Study abroad teacher education programme: student perspectives on professional and personal development

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Sheffield School of Education
February 2012
Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the influence of a student teaching abroad programme using data collected from American and Canadian teacher education students who participated in a study abroad programme over a fifteen year period. Although there is a growing body of research into the impact of study abroad in a wider context, far less exists specifically on student teaching abroad and this makes systematic examination difficult. This lack of information provided a major stimulus for developing my own research. This took the form of a longitudinal study which focused on the professional and personal perspectives of the participants’ experience overseas on their subsequent lives and careers. The research sample of sixty-six participants completed a detailed online questionnaire and from this group eight participants were selected to take part in semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

Students’ responses indicated that a major benefit of a student teaching placement abroad was the opportunity it provided to observe and work in an educational system which was often very different from those they had previously experienced. Participants described how they felt they developed a range of personal attributes which enabled them to become more mature, confident, articulate and resourceful teachers. Their experiences were not without challenges and they identified a range of issues which they found difficulty with, including homesickness, the challenge of living in a different environment and teaching students for an extended amount of time (which was a new experience for many of the participants). The challenges experienced however helped to develop in students a growing sense of professionalism as they progressed through their placement. Many participants felt that the rich cultural experiences enhanced and extended their professional and personal development and gave them a confidence to work with a range of ethnically and culturally diverse learners in their subsequent teaching posts on their return to their home countries.
Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for help and support from the following people:

Dr Craig Kissock for suggesting the study in the first place,
Ethan Quirt for working his magic with online questionnaires,
Peter Smith for reading early drafts so thoroughly,
Tony Richardson who really can find lost work on a computer,
Fran Royle for her expertise with words,
Valerie Peters for her peer group support and phone calls,
And last but not least Dr Chris Winter my cheerful and encouraging supervisor without whom this thesis would still be lying in a dark cupboard!
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Chapter 1 Setting the scene

1.1 Introduction

In the 21st century it is widely accepted that school teachers throughout the world have a responsibility to prepare their students to live and work in societies which are increasingly multinational, multilingual and international in character. In the United States there have been numerous calls from teacher educators for their students to have opportunities to work abroad (Cogan, 1982; Schneider and Burns, 1999), but many colleges and universities are still failing to provide them. Blount-Lyon (2008) estimated that over 27% of American colleges have no students at all studying abroad for any part of their programmes. This is not merely an issue for the United States of course; the United Kingdom report *Global horizons and the role of employers* (Archer, 2008) called for more positive support from both universities and funding organisations in the United Kingdom to promote greater opportunities for students to widen their experience by studying abroad during their student days. These research findings reported that employers felt that students who had opted to study abroad demonstrated a range of attributes including initiative, flexibility, cultural awareness and a wider perspective on world issues.

In the United States, international exchange programmes such as the Peace Corps Volunteers and Fulbright Scholarships have for many years offered opportunities for young people generally under thirty years old to study overseas, though few have taken them up – perhaps for financial reasons, or even lack of knowledge that the schemes exist. Higher education offers greater scope to study abroad, particularly in foreign language disciplines, but such opportunities have tended to give a low priority to the field of education (Figure 1.1, page 12). Lambert (1989) describes students in education departments being offered on average 1.5 internationally focused courses per year in contrast to 2.4 courses for students in other major subjects. However, awareness of the need for all citizens to be more globally aware is on the increase. Surveys conducted by the American Council for Education (2002) found that 77% per cent of Americans surveyed in March 2002 supported international course requirements in college, while nearly three out of four agreed that higher education has a responsibility to educate students and teachers on a variety of international issues, events, and cultures. To support this view, in some universities in the United States geography, a discipline which aims to develop a greater understanding of the
wider world is enjoying something of a renaissance compared with the more traditional history-dominated social studies programmes (Murphy, 2007) and could be a possible route for developing greater international knowledge and understanding.

One of the main stumbling blocks to bringing about greater levels of global knowledge and competency in teachers appears to be the inadequacy of the present system of teacher education. The US National Research Council (2007) confirms this view:

One of the key deterrents to developing a pipeline of young people prepared to develop advanced language proficiency and deep knowledge of countries and cultures is a lack of trained teachers. (p.2)

Some American colleges, universities and organisations have developed elements of their teacher training programme to promote global understanding. Some of these offer overseas teaching opportunities to encourage valuable insights into other cultures and educational systems. One example is the student teaching programme established by the University of Minnesota in 1989, which has given over 2,000 student teachers the opportunity to complete their final teaching practice overseas in national and international schools in both the public and independent sectors. However, many academic administrators question the need for international teacher education; the culture of teacher education tends to be local, so it is logical to ask how and why a greater global understanding will help teachers perform better in local schools (Kissock, 2007).

I work for a small educational group called Educators Abroad which organises student teaching placements abroad for a number of teaching education departments in American colleges and universities. Only a relatively small amount of research has been conducted on the effect that an overseas teaching practice placement has on participants either by Educators Abroad or other researchers. This paucity of research evidence has resulted in concerns being expressed as to the efficacy of such placements overseas by some of the teacher education institutions in the United States. My study aims to make a contribution to knowledge about overseas student teaching by researching student teachers’ perspectives about the influence of their overseas student teaching placements in terms of their professional and personal development. The pivotal question in the minds of those who prepare pre-service teachers for their careers, and therefore an important one
for my own research, centres on the ability of student teachers to transfer the competences, knowledge and skills gained in one educational system, to their future employment in another.

1.2 The organisation of this chapter.
In the first part of this chapter I look at the justification for my research and discuss the issues and ideas which led me to develop my study. I then introduce and provide some background for my research question which will be developed more fully in chapter 3 where I discuss the methodology in more detail. I follow this by identifying the significance and relevance of the research which I undertook. I then look at the present position of teacher education in the United States and the growth of the study abroad concept. Finally I discuss my positionality in relation to the research I have conducted. This is developed further in Chapter 3 when I look at how my positionality is influenced by my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

1.3 The justification for my research
In this section I start by explaining the reasons for carrying out this research. I discuss the notion of study abroad and identify some of the evidence which supports a view that study abroad helps students to develop a wide range of skills, competences and knowledge. I go on to reflect on the need to support teacher education institutions in gaining the confidence to encourage their students to participate, and ways of doing this; finally, I describe some insights from this research which can be fed back into the student teaching programme I work with to help review its progress and plan future development.

Study abroad is not a new activity in American higher education colleges and universities, but it has often been concentrated in languages, economics, and business and social sciences faculties. In these subject areas, students can spend varying periods of time overseas, gaining knowledge and understanding of their subject area. There is also evidence that studying in a foreign country helps students to grow and mature in their beliefs, behaviour and competence (Carlson and Burn, 1990; Wilson and Flourney, 2007) and that it helps young people adapt to the possibility that in the future their world may be very different, possibly characterised by fading borders or even becoming borderless (Ceglowski, 1998; Hooghoff, 2001). If this comes to pass, the role of teachers will change, and they will need a very different set of skills to successfully prepare
students for their own futures (Kinchington and Goddard, 2006). However, in disciplines such as education the idea of study abroad is much less well developed (Figure 1.1, p.12). This is possibly because teacher educators feel that student teachers can best be served by being in educational systems in their own area or state rather than learning the craft of the classroom in an entirely different and possibly distant education system which may not sufficiently prepare them for their future posts (Stachowski and Visconti, 1998; Kissock, 2007).

