms (p. 472).
With that being said, and more specifically in relation to this study, part of the interview was to have the participants bring in a metaphor, photograph, poem, song, movie, or picture that captured what their teaching and learning experiences were like as they went through the ESL endorsement program. As stated in the findings, the items that the participants brought varied from symbols of the world, food, and metaphors with emotion from experiences with their own students. In fact, two of the participants brought in the student-made metaphors to the interview. It seems like these were the only two expressive pieces that indicate the possibility of a transformative learning experience. One participant mentioned that she felt that her teaching and learning experiences came full circle after she read a journal article from one of her students. While this was not a type of “art” per se, it clearly was the metaphor she chose to capture her emotions and feelings between her student and her own learning as well. The other participant created a poetry book that she shared in her interview. As Lawrence (2012), points out, poetry is a form of artistic expression that can lead to a transformative learning experience. In this example, the participant clearly states that the poetry book she created with her students was one of the most emotional projects that she has ever completed with her students. As the students talked about their home countries in this poem, the participant and some of her students cried because they listened to other people read about their home countries. This participant possibly had a transformative learning experience, given the depth of emotion expressed (Lawrence, 2012). She was moved by how her students who wrote the poems were able to make sense of their problems back in their home countries. In this case, the poem was the way for the participant and her students to have discussions...
that they might not have had and it lead to a potentially transformative learning experience, not just for the participant, but for her students as well.

In this study it appears that the participants made use of artistic and metaphorical ways of knowing only to a limited degree, and it was more evident in what they did with their own students in their practice as in the example above of the participant moved by the poems of her students. No one referred to these forms of knowing within the ESL endorsement program itself. While they did participate in developing a symbol or metaphor about their experience in the ESL program because they were asked to do so as part of the interview process, it seemed that for most of them, thinking in this way was more of an afterthought than a way of thinking. It might be in regards to academic programs that participants need to be encouraged to think in these ways. This perhaps could be an area of further research, particularly in regard to education about ESL students in the curriculum.

**Implications for Theory, Practice, and Further Research**

Although this study had limitations given that it only focused on the ESL endorsement program with a small population of learners, the experiences of the participants can be useful both to the program itself and to ESL teachers and adult educators. Hence, it offers implications for theory and practice and further research.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

As noted the theoretical framework of this study was grounded in transformative learning theory as related to ESL teachers. Transformative learning in this particular study was informed by the discourses of rational (Mezirow, 2000) and extrarational (Cranton, 1992; Cranton, 1994; Cranton, 2003; Cranton, 2006; Cranton and Roy, 2003;
Dirkx, 1997; Freire, 1970; Freire, 1971; Freire, 2001; Freire, 2004; Jung, 1971; Taylor, 1998; Taylor and Cranton, 2012) perspectives of transformative learning. The study was framed through this lens and the findings were discussed above. As a result of this theoretical lens, the theoretical and practical implications are: increasing the need for cultural awareness; fostering transformative learning when focusing on culture and language takes time; and the need to promote critical cultural awareness and expressing experiences through other ways of knowing in an online class.

**Increasing the need for cultural awareness.** While the findings showed that the participants did value their own students’ culture and were receptive to learning about their students through their ESL coursework, they had a difficult time expressing a lot of insight into their own cultural background particularly around the notion of linguistic or cultural privilege. Many of the participants’ responses were very general when asked about their culture, so it seems like this needs to be an area in which to focus on within an ESL endorsement program. There also needs to be an awareness of how to acknowledge the cultural differences among individuals. Byram and Feng (2004) mention:

> Cultural identities of individuals are no longer based solely on geographical locations or nationality but often, among other social factors such as gender, age, economic class, etc., on internalized lived experiences in more than one geographic setting incorporating more than one culture (p. 158).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) take this one step further and say that, teachers and learners “need to explore the various social and cultural groups to which they belong, including those identified with race, ethnicity, social class, language, and gender” (p. 22). In turn, the awareness of where our social factors are positioned within the dominant
culture could help us make sense of the world around us. While it is important for individuals to be aware of their positionality, Johnson-Bailey (2012) also highlights that “positionality and the understanding of one’s place in the society is fluid, subject to time and experiences, and complicated by intersection and overlap of the positions and of understanding of the subject and the person attempting to know the subject” (p. 263). Thus, even though this awareness of positionality can be introduced in the education environment, she also mentions that, “a transformational awareness about what or how a learner’s position affects learning cannot be forced” (p. 264). As the findings suggest, the participants did not discuss their positionality either in the ESL endorsement program or in their teaching within their classrooms and their responses about culture and language were very general in nature; therefore, further development of such a theory would include not only issues of positionality, but it would also include the ability of ESL teachers to recognize how their social positions in the world are brought and brought into the classroom can affect their ESL learners. As discussed earlier, critical reflection is the driving force of the process of transformative learning, hence, in order for transformation to occur in settings such as the one depicted in this study, “learners must be able to develop a discourse that transcends regular discussions and is informed by research while valuing positional experiences and intuition-based knowledges. Such discourse must be culturally sensitive” (Johnson-Bailey, 2012, p. 270).