The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005), an important official body in the United States, collected feedback from students returning from overseas study in a range of disciplines. Of these returnees, 98% indicated that studying abroad had helped them to understand their own culture in a more constructive way, and 94% that their experiences abroad had influenced their interactions with people from other cultures on their return home. The personal gains they had made, such as developing self confidence and being able to deal more easily with challenging situations, were seen very much as characteristics which would also help them in their future careers. The Commission’s report also indicated that as a result of these positive gains a very significant goal, that of one million Americans a year able to participate in a study abroad experience would be recommended as a national target.

Students who have studied abroad, and tutors who have supervised a student on an overseas placement, recognise that it can be a pivotal experience. The students returning to campus often described positive experiences (Jackson, 2008), but to date these anecdotal accounts of personal enthusiasm have been unsupported by wide scale research, particularly in education and student teaching (Hopkins & Wilson, 1993; Mahler, 2003). It is important, therefore, to convert what Hulstrand (2006) describes as the “intuitively known” into the “researched known” (p.52) He also notes that the research is very limited in the whole area of study abroad but especially in terms of outcomes:

... it is assumed that programs are valuable, yet additional research is needed to demonstrate actual outcomes. Thorough understanding of individual experiences will allow administrators to develop specialized recruitment techniques and increase enrolments, helping in the national movement to democratize study abroad programming. (p.53)
His use of the word ‘democratise’ is interesting but reinforces his view that greater participation in study abroad is important for everyone and as such is very relevant to my research. He indicates that more research of individualised experiences of overseas study may go some way to helping towards a greater understanding about, and availability of such opportunities both at the administrative and student participant level. Such a comment is directly relevant to my research.

There is more research evidence on study abroad to be found in curriculum areas such as modern foreign languages (Adams, 2000; Byram, 2008) but in education departments the absence of such evidence may inhibit policy makers and teacher educators from supporting study abroad, particularly on campuses where faculty members themselves lack international experience.

While many American colleges recognise the potential value to students of study abroad, they need to see evidenced data which confirms its actual value before they commit their budgets to such projects. At present it is estimated that around 1.5% of the higher education population in the United States spends some time studying abroad for credits during their degree programme (Open Doors, 2009) but many more, up to 50% of all college-bound high school students, express an interest in doing so, illustrating the enormous disparity between those who would like to go and those who actually do.

Colleges and policy makers alike have been cautious about commitment to an institutional philosophy regarding study abroad. Ulich (1979) identified this approach as “fumbling around in education” (p.5), generating unclear perceptions of the benefits that studying abroad can bring about. The US government, however, takes a rather different, and more focused, view of the benefits of international experience, which it interprets as being more about bringing overseas students to US colleges than sending American students overseas. Indeed, successive US administrations regarded themselves as providing the capacity for global leadership by educating generations of world leaders from other countries (NAFSA, 2000). They did not readily see that the United States could benefit in return; for example, that managing homeland security, one of their major pre-occupations, might be significantly enhanced by engaging more positively with the international community, so signalling that the United States wanted to emerge from its isolationism. Until the end of the twentieth century it seemed as if American efforts to engage in meaningful dialogue with the international community were no more than lip service (Leestma, 1979; NAFSA, 2003).
However, the terrorist events of 11 September 2001 changed both the American view of the world and its perception of itself and its place in the world; it was a turning point in the acceptance that the United States needed to engage with other countries differently from in the past. It was also recognised both before and after the events of 2001 that a country’s citizens needed to be educated about the wider world, to acknowledge and understand the different political and cultural identities of other regions (Preston, 1997; Staisny, 2006; Byram, 2008), and to be aware that ethnic and cultural changes, for so long localised, were now resulting in an increased heterogeneity (Nicholson, 1996). The recognition and acceptance of these changes are already giving a fresh impetus to the idea that study abroad should be more actively promoted, across a wider set of educational spectrums in the United States in particular. Eggspuehler (2005) impresses on us the urgency with which the situation needs to be viewed when he wrote:

In the post-September 11 2001 world, it is strikingly clear that the reputation of the United States has suffered greatly across the globe. Moreover, anti-American sentiment is at an alarming high … the root causes of the rising anti-Americanism, which are obvious to many, include US foreign policy, the effects of globalisation, the pervasiveness of US popular culture and the collective personality of US citizens. … neither isolationism nor passivity is practical or prudent in the current climate … the US has an immeasurable amount at stake – the economy, security, education – in what is, after all, a global war of ideas. (p.5)

There are significant differences in the reasons why institutions and government might want to encourage young people to study abroad. Both groups would probably cite personal development, the chance to gain a broader understanding of other nations and their values and priorities, as well as enhanced career prospects and empathy with cultural issues in home communities (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). However, a powerful lobby also sees some very practical, rather than philosophically educational, reasons for supporting these overseas experiences. Over seventy United States federal agencies see dealing with the language and cultural skill shortage highlighted in many areas of employment in the aftermath of 9/11, as critical to American security and economic well-being. Walker (2002) describes the practical consequences of this lack of overseas experience and understanding:

These shortfalls hindered the prosecution of criminal cases; limited the ability to identify arrest and convict violent gang members; weakened the fight against international
terrorism and drug trafficking and resulted in less effective representation of the US interests overseas. (p.2)

So for very different reasons the US government is beginning to support the idea of students becoming more globally aware through overseas experiences. However there are other reasons, beyond the practicalities of supporting homeland security, as to why a greater understanding is needed about other people and their cultures. Multicultural issues are nothing new in the United States, but have often been both confined to, and focussed on, specifically urban areas (Ladson-Billings, 2004). However all that is beginning to change; the rapid rise in immigration from around the world into states all over the US means teachers need to respond rapidly to the resulting increase in cultural diversity, and is a powerful reason for equipping student teachers with overseas experience to help them to achieve this. Schools will need to accommodate an increasingly diverse range of students, which will challenge teachers as never before, and there is much debate about the knowledge, understanding and skills they will need (Rebel, 2003). Individual colleges and universities are now taking tentative steps towards planning more student visits abroad in the hope that a broader outlook and exposure to unfamiliar cultures will help them to establish a cultural framework to support their own life and work experiences on their return home (Baker,1977; Larkin and Sleeter,1995; Klassen and Gollnick, 1997).

The University of Minnesota, a leader in setting up international programmes, aims to have 50% of all undergraduates studying overseas at some stage in their courses by 2016, but in general relatively few university teacher education departments actively encourage their students to participate in these programmes. Figure 1.1 shows the percentage of American college or university students (Post Secondary Enrolment) who have had the opportunity to study abroad as part of their course during 2006. The figures clearly show that while education is the fourth largest subject group in terms of enrolment it is eighth in terms of participation in study abroad, and Open Doors reports (2008) indicate that the figure of around 4% has barely changed for more than seven years. This lack of growth could be attributed to a number of causes including home circumstances or financial pressures on participants but some educators believe that local colleges are really best placed to prepare students to teach in local schools and that teaching overseas is just too different, so students would be unable to apply their overseas experience in local schools in the United States (Kissock, 2007).
Figure 1.1: The percentage of US study abroad participants by subject. (Information based on data from the Institute of International Education’s Open Doors Report and the US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics 2006.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic subject</th>
<th>Post Secondary Enrolment 2003-4</th>
<th>Students abroad 2003-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and management</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.1%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine or applied arts</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign languages</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health sciences</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math or computer science</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and life sciences</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social science</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With both federal and state governments placing a high emphasis on accountability, it is easy to see why American colleges and universities are concerned that returning overseas student teachers might be found poorly prepared for work; any shortcomings in this respect would rebound on their institutions. The academic integrity of the constant experiential ways of learning that make up student teaching is possibly one of the most contested issues in any evaluation of study abroad (Sommer, 2002). Research evidence which evaluates the outcomes of student teaching abroad will help to identify both positive and negative responses from participating students and so move the debate forward. The amount of research about student teaching abroad is still relatively small. Chapter 2 analyses some studies which look at the cultural impact of the placement on returning students, particularly how it affected their language.
acquisition. However recognition is growing that the effects of extended overseas travel is not just about language acquisition but more about developing students’ perspectives on their placement country, the people they encounter there and subsequently, possibly on their own home country. Research (Pollack and Van Reken, 1999) indicates that immersion in a different culture, living there as an ethnic minority, can have long-lasting impacts on cultural perspectives; this may lead to a clearer understanding about the culture of both the placement country and their own. Kakar(1982) also notes that:

A degree of alienation from one’s own culture, a deep exposure to other world views and even a temporary period of living as “others” may indeed be necessary for heightening one’s perception about the culture and society one is born into. (p.9)

However one of the issues with any degree of alienation and being part of a minority group in a foreign country is that of acculturation. Thompson (1996) identifies the risk to visitors or minority groups of being coerced into conforming to, and being assimilated into, the dominant culture, resulting in a possible loss of identity for the minorities.

As European Manager for Educators Abroad, placing North American students in their student teaching schools, I am privileged to be able to work with the growing number of student teachers who opt for placements in a variety of locations overseas. The student teaching abroad programme is designed to ensure that participants gain a greater understanding of international contexts and become more aware of the world beyond their national boundaries. However, colleges and universities supporting the programme need to know the impact of participation both on the students themselves and on their ability to teach effectively, whether in the United States or elsewhere. Are the student teachers disadvantaged by having worked in schools in a different location and culture from their own? Can they fulfil the assessment criteria for state recognition as a qualified teacher upon their return? My study identifies the impacts, professionally and personally, on participants in an overseas student teaching experience, but more importantly the degree to which students feel they can fulfil the assessment criteria for a state teaching qualification, and how far such a placement influences their ability to work successfully in the US educational system on their return.
1.4 The research question

My work consists in placing and supervising student teachers from the United States and Canada in schools in over 45 countries, and is formally complete when they have returned home and the home university has received their letters of recommendation and final assessments. At present the student teaching programme receives occasional feedback from the students as to how they adapt to their teaching positions on their return to the United States but this is often sporadic and anecdotal in nature. To evaluate the programme effectively the time was ready to have a more rigorous method of indentifying outcomes for students. This set the broad parameters for my research which became clearer after considering the aims outlined in the Handbook for Participants (Educators Abroad, 2009), which set out the philosophy underpinning the rationale and organisational framework for the programme:

(Teacher Educators) must cause every person who seeks to enter our profession, which is a global one, to move beyond their comfort zone, develop their talents in communities which are different from the ones they know and demonstrate their ability to guide the learning of any young person they encounter … As teacher educators we have two fundamental responsibilities: to help select and then begin the process of preparing individuals who will, throughout a forty-year career as a professional educator, effectively prepare students for the world in which they will live – the world of 70-100 years into the future (p.4)

The justification for my research question which is discussed at greater length in Chapter 3 can be expressed in two ways. The first is from the philosophy of the programme which provided the broad field for research into college students and their participation in a student teaching programme abroad. From a critical review of the literature about study abroad in general and student teaching in particular it appeared that study abroad schemes were well documented, and supported by a growing number of colleges. However, the research often concentrated on identifying the personal, rather than professional, gains made by participating students (Hyser, 2005; Obst et al., 2007), and research that focused on the evaluation of student teaching overseas was far less in evidence (Manley, 2002). It became clear to me that if the ideas about student teaching overseas were to be seriously considered in teacher education departments in universities and colleges in the United States, research was needed to identify how the overseas experience affected the professional futures of the returning student teachers. The second justification for the question is provided by the programme organisers’ question – how effective
is our programme? And how can we accurately analyse the outcomes? Answers to these questions can help develop programme policy and practice in the future.

My research question, therefore, is in two parts: what effect does participation in a student teaching programme abroad have on (a) the professional development of teachers, and (b) their personal development? The first part of the question examines the impact of an overseas placement on students professionally. Participants are then asked to compare the education systems they taught in abroad with their previous experiences in the US. They were also asked to consider how easy or difficult it was to adapt or transfer their experience on the practicum placement to their subsequent teaching posts. My decision to initially investigate the effects on students’ professional lives was twofold: firstly, it gives the research new ground to work on, and secondly I hope it can give the programme organisers empirical evidence about its level of effectiveness, on both teachers’ subsequent careers and the educators and students with whom they work. The second part of the question recognises that a teacher’s professional and personal development may be linked, and influenced by study abroad. Learning to teach is a very personal experience and the results are very dependent on the quality of the experiences a student teacher encounters (Hauge, 2000). Asking students “How did your life and work in another country impact on you as a person?” may help to identify if any personal values or outlooks changed during the placement.

1.5 The significance and relevance of the research
The significance is threefold. The first strand concerns the need to understand and contribute to the re-thinking of the practice of teacher professionalism (Mayer, 1997; Sachs, 2000), so teachers can respond to the challenges they face in their professional future. Student teaching in another country is not without its critics: one common objection raised on American campuses is the belief that in order to be well prepared to teach in an American school it is necessary to be a student teacher in the American system (Mahon and Espinetti, 2007). By examining responses from a large number of student teachers who have participated in an overseas teaching experience it may be possible to see how far the above statement holds true. The changing nature of classrooms, the growth of a multicultural society and the need to widen educational perspectives on matters such as equality, diversity and social justice means that new ways of
thinking about educating student teachers have to be found (Moran, 2007). The question which arises is can student teaching overseas contribute a positive answer to this debate or not?

A second significant feature of this research will be a review of the literature connected with the whole concept of study abroad and in particular student teaching; this will also provide a basis for future research in this area. A third significant strand of the research is to provide relevant and timely feedback to help the student teaching programme managers know if its objectives are being achieved, and if necessary review current policies and practices. If the programme is to develop and thrive, college staffs also need to be confident that they can help student teachers to gain the professional competencies required by their potential employers.

1.6 The present position of teacher education
The quality of the education provided in any community depends critically on the quality and training of teachers, but as the community changes so teachers need to develop if they are to continue to fulfil their role well (Kirk, 1988). At present initial teacher education is often criticised for its inability to prepare students for teaching in the “real world”. If they are to serve students well, teachers must now not only be pedagogically, but also culturally, competent (Cushner and Brennan, 2007) and inter-culturally sensitive (Bennett, 1993). However, it is unrealistic to expect that new teachers should be able to take their place in schools on the same level as more experienced colleagues (Robinson and Latchem, 2003); their training may lack vision about their future needs and direction (Helsby, 2000). The training and development of teachers is a contested issue, and sits in a context of rapid changes around the world and high expectations of education systems (Goodson, 2000): notions of lifelong learning, and the need to equip people with a variety of new skills as well as the flexibility to cope with global changes, are seen as vital components of education (Robinson and Latchem, 2003). Change in the world is constant and both national policies and teacher education institutions need to respond flexibly to this if teachers are to fulfil their role well.

However, many of the present changes are limited and limiting, as well as inward looking. US Governmental pressure and accountability to state and federal bodies often inhibit flexibility in teacher training, and teachers are subject to ever increasing limitations on their freedom within
the classroom. For several decades, political influence has had a significant impact on the way teacher education is organised. National policies in the United States such as “No Child Left Behind” (2001) influence state requirements, which in turn rely heavily on testing and accountability to raise standards, often resulting in restricted curriculum opportunities for young people. McCulloch (2000) talks of the “myths and memories” (p.24) of teacher freedom to choose what to teach which used to exist and are often invoked by critics of the centralised approach common in many countries, but in reality this freedom was lost long ago as National Strategies in both the United States and the United Kingdom took a more central place in determining the curriculum to be delivered.

Our inability to know what the future holds for us identifies a problem in determining the best way to train teachers (Carr, 2000), but the status quo at the present time which, if left unchallenged, may well not prepare the high quality teachers of the future. This centrally controlled approach to education (Dorrell, 2008) provides the backdrop for my research. If colleges and universities in the United States are to be more open to considering the possibilities of overseas student teaching placements, they need researched evidence to show whether or not their institutional educational aims and goals are capable of being met by study abroad, to the same standards as in the United States. Many teacher educators are doubtful that this can be done as it is difficult for some faculty members to imagine that:

... the possibility that pedagogical skills practised in overseas schools can be used to address problems and parameters of schooling in the United States … individuals who have invested time into crafting a teacher preparation program may believe the international context simply does not offer the same quality or philosophy of teaching. Thus, questions of context often lead to quality concerns. (Mahon and Espinetti, 2007, p.17)

1.7 The growth of the study abroad concept
A welcome milestone in the development of study abroad programmes was the designation by Congress of 2006 as the Year of Study Abroad. This was a consequence of the 2004 appointment by the President and Congress, of a Commission (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005) to recommend ways of expanding and enhancing opportunities for American undergraduates to study abroad. This had a particular emphasis on
diversifying destinations and institutions, as well as the range of students. According to the Commission around 191,000 students travel abroad annually to study, about 60% of them heading for Europe; this represents only about 1% of the totalled enrolled undergraduates. 66% were female participants and less than 4% were black.

The Year of Study Abroad does seem to have softened the educational mood in the United States and produced a more positive response towards student teaching overseas, but real credibility requires research evidence into the effect on students of their experiences, and how they might be applying these experiences to the business of shaping their subsequent lives. An important outcome of this research study will be its contribution to the debate about whether or not student teaching overseas really can not only match the experience in North American institutions but also equip students with other qualities and skills not available at home.

1.8 My research positionality
Positionality is central to the research process in three ways: first my position as the researcher; second that of the participants in the research; and third the various positions adopted within the research topic literature. Of course, positions change over time, and very possibly over the life of the research project. Wellington et al (2000) identify that:

Where people are positioned is rarely clear cut; they may hold views at different points on a continuum, and may, indeed, sometimes contradict themselves (p.22).

My own positionality which is developed further in Chapter 3, where I look at how my ontology and epistemology influence my decision particularly in carrying out my research, derives from two strongly held views; first, that we all need to know about the world we live in; and second, as an educator, a deep-rooted commitment to helping students understand how others live their lives. As a geography teacher I have always been interested in the world around me; it is a constant source of fascination and wonder, though not always easy to understand or interpret. My research career began when I became a local authority Adviser for Geography in the UK, initiating and leading BPhil courses for primary teachers within the authority. Here I developed a new interest: helping teachers to research and write their own dissertations.
This was followed by work at two British universities where I developed a range of professional modules for primary geography PGCE courses. I became aware of, and disturbed by, how little some education students knew about the peoples, environments and cultures of the world, and yet these were to be the future teachers of youngsters from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This led to voluntary work with the Geographical Association, a subject association which supports the teaching of geography in schools and colleges in the UK, where I have opportunities, albeit on a limited scale, to encourage teachers to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills in their geographical thinking and understanding about the world, both physical and human. For the last fourteen years I have worked with Educators Abroad, a small organisation which enables student teachers, initially from colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, to complete their practical student teaching experiences in schools overseas. More recently, student teachers from education departments in English universities have also been able to join the programme.

The methodologies I chose to use to develop my research are those which are best suited to my research purpose; I chose to use a quantitative one to collect information from a wide number of participants in the programme which would provide a broad based context for the research but as my personal view is more of a socially constructivist one, I was happy to also use a qualitative approach carrying out interviews to help me understand more about the individual participants’ experience. The benefit of using two different methodologies increased the trustworthiness of the data as triangulation could be used to provide a check on data previously collected. My choice of methodologies and methods is more fully discussed in Chapter 3. I began my research in 2004 by creating an email database of all known participants in the programme over a fifteen-year period, around 1200 students, and asking them to help with my research. 232 respondents replied to the original email; sixty-six subsequently completed an online questionnaire. From the questionnaire respondents eight people were selected to interview face to face; this selection process is fully described in Chapter 3. As I was already closely involved with the student programme it was important that my methodologies and methods allowed data to be collected in a fair and responsible manner so I could not be accused of picking or choosing specific participants who might for example be expected to provide a more positive review of the programme. They had all completed their placements, and indeed their degrees, by the time of the research which
meant there was no chance of my being in a position to change award outcomes or perceive “a positive indebtedness” (p.45) to the participants for their willingness to contribute to the research (Cohen et al., 2000).

However, I do acknowledge the importance of recognising one’s own level of objectivity and positionality when undertaking research but there is a richness to be gained from working with each of the individual participants which both shapes and enhances the experience (Wellington, 2000). As the researcher, I must use my privileged position as a key instrument in the process with care, allowing the voices and views of the participants to come through clearly and accurately allowing me to report honest responses and make critical reflections on the findings. The insider’s advantages – access to information, an understanding of the systems used, being personally accepted by the students and so on – are not without their dangers (Woodward and Sinclair, 2005): it would be easy enough to apply pressure on students to provide positive answers. I, as the researcher, have to be aware of my ability to affect the responses or be seen by colleagues as a gatekeeper of the evidence, and take steps to minimise such effects on the results. Some argue that far from being a negative aspect of research, positionality is an important ingredient (Taylor and Tisdell, 2000); others like Cook (2005) suggest it makes it a tricky business to produce convincing arguments and critically evaluated findings. It is often maintained (Freire, 1994) that all social science research, including teacher education, cannot be politically neutral but that bias only becomes questionable when it stifles or overpowers open thought and discussion or distorts evidence.

My own beliefs are set out here: I personally hold the view that study abroad is a positive concept which can promote a sense of connectedness between participants and those with whom they engage. I have a deep curiosity therefore to find out if, and how far, these student teachers feel that their view of the world has changed as a result of their experiences or if indeed it was of benefit to them in their future work or not.

1.9 The structure of the dissertation
In Chapter 2 I critically review existing research in three main ways. The first explores the literature about what student teachers need to know and experience in order to prepare them for
work in the 21st century. The second reviews the literature on the value of international and global concepts for developing education in the future. The third looks at research into examples of study abroad and existing student teaching abroad programmes in the United States. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and methods used to carry out the research. An initial online questionnaire collected data and verified the availability of students; this was followed up by face to face interviews with selected participants. In Chapter 4 I explain how the analysis is structured; this is followed by an overview of the main research findings. I present and analyse the data collected from both the questionnaire survey and the semi-structured interviews. Chapters 5 and 6 review my research in the light of the research questions, the core issues which emerge from the literature review and the data which emerges from the findings. I also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research project, and make recommendations as to how these findings might be used to both improve and strengthen the student teaching programme. Finally I suggest areas for further useful research in the future.