Additionally, educators need to help their own students develop an awareness of positionality and prepare them to critique the situations that encounter through critical reflection (Smith, 2012). Goulah (2007) shed some light on this in his previous work by showing how transformative learning is possible in a foreign language setting where
adolescents are the learners. The findings of his study show that dialogue between the adolescent learners and the teacher were essential to constructing an understanding to the concepts and engaging the students in transformative learning. While this was not necessarily the focus of this study, it is important to note the connections between transformative learning and positionality within an ESL classroom setting, thus, the same concept can hold true for ESL students. Shedding light on this aspect of transformative learning can help to uncover how ESL educators can prepare their students for critical reflection in order to discuss the areas of positionality within their learning environment.

As stated previously, Charaniya (2012) mentions that the role of the educator is to set the tone for creating an environment where it is safe to discuss cultural ideas. It is during this time that participants need to question their deeply held beliefs and attitudes about culture and engage in experiences that help them to see their own culture as one that connects them to the world. Charaniya (2012) calls this, “an ongoing, cyclical smorgasbord of opportunities to dialogue, share stories, explore symbols, and learn from each other” (p. 238). If this can exist in an ESL endorsement program, learners can potentially be transformed in terms of how they envision the world around them, how their identities are viewed, and how they understand their role in the world.

**Fostering transformative learning around culture and language takes time.**

The purpose of the ESL program is to prepare educators to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of ESL students. One of the clearest findings of this study is that transformative learning around language and culture takes time. What can be accomplished within the space of the required courses (in terms of dealing with the mechanics of language while being attentive to cultural issues) is limited. Such
transformation likely requires being immersed in settings where one is repeatedly dealing with cultural issues in their lives in numerous places. So it might not be realistic to think that the participants in this program will have a transformative learning experience in this context. Transformative learning may be something that requires more time, experiences, and poignant activities than an ESL endorsement program can provide in the space of the required academic courses. Perhaps ESL endorsement programs can provide groundwork that can make transformative learning around these issues possible or more likely.

An ESL endorsement class is just one component of building an awareness of culture and language among individuals. As Taylor (2008) suggests, learners need opportunities both in and out of the classroom. Transformative learning is not only an academic exercise, but it is something that can potentially happen if other opportunities are explored in addition to what students learn within the academic setting. If participants in the ESL program have more experiences with various cultures both in and out of the classroom, the chance for transformative learning is greater. By seeking different avenues in order to become involved both in the community and in the coursework, individuals can “restore their ethics and transform their interaction with their material, social, and physical realities” (Lange, 2004, p. 137). Academic spaces can certainly ask critical questions about cultural and linguistic privilege that can provide fodder for discussion that might facilitate transformative learning.

Finding ways for promoting critical cultural awareness. Given the limitations of academic environments that are often represented by members of the dominant culture and language, it seems that for learners to have more experience of diverse cultures and to think about issues of positionality and linguistic and cultural privilege, it might be
necessary to find ways to creatively bring in more cultural and linguistic diversity into the classroom to promote critical cultural awareness. Goulah (2007) and others have made use of popular film to bring culture into the classroom. This is a way to not only bring culture into the classroom but to make issues of the forces that strongly influence culture into the discussion.