1.10 Conclusion
This first chapter has set out the issues surrounding study abroad, and student teaching in particular, and explained why the topic is so important, so justifying my research on it. It also provided an opportunity for me to question my own positionality with regard to research and clarify my research questions, which will become more focussed as a result of reviewing the existing literature. The next chapter takes on the task of critically examining this literature, not only to assess the existing knowledge but also to locate gaps in evidence or questions which still need to be answered. I begin by examining researchers’ views about some of the challenges future teachers will face and what they will need to prepare them to fulfil their roles successfully in a rapidly changing world. I also look at the emergence of the standards debate and the impact of policy document on teacher preparation particularly in the United States. I then review the need for a more global and international dimension in developing teacher education in the future. I examine some of the literature on current study abroad programmes and present the case for and against study abroad and finally identify some of the main debates and ideas which emerged from the review of the literature.
Chapter 2 A review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to review the literature pertinent to my area of research. A literature review has three main purposes:

- to help the researcher set the chosen topic in context, by critically analysing existing research literature
- to identify areas of controversy or gaps in the research, enabling the researcher to determine the direction of research
- to help to formulate or confirm research questions.

To make a new contribution to the debate, the researcher needs to be knowledgeable about the topic, and a review of the existing literature is an opportunity to investigate work already done. Hart (1998) emphasizes that an open mind and setting aside prior assumptions, will facilitate interesting or unexpected findings. It is also important to maintain a critical perspective, comparing and evaluating work in the research and connected topics. Wellington (2000) describes this process clearly, likening a piece of research to a brick, original in itself but also capable of slotting into an existing wall constructed with other material.

One important but challenging aspect of reviewing the research material is knowing when to stop. With the explosion of available information, particularly peer reviewed academic material on the internet this can be a real problem, and coping with the endless amount of material that presents itself was creatively described by Kamlar and Thomson (2006) as “persuading an octopus into a glass …” (p.8). This literature review refers to, and takes account of, a number of different types of sources in both hard copy and electronic formats, including academic books and papers, policy documents, journal articles and doctoral theses. As the topic is comparatively new much of the literature, particularly the research papers and small-scale investigations, is published in journals, reports and on the internet. I draw on material from around the world, but the majority is from research into university and teacher education in the UK and the USA.
2.2 Choosing the literature to review

Whilst the idea of student teaching overseas is relatively new, the literature with potential significance for my research is quite extensive, so to help me choose appropriate material for critical review I returned to my research question: what effect does participation in a student teaching programme abroad have on (a) the professional and career development of teachers, and (b) their personal development? To support consideration of these questions I also returned to the purposes of the teacher education programme in which I work:

School based experiences and student teaching are significant aspects of teacher education programs. These experiences provide students with an opportunity to understand all dimensions of teaching, develop professional talents and demonstrate abilities expected of professional educators in the twenty-first century. (Educators Abroad 2009, p. 4)

A good starting point, therefore, was to identify literature which looked at the knowledge, understanding, talents and abilities that teachers need in order to do their job well. Given that teaching is a global profession, what does existing research say about how well teachers are prepared for the challenges presented by the twenty-first century such as increased student mobility, the rapid pace of change in education, and the diverse needs of individual students, schools and countries? It was therefore important to see what the existing literature had to say about the need for a more global approach to educating teachers.

Having identified the appropriate literature which focussed on the aim of my study and the research question the following five sections emerged for my literature review:

- Challenges in the preparation of teacher educators and class teachers for the future.
- Implication of the standards debate for, and the impact of the main policy documents on, teacher education.
- Assessing the need for a more global approach to education.
- Cases for and against study abroad, with reference to some of the existing programmes.
- Conclusion: the issues and debates which emerged from the review.
2.3 Challenges in the preparation of teacher educators and class teachers for the future

a) Introduction
There are always tensions in student teacher education, not only between the agencies which work with student teachers – schools, cooperating teachers and teacher educator institutions – but also more widely, in the debate about how best to prepare teachers for the future. Wragg (1982) succinctly refers to it as “an unmanageable field” (p.11) and questions the often arbitrary decisions which may not necessarily meet the needs of the future teachers and students. This first section of chapter 2 examines the major challenges for teacher educators and suggests how the practices and processes of teacher education might develop to meet the new demands of a changing world. It also considers research on encouraging reflective practice amongst student teachers, and finally looks at an example of rather more controversial research on how teachers should be prepared for their future careers.

b) Identifying the challenges
I began by looking at research undertaken by Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) who posed the view early on in their work that the task of preparing new teachers is complex and challenging. Over a two-year period they researched the experiences of two cohorts of twenty trainee teachers in the UK as they completed their professional training and classroom experiences. They had three particular interests:
- the trainees’ experience of the process of becoming a teacher;
- any changes to their conceptual understanding of the training process that had taken place;
- how well they thought they had been prepared for their future posts.

Calderhead and Shorrock’s findings can be summarised as follows. First, teacher educators appeared to lack a common language and understanding of their field, so they were sometimes unable to communicate effectively with both the school and the student teachers. This created tensions between the academic and practical sides of the experience. Second, although there have been many imperatives to encourage innovation in teacher education, students saw many of these as politically motivated, rather than prompted by a clear understanding of the needs of future
teachers. Finally, they found that student teachers appeared to value their school-based practical experience much more highly than their college-based professional training; this created dissatisfaction with what they call the “bridge” between theory and practice.

Calderhead and Shorrock go on to carefully consider possible reasons for these findings. In contrast to other professions, teaching appears to place a high premium on the personal and practical experience, which they define as “action orientated”. This is in line with the findings of Lanier and Little (1986) who identified in law for instance, theory was emphasised and work-based placements were relegated to a minor role. Calderhead and Shorrock’s forthright conclusion was that to maximise student teachers’ training experience, institutions needed to work harder at developing the interface between theory and practice. They also pointed to the size of the task facing student teachers, which involved working with a huge volume of knowledge, skills and understanding in a short time frame: the consequent overload resulted in theoretical work being jettisoned in favour of the practical elements, which tended to boost teachers’ confidence as well as offering survival mechanisms for their future work. And like Cope, Kalantzis et al (1994) concluded that the personal and emotional ties which form between the student teacher, class teacher and pupils are a very significant part of the professional experience, so classroom practice becomes a landmark for student teachers. This is also confirmed by Torrence (2007) who argues that the student teacher relationship with school teaching staff has a powerful influence on learning to teach. From my own experience of supervising student teachers I very much agree with this finding, whilst at the same time believing in the difficult but essential task of balancing and underpinning these motivational practical experiences with the academic rigour of the teacher education courses.

Shrewdly, however, Calderhead and Shorrock surmise that the academic college contribution to developing the skills of teaching may be greater than the students realise, as it tends to be embedded in their classroom work and is thus less readily identified and acknowledged. They go on to suggest, logically enough, that one reason why preparing students to teach is perceived to be so challenging is that it requires a range of learning processes quite unlike those the students have previously encountered. This may sound obvious, but I think it may be very perceptive. Entry to higher education requires academic qualifications, often within highly specialised
parameters resulting in tight assessment outcomes; in contrast the breadth of knowledge, skills
and understanding students must acquire to become successful teachers must at times seem
almost unachievable. Lodge (2010) describes it as a “tsunami of competing information” (p.104).
Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) conclude their research not by offering answers but by posing a
series of questions, for example: “Why is teacher education so dilemma ridden?” and “Why do
trainee teachers feel that they are not always adequately prepared to face their own classes in the
future?” This is somewhat unsatisfactory but they are honest in acknowledging that this
important area would benefit from further investigation and give very positive encouragement to
others to continue this work.

The importance attached to school-based learning is confirmed by Bridges (1993), who sees the
mentoring role of class teachers for student teachers as vital as it can “ strengthen the
professional identity of teachers” (p.53) but he cautions that it can also distract from a teachers’
central commitment to working with pupils. Despite various attempts to restructure teacher
education, according to Korthagen et al. (2006) there is no consensus about which principles
should underpin teacher education programmes to ensure that they are responsive to the
expectations, needs and practices of student teachers. They analyse the effective features of
Australian, Canadian and Dutch programmes, and suggest a framework of seven educational
principles for preparing student teachers for their future work. The problem, which they clearly
identify but do not solve, is how to smoothly integrate theory into practice in a context of
significant pressure on schools and teachers to achieve prescribed standards and attainment
targets.

Romano and Cushner (2007) talk of teacher preparation moving towards what they call a
mechanistic, technocratic model, aligned with state and national accrediting bodies as well as
meeting a required set of standards. A mandatory framework of planning and assessment already
has a tight grip on schools in both the UK and US; trying to meet these requirements, and at the
same time assimilate a vast body of knowledge and new skills, generates great anxiety amongst
students. Sachs (2000) also identifies this as a significant issue for classroom teachers who are
continuously required to be externally accountable to a great variety of stakeholders, often with
differing views, while at the same time helping pupils become well-rounded, informed and proactive citizens. She sees this as limiting the true potential for teachers, who need to be:

Skilled practitioners who are able to solve immediate practical problems, reflect on their practice in order to develop quality learning opportunities for their students and cope with rapid change inside and outside their classrooms. (p.77)

Already emerging from the literature is a sense of confusion about what student teachers should know and learn, stemming from the lack of consensus about how student teachers should be prepared for their future work. Discussing a new teacher education course he helped to establish, Hicks (1994) tries to bring some sort of order to the problem by identifying three fundamental questions:

- What challenges have to be faced?
- What role will education have to play in society?
- How far will education in its present form be able to meet the global needs of the next century?

He is rightly concerned that the universality of the school experience can lead to complacency; what we ourselves experienced is repeated through subsequent teaching generations – the “one lesson taught fifty times” model, rather than fifty lessons taught once each. He acknowledges the difficulties of living in such fast-changing times, and recommends that teacher education should develop long-term, as well as short-term, goals to help young people fit more easily into their future worlds. He urges us to recognise that all our actions will have consequences – we cannot opt out of the future – and clear direction is needed on how teaching relates to the future needs of children. Gunter (1995) raises further issues, describing what he considers the two most important global changes of the previous two decades: transformed educational systems and the creation of rigorous standardisation, which he describes as the “relentless pursuit of school improvement” (p.viii). He warns that in many countries, raising educational achievement is seen in a context of national economic competitiveness – a matter of establishing an easily identified range of standards each student must reach.

This idea is further developed by Hargreaves (2003) who comments that the failure to promote sustainable educational development in teaching and learning can in part be traced to the
focussed adherence to the pattern of reform adopted and the method of restructuring, together with increased accountability through the imposition of standards. These are significant points. Both Gunter and Hargreaves take a rather bleak view of how education is evolving, but the promoters of school improvement are working from the moral high ground: it is difficult to argue with the concept of school improvement. The tensions inherent in the drive to bring about change can have a significant effect on a teaching workforce. Ingersoll (2003) found that around a third of America’s new teachers leave the profession during their first three years, citing poor facilities, large, often ethnically diverse classes and low salaries, as well as the heavy reliance on standards as a measure of success both for themselves and their students. To remedy this situation, Ingersoll favours a strong field experience in diverse settings supervised by accomplished teachers. Through this student teachers will build up a wider understanding of what good teaching can be and can achieve, and develop a more balanced approach to what is needed to be an effective teacher.

According to Olson (2007) it is inappropriate to continue with what she calls a factory model, where novice teachers are expected to fill exactly the same roles as longer-serving teachers, which she deems totally unacceptable for our rapidly changing technologically-based society. But she argues that we must rethink the structure as a whole, rather than just tinker with individual elements, if anything good is to come out of it. Earlier research supports her views: for example, Berends et al. (2002) had already warned about the inadequacy of attempting piecemeal reform of schools by simply reacting to individual pressure points. They looked at a decade of the New American Schools (NAS) organisation, formed in 1991 to create and develop whole-school designs for improving students’ performance that would be adopted by all US schools. The results of Berends et al’s study confirm that applied research and continuous evaluation are vital to identifying and disseminating good practice and raising student achievement. The key players, i.e. teachers, need to be involved in all facets of development if they are to cease being what they call “recipients of chance” and instead become “instigators of change” (p.2). They argue that the best outcomes are where both state and school districts develop policies and practices that support school improvement processes, and where there is broad community understanding and support for school redesign: these become embedded into a district’s culture, ensuring that they last, as they say, “beyond one dynamic superintendent” (p7).
A much sharper and more controversial solution is proposed by Carroll (2007) when he talks somewhat provocatively of the need to abandon “factory era schools”, which were designed to meet the needs of the last century, and totally rethink what is needed to prepare both teacher educators and teachers for the challenges of the 21st century. Strands in his study echo the British idea of community cohesion, whereby schools are encouraged to develop a wider local vision for both children and education in their own areas. A clear definition of what forms a good educational experience is lacking in much of the literature, but there is a greater consensus that the quality of education is critically dependent on the quality of its teachers. Kirk (1988) takes a very broad view of the teacher’s role, one which has at its’ heart the education of children in a more holistic way. This he feels will give a better quality education but acknowledges that many educators hold a much narrower view of teaching with clear boundaries and objectives which results in what he terms a “curriculum as content” model (p.11).

So far, the evidence suggests a failure to agree about how student teachers should be prepared for teaching. Stenhouse (1975), however, embraces this controversy, arguing that diverse interpretations should be welcomed as a sign of a dynamic and vigorously developing system, and thinks that the notion of teacher as a researcher accords well with methodologies and knowledge within the system. He supports the view that curriculum change could feed teachers’ personal research and development, enabling them to see progression in their understanding and transforming their self image and improving their practice. It would be interesting now to hear Stenhouse’s reaction to the present educational model, based on tightly regulated schools and attainment targets, and his views about their effect on teachers and the quality of their work.

Day (2000) has no doubts as to what is important about the preparation of teachers. The way teachers develop is determined by their professional and personal experiences, the school environment and policies, and the interaction of these two aspects. Valli (1993) suggests that the ability to reflect successfully on one’s own practices may be one of the most important processes in teacher education, but is often played down in the rush to create and fulfil its objectives. Reflection should be an ongoing process in a teacher’s development, fully embedded in the structure of broader goals and objectives, in what Valli describes as the “personal construction” of becoming a teacher.
Further encouragement exists for teachers to break out of the constricting mould that politicians set for them. Wideen and Grimmett (1985) argue that we seek too readily to control our world through technology and economic productivity; the greatest challenge facing teachers today, they suggest, is resisting such conformity. They reinforce Stenhouse’s concept of self image, venturing onto what might seem dangerous ground with this question:

How do we enable the student teacher to develop a sense of the self, rather than fit the school or knowledge regimes? (p.110)

This is a really important question; but to break free from the constraints placed on classroom teachers is to climb a veritable mountain. Perhaps a partial answer might be that student teachers and teachers should become more active and reflective, using the established framework as a construct rather than a barrier to performance, and developing more readily their own philosophy and individuality within it. More radically, Stenhouse saw teachers as pioneers exploring attitudes and values in their bid to become what he described as “extended professionals”. However, under current political, social and professional constraints, such freedoms may be difficult to achieve.