Yosso (2002) identifies as critical media literacy, specifically, the use of media “as a pedagogical tool to facilitate students’ becoming critically conscious of themselves in relation to the structure of power and domination in their world” (p. 59). This critical media literacy theory is grounded in the fact that the public interprets what they see in the media and the media has the power to control what the public sees. However, in order to determine the truth of the media’s images, the consumers of the media need to be educated on exactly who controls the media and the images they represent. In fact, we must use a critical lens in order to determine who or what benefits from the hegemonic images that are represented in the media. There are other issues to focus on while educators become informed on the ways in which students are influenced by race and racism. They are: a) the intercentricity of race and racism, b) the challenge to dominant ideology, c) the commitment to social justice, d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and e) the transdisciplinary perspective (Yosso, 2002). As educators become educated through this theoretical framework, the five elements listed above can enhance the ways that they interact with students, and also the ways in which students interact with one another. In an ESL online classroom, one way this could be accomplished is by using media as a way to highlight issues of power, gender, and identity (Goulah, 2007). Additionally, after the students would view the movie, they would then be given readings
coupled with rich dialogue in an online forum in order to examine deeply rooted beliefs. In order to do so, however, both students and educators need to be knowledgeable about critical race theory. “Critical race theory is a framework that can address the racism, sexism, and classism embedded in entertainment media” (Yosso, 2002, p. 53).

In a study on critical race theory with Chicano/a students at a community college, participants followed critical concepts to utilize as they interact with media: (a) media images are constructed; (b) media is money-driven; (c) media makers use their own experiences when they create media; (d) media uses a powerful combination of moving pictures, words and sound to communicate; and (e) audiences bring their own experiences with them as they interact with media (Yosso, 2002). By tying these key themes with education of the media in terms of hegemonic issues, her participants were able to critically analyze images from the media with a better understanding and more awareness about the forces that create certain images. One could easily ask these questions in relation to the cultural and language portrayals in films depicting members of different cultural groups in order to begin to find ways to bring about what Goulah (2007) refers to as “cultural transformative learning” or what Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012) call critical cultural awareness. Promoting critical cultural awareness not only takes time, but sometimes requires something of a shock (Washburn, 2008). Therefore, it might be beneficial to include activities in an ESL endorsement program that would help the individuals to look at a situation from a shockingly different perspective. Instructors should aim for activities that have the ability to create instances for this such as media as shared above. Such activities have the potential to open up spaces for individuals to be aware of the various perspectives of others. For example, the
activity used in a study about adolescents who viewed Japanese pop culture media could be beneficial in developing critical empathy (Goulah, 2007). “Discussing transformative learning themes in relation to Princess Mononoke and Japanese culture led to a development of intercultural critical empathy in which students examined their own culture through a lens of the target culture and vice versa” (Goulah, 2007, p. 169). It is the hope that from experiences such as this one, students would then develop a type of empathy that can encourage critical cultural awareness. It would also have the power to help individuals to create strategies necessary for teaching language acquisition skills to ELLs.

**Expressing experiences through other ways of knowing in an online class.**

As noted previously, ESL endorsement programs do not generally have a component that teaches students to learn through different experiences. Thus, it is important to understand different ways in which students in an ESL program can begin to acknowledge that there are other ways to learn about a concept rather than the traditional ways. Smith (2012) lists a few strategies that may foster transformative learning in the online classroom. A key component to fostering this type of learning in the online classroom is collaborate group work. From what the participants of the study said, it seems as though the ESL endorsement program does a great job in giving them the opportunities for collaborative engagement within each of the courses. Participants noted that discussion forums, emails, live chats, and quick responses from instructors helped in making collaboration seamless within the program. She also mentions that journaling is a key component to an online environment to foster transformative learning. Again, the participants seemed to enjoy the weekly Application of Knowledge assignments, or
reflective journals, that they had to do for many of the courses. These assignments were essentially weekly journals about a given topic that the student needed to write about. Yet, Smith (2012) takes this one step further by saying that in addition to the journaling aspect, students should also “draw pictures or otherwise use art to express their experiences” (p. 416). She gives an example of how to do this by saying that students can write down or draw something that comes to mind in terms of their experiences. She gives another example from Sable’s (2010) work which is doing what is called a mindful meditation:

Students are asked to focus on an object—such as a drawing, a statement, or a question—and to reflect intensively on the object without trying to analyze it. Students are asked to let go of any thoughts that come to mind about the subject of their meditation (p. 416).

This first stage can help the students to remain focused on the object without overthinking about it. Next, she says that, “students are asked to pay attention to what is happening to their whole body, not just their brain. They are to notice any felt sense and stay with it, without judgment, allowing their attention to be open” (p. 416). She notes that this activity will help the students to generate space for any kind of fresh perspective that may occur.

To reiterate Lawrence’s (2012) point, transformative learning can occur by means of artistic expression either by individuals creating the art or by witnessing art created by others. Therefore, if an ESL endorsement programs can begin to include activities that foster this type of learning environment, students may potentially have a transformative learning experience.
Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Although this qualitative study addressed the teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers in regards to culture and language, this study contains some limitations. But, the study does offer a beginning place for understanding what we know about teachers in an ESL endorsement program, and suggests many opportunities for further research. The limitations were either a result of the design of the study, appeared during the research process, or were things that emerged after the study was concluded.

The participant selection was limited to people who completed an ESL endorsement program and the sample of participants seemed to include a majority of White individuals rather than a mix of people with various languages and cultures. Therefore, the teaching and learning experiences of the participants cannot be generalizable to the population as a whole. The pre-determined questions for the interview could have included more questions regarding a deeper understanding of culture and language. Finally, there were many limitations on the metaphorical and creative dimensions of learning. Each of the three limitations will be described below.

The participant selection was also not completely inclusive of other ethnic identities and socio-cultural dynamics. If they would have been, perhaps other forms of learning would have emerged. Although I attempted to recruit men and women with diverse ethnicities, the fact is that the population of people who have been through an ESL endorsement program is largely white, female, and middle to upper middle class and therefore, the findings are not generalizable to all groups. Further studies could include diverse socio-economic groups to determine the role of culture and language on this population of learners.
The pre-determined questions for the interview could have included more questions regarding a deeper understanding of culture and language. In Chapter Four, participants discussed their views on culture and language in a very general way without actually using the term “culture” or specifically examining dimensions of culture with any real depth. This may be because I did not ask them about specific dimensions of culture, rather I asked them general questions which may have resulted in general answers.

In the section about metaphorical and creative dimensions of learning, there were significant limitations. The participants were asked to bring in an artifact to create a metaphor to encapsulate their teaching and learning experiences. While it seemed as though the participants were excited to share their metaphors, it seemed to be a disjointed part of the interview because to many of the participants, this was a new way of expressing themselves, and there appear to be limitations in this context in relation to the extent that the metaphors were reflective of transformative learning.

Despite these limitations suggested, the study does make an important contribution to the literature. The study addresses the increasing need for cultural awareness within an ESL endorsement program by means of understanding where one’s social factors are positioned within the dominant culture. Through the use of critical reflection and dialogue in the classroom, the potential for a transformative experience could be possible. Yet, as the study depicts, transformative learning around culture and language can take time, experiences, and poignant activities. By using popular film in the classroom, it is the hope that students would then develop a type of empathy that can encourage critical cultural awareness. This is a way to not only bring culture into the
classroom but to make issues of the forces that strongly influence culture into the discussion. Finally, by expressing experiences through other ways of knowing in an online class, students may potentially have a transformative learning experience.

**Final Thoughts**

My interest in conducting a study about the significant teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers in regards to culture and language stemmed from my own experiences as both an elementary ESL teacher and as an adjunct ESL professor. This interest was further ignited by the fact that I value my own culture and background and I am encouraged in learning more about the various cultures that surround my world. The drive behind the study not only originated from learning more about transformative learning among teachers, but how their learning experiences could benefit the ESL students that they see on a day to day basis. The ESL students that I work with each day bring light to my world and show me that amongst the challenges in the world, there is always a ray of hope out there. To my ESL students, I strive to be that ray of light for them in terms of giving them the skills and strategies they need to succeed in the world, but also to help show future ESL educators the significance of acknowledging culture and language among individuals. The findings of this study support the fact that individuals need to become more aware of not only the cultures and languages that surround them, but they also need to dig into their own cultures to truly explore the concepts such as race, class, and gender. From the onset of conducting the study, the way I view my own identity has changed. I think differently about elements such as race, class, gender, and social class and how they all have an important part in creating the cultural differences within our society. As the study progressed, I also learned that educating adults about
culture and language requires more time, creativity, and a willingness to host a safe place for adults to learn and explore. Therefore, it is my desire from here on out to be involved in helping both ESL students and teachers create a cultural awareness that transcends society.
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Appendix: Interview Guide

PART A: General Questions
1. Tell me a little bit about what the ESL program was like for you.

2. Discuss a couple of significant learning experiences that you had in the program overall.

3. What was the most important thing you learned about yourself overall?
   a. What about yourself as a learner?
   b. What about yourself as a teacher of ELLs?

PART B: Identity, Transformative Learning, and Creative Expression
4. In thinking of yourself as an adult learner, describe any learning experience in the ESL program that helped you to further define who you are as a teacher.

5. Discuss any learning experiences in the program that you found challenging or disorienting and explain how you dealt with them.