The concept of the teacher as a reflective practitioner is further supported by Zeichner (1996), who acknowledges the wealth of experience and expertise that already resides in teachers’ practice. This is also noted by Schon (1987) who refers to it as ‘knowledge in action’ (p.15). From the individual teacher’s perspective, it means that the important process of understanding and self improvement must start from reflection on one’s own experience and continue throughout the teacher’s career. This support for reflective thinking has been a major influence on my research. I ask past participants in a programme to reflect on their placement, and how it has affected their subsequent practice; in this way I hope to reach beyond their initial reaction to the experience of the “new” to a deeper level of understanding about the effect of their overseas placement.

Darling-Hammond (2006) critiques the view, widespread amongst lay people and – more worryingly – some policy makers, that many people could teach quite well given the opportunity, and equipped with some relevant knowledge together with she calls a few “tricks of the
trade”(p.24). She outlines the realities: in some classrooms in the United States at least 20% of the students will be living in poverty, 20% may have learning difficulties and 15% may speak a language other than English, whilst up to 40% may be a member of a racial ethnic minority group. Many will be recent immigrants from countries with different educational and cultural traditions. It is hard to see how anyone, in such circumstances, could be a successful teacher without a thorough teacher education background to support them.

In direct contradiction of these views, extensive but much-contested research published by Levine (2006) painted teacher education in the US as a “troubled field in which a majority of aspiring teachers are educated in low quality programs that fail to sufficiently prepare them for the classroom”(p.21). Levine’s first premise is that if teachers are to be well prepared, Schools of Education must recruit more academically able students; his second, that the present system of assessment and accreditation of student teachers in the US is so badly flawed it should be dropped. He suggests the development of clinically-based, rigorous five-year programmes and recommends the closure of poor-quality programmes. These recommendations, although not new, hit hard at the very core of the way colleges work and are causing much debate within teacher education, so warrant further examination. It is accepted in many countries that a career in teaching may not attract the most academically able students. Inadequate promotional structures, poor pay and heavy workload are strong reasons for seeking employment elsewhere. In the US elite universities charge higher fees, so students planning to teach, who may subsequently earn lower salaries than those who go for example into business, tend to opt for cheaper institutions. These may have good teacher education programmes but lack the prestige, as well as the costs, of the elite.

Levine’s hard-hitting, controversial research may be most valuable in stimulating US colleges, universities and organizations such as the voluntary National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to reflect on their existing systems and challenge their beliefs about the way they work. Levine indicates that some elite universities which do not have teacher education programmes accredited still produce very good teachers; he argues that this proves such accreditation lacks value and should be jettisoned. Professional accreditation in teacher education is clearly not perfect; in spring 2005 NCATE reported that around one in four of the
teacher education institutions inspected failed to meet NCATE standards. But the accreditation process does have identifiable standards which must be reached and maintained.

Wise (2006) challenges Levine’s conclusions:

We might all wish that elite institutions would produce a more significant share of America’s teachers but, given the economics of higher education and the teaching profession, that has never occurred in the past, nor does it appear likely to happen anytime in the foreseeable future. The sad truth is that teacher education is not an important part of the mission at some elite institutions. Eighty percent of those preparing to be classroom teachers are prepared at public institutions, with most at regional state colleges and universities. (p.2)

For me, the flaw in Levine’s work is his basic premise: the importance of the outcome, rather than the process, of preparing teachers. He believes that the most important role of teacher education is to prepare students to work in today’s outcome-based and accountability-driven schools, which in turn produce their own high-achieving students. This goal is politically set and schools are judged on their ability to turn out such students. Levine accepts this standards-based model, rather than exploring other criteria for preparing and assessing teachers – a view that puts him on a direct collision course with many teacher educators and educational researchers.

c) Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this section confirms that the preparation of student teachers is characterised by a perceived disconnection between academic theory and classroom experience; in addition, teacher education lags behind rapid change in educational needs globally. There is no consensus about how to address these problems, and as a result, student teachers in the US, and indeed elsewhere increasingly often feel ill prepared to take up teaching posts. It also confirms that reflection on their experiences, by students and teachers alike, is the starting point for change and progress in successful teaching. The points made about the importance of reflection in the preparation process supported the development of my questionnaire and interview questions about prospective teachers’ ability to reflect on the results of their work, the challenges they faced, and the potential transferability of their overseas experiences to their subsequent jobs.
2.4 Implication of the standards debate for, and the impact of the main policy documents on, teacher education

a) Introduction
Identifying quality teaching has always been what might be described as a will o’ the wisp exercise – we know when we see it, but measuring it has presented successive generations of teacher educators with a challenge (Yorke, 2008) Today the emphasis has moved on to measuring teacher effectiveness in terms of increasing student achievement in line with clearly defined national or state curriculum objectives and outcomes. This section looks at some of the research into both teacher accountability and the impact of attempts to raise standards, together with a review of some of the important policy documents which have helped to bring this present situation about.

b) The impact of accountability and the standards debate
Zamastil-Vondrova (2005) found that quality and accountability in higher education were both high on the agenda of governments in the US and UK. She also points out that as successful outcomes in teacher education are likely to be measured by standardised tests, attempting to quantify study abroad using the same instruments may prove difficult, especially where not only knowledge acquired, but intrinsic qualities such as personal growth, cultural awareness and sensitivity form part of the evaluation process. Imig and Imig (2006a) discuss the fact that the readily available hard data of student achievement can be seen not only to identify effective teachers but also as evidence of the effectiveness of particular teaching methods or curriculum plans. With education a feature of mainstream political agendas, any progressive methodology was never going to replace the more traditionalist approaches which have long been an established feature of education not only in the United States but in many other countries as well. American school pupils have to complete a raft of assessments which as used as a yardstick of successful schooling and trainee teachers have to successfully complete the individual State standards in order to qualify.

But as Imig and Imig point out, an army of educational researchers has been unable to identify to anyone’s satisfaction those characteristics which really do define the excellent teacher: in the
absence of an alternative yardstick, this puts the proponents of student learning outcomes in a strong position. Successive governments in the US have homed in on this uncertainty, so criterion- and norm-referenced tests of student achievement remain the accepted methods of ensuring that both schools and their students are making the sort of progress required by the No Child Left Behind agenda (2001) which now underpins the curriculum and teaching requirements in the United States. Furthermore, the accreditation standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001) arrived at a consensus of what it deems to be good practice in teaching: subject knowledge is a vital part of the teaching strategies, and together with the desired skills and pedagogical understanding, should underpin not only teaching strategies in the classroom but should also form the basis of teacher education programmes throughout the nation. This professional model of competence has produced certification standards, standards for national accreditation as well as forming the basis for licensing requirements. While these standards themselves form a good professional consensus of what is important in teacher education, in some cases they have tended to result in standards tick lists of huge proportions.

This situation is by no means unique. The standards debate exists in most countries at a variety of levels. As Carr (2000) points out, no one can seriously object to the raising of standards or improving the quality of teaching: the very point of education is to help people to improve through their learning. However, as soon as you examine the fundamental question of how educational standards are defined and understood difficulties arise. The seemingly innocuous phrase “raising standards” can be interpreted on many levels, from the simplistic, i.e. better scores in reading and mathematics, to higher order questions concerning our educational values and beliefs, and how we individually want to see these translated into helping students emerge from the schooling process able to take their place in the world. In the standards of effective practice for the licensing of beginning teachers in the United States (INTASC, 2010) standard three sets out the knowledge, dispositions, and performances beginning teachers need in relation to students from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is important that each teacher:

... knows about the process of second language acquisition and about strategies to support the learning of students whose first language is not English, understands how students’ learning is influenced by individual experiences, talents, and prior learning, as well as
language, culture, family and community values, has a well-grounded framework for understanding cultural and community diversity and knows how to learn about and incorporate students’ experiences, cultures, and community resources into instruction.’ (Standard three, INTASC)

The situation in which contemporary North America and other western countries find themselves requires a lot of new thinking in terms of providing a suitable education and training for student teachers. Zeichner (1996) has no doubt that one of the most pressing issues in 21st century classrooms will be the range of ethnic diversity found in classrooms. Until recently, this multicultural challenge has mostly been concentrated in large urban and industrial areas; but demographic changes mean that throughout the United States the next generation of teachers will need not only knowledge of, but offer positive attitudes towards students from minority cultures (Craft, 1996). I believe that both Craft and Zeichner have identified issues with huge implications for teacher education. Increasing migration into and within the US and indeed many other countries puts pressure on schools to provide for the consequent increase in levels of diversity amongst their student population. More worrying is that the US government appears not to understand what is needed to help schools and teachers face these challenges, relying on a piecemeal approach rather than examining the wider implication especially for teacher education.

c) Policy documents which influence teacher education

The most important educational policy document in the United States for many decades, and one which guides the 21st century educational reforms is “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB, 2001). Its UK counterpart, in both importance and influence, was “Every Child Matters” (DfES, 2004). The American policy comprehensively covers all the major factors currently influencing American education and offers guidance on issues of societal concern, including gun culture, drugs and immigration. Essentially a practical document, NCLB clearly describes the funding available through a range of state and federal initiatives. However, it completely lacks a clearly defined philosophical perspective: it fails to consider the needs of educators, both qualified and still in training, who will work in 21st century schools. The section on immigrants, for instance, whilst recognising that immigrant children need a supportive education structure, offers no guidance for teachers on engaging with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This bears out concerns expressed by Rizvi (2004) and Cole (2005) that when test scores are regarded as the
most important outcome of schooling, this limits teachers’ ability to serve the broader needs of children and their communities. Over-reliance on testing also diverts attention and resources from more promising school improvement strategies like smaller class sizes, a more creative approach to curriculum change, and teachers’ own professional development.

Ferguson (2005) restates the principal issue thus:

As American schools seek to accommodate an increasing range of students, teachers are challenged as never before ... even willing teachers fear their lack of training and preparation to deal with such differences will make their role as a teacher inappropriate and inadequate ... (p.7)

As I see it the NCLB policy reflects a domestic solution, equipping teachers with what Wallis and Steptoe (2006) refer to as the “meagre minimum” (p.42) and failing to take in the wider world dimension and implications for the future. Its silence on these issues is an opportunity lost. Stachowski (2007) is in no doubt that if schools are to have teachers who can adequately prepare classes for the future, those with political responsibility for education need to recognise and urgently implement a blueprint for totally rethinking American education from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12). Policy decisions or perhaps the lack of them, about teacher education reflect the particular goals and roles given to education by individual countries; inevitably, teacher training will be influenced by political or other stakeholder imperatives. These will be at their most powerful when education departments are competing for scarce resources against other budgets, and the performance of teachers and their students are weighed in the balance (Hon-Chan and Mukherjee, 2003; Oliveira and Orivel, 2003). Colleges and state departments will be concerned about their accountability, and sending student teachers overseas to train might look like a risk too far.

Kincheloe (2000) provides another voice arguing that teacher preparation must emphasise much more than what he calls “The Test”. Student teachers need to be aware of, and know how to work with, the backgrounds, attitudes and pressures of the pupils they teach; these should not be squeezed out by assessment. Where institutions do try to prepare students for future scenarios they might find themselves in the firing line. Lawler (1990) for example, criticizes many initial training courses for what she terms their “obsessive concern” about multiculturalism and special
needs, which she regards as outmoded liberal ideas, at the expense of developing a wide range of subject knowledge. Bevilacqua (2007) shares this view of teacher education:

While no one denies that pedagogical skills and class management tactics are valuable, the most consistent data we have about the characteristics of effective teachers show a reliable correlation between higher student achievement and greater general knowledge by the teacher. And this objective data is consistent with the self reports of teachers themselves, who with great unanimity consider the most important part of their training to be a “focus on content knowledge”. Since this is so, the primary emphasis in teacher training should fall squarely on mastery of the academic subjects commonly taught in elementary school. (p.3)

Lawler and Bevilacqua appear to suggest that a subject-centred curriculum taught by intellectually able teachers will automatically produce better classroom practice and successful pupils. In my view, this approach is far too simplistic: subject knowledge alone cannot adequately address pupils’ needs, or the complexity of classroom practice and curriculum organization.

d) Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this section highlights two related phenomena: the growing preoccupation with accountability, and the reliance on standards and testing as determinants of successful education for teachers and students. Together, these have had the effect of suppressing the creative aspects of teaching, making teachers more insular in thinking about and planning their teaching; and we are no further forward in being able to accurately measure effective teachers and teaching. However, this review has triggered important lines of thinking for me as researcher, and suggests I need to ask how well the participants in student teaching abroad programmes feel able to transfer the knowledge, skills and understanding they gained overseas to teaching posts in the US. Another important question, in the light of the identified preoccupation with standards and their measurement, is to ask how well prepared they feel on returning to work within the US testing system; or, indeed, if their experience has given them the confidence to attempt a broader interpretation of the curriculum they have to teach.
2.5 Assessing the need for a more global approach to education

a) Introduction
We are living in a time of significant technological change, in terms both of the ways we communicate, and the speed with which we can access information. Technology has created a global information highway, giving rise to what economists call the Global Village (Bajunid, 2000; Jarvis, 2004). Supranational groupings, for example the European Union, have brought into being large communities no longer restricted to geographical and political boundaries. Overseas investment, the spread of global news channels such as CNN and the phenomenon Ritzer (1993) and Sousa (2002) refer to as the ‘McDonaldisation’ of a place all demonstrate American influence on daily life around the world. This section looks at how a global approach might affect teacher education and what changes might be needed to prepare young people to live and work in the future.

b) Is there a need for a more global approach to teacher education?
The problem is that any developments which bring people and nations closer together also show up the tremendous differences between them. This is particularly true of educational opportunities. The United Nations report (2000) indicates that:

More than a quarter of the 4.5 billion people in developing countries still do not have some of life’s most basic choices – survival beyond 40, access to knowledge and minimum basic services … and one in seven children of primary school age is out of school … (p.3)

However whilst such inequalities are most obvious in less developed countries in the world, they can also exist within highly developed countries where educational opportunities are not always equally available to all pupils. In the US teachers, schools and teacher education institutions often struggle to meet the challenges of conflicting expectations, social inequality, curriculum development and accountability. Day (2000