6. What would be a metaphor to describe what these learning experiences were like? Or you could demonstrate it in another way, perhaps as a photograph, or a poem, a song, a movie, or picture?

7. Think about the times in your ESL courses where either professors or other students used art, poetry, or music as a way to facilitate teaching or learning, and what was this experience like for you?

8. What are the ways in which you have applied what you learned in the ESL program in your practice as a teacher?

9. Describe a couple of significant learning experiences that you’ve had from the experience of teaching ESL/ELL either with the students themselves, or their parents since you completed the program.

PART C: Language and Culture
10. A large part of the ESL program deals with issues of culture and language.
    a. What is the most important thing you learned about your own culture and language?
    b. What is the most important thing you learned about teaching students whose language and culture are different from your own?

11. How did you learn to become culturally and linguistically aware of your diverse population of learners?
12. Explain your current understanding of language diversity and your perspectives on teaching ELLs.

13. As an ESL teacher, speak to how your linguistic power and the privilege you have of knowing how to speak in English helps to inform your teaching of ELLs.

14. Within the context of your teaching practice, describe a time when there seemed to be a disconnect between the content of what you were trying to teach, and the challenges the students face. How do you deal with these issues?

15. Discuss the times that you’ve seen your students or their families experience oppression or prejudice because of their culture, language or race. How did you deal with this?

16. Tell me a story of one of your students or her or his family that you feel really positive about and why.

17. Think of a picture or metaphor or poem that describes your learning about language or culture that comes out of your teaching experience and describe that for me.

Part D: Closing Question and Photo or Metaphor Elicitation

18. If you were going to make a recommendation for improving the ESL program what would it be? Why?

19. If you were going to give some advice to ESL teachers what would it be?

20. You brought a photo or poem or picture today that describes your experience teaching and learning in the ESL program. Can you tell me what this means to you?
Dara Pachence Schmick

EDUCATION

Penn State University, Harrisburg, PA
- Successful completion of a Doctorate in Education—May 2014
- Successful completion of a Masters in Teaching and Curriculum—August 2005
  - Completion of the Reading Specialist Certificate
  - Completion of the English as a Second Language Certificate
  - GPA: 3.76

Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA
- Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education—December 1999
  - Concentrations in Spanish and Exceptional Children
  - Major GPA: 3.85  Cumulative GPA: 3.27

University of Pontificia, Salamanca, Spain
- Semester Abroad Program through Bloomsburg University—Summer 1999
  - Completion of 9 credits in Spanish Language and Communication

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

Central Dauphin School District, Harrisburg, PA
English as a Second Language Teacher, Fall 2000-Present
- Teach elementary students who are enrolled in the district’s English as a Second Language (ESL) Program
- Lead all ESL teachers for the district as the Head Chairperson for our district’s ESL department
- Make instructional decisions for the Data Decision Team in our school’s Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTII) Program
- Serve as an internal coach for the Positive Behavior (PBS) team at Rutherford Elementary
- Work with the PIRC (Parent Information and Resource Center) to promote parental involvement in the school
- Help revise the current ESL curriculum and standards for the district
- Attend Act 48 conferences in order to meet the diverse needs of students including English Language Learners

Penn State Harrisburg, Middletown, PA
Adjunct Professor, Summer 2006-Present
- Presently teaching on-line graduate level courses to students interested in pursuing an ESL Certification
- Assisted other faculty in expanding the on-line courses for the ESL program at Penn State Harrisburg
- Worked with other faculty members in order to revise assessments according to NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) standards
- Presented an ESL informative poster with other colleagues at an NCATE BOE (Board of Examiner) reception
- Previously completed a second language action research project

RELATED EXPERIENCES

Central Dauphin School District, Harrisburg, PA
ESL Department Chair, Fall 2011-Present
- Lead monthly department meetings and facilitate professional development workshops within the meetings
- Attend monthly department chair meetings for the district and report information back to the ESL staff
- Work very closely with the Director of Pupil Services and act as a liaison between the ESL staff and administration

Central Dauphin School District, Harrisburg, PA
ESL Summer School Teacher, Summer 2002 and 2003
- Taught fourth and fifth grade ESL students in an intensive language program
- Emphasized communication skills, reading, writing, and mathematics throughout the program

CERTIFICATIONS
- Reading Specialist—K-12
- English as a Second Language Program Specialist—K-6
- Instructional I and Instructional II, Elementary K-6

REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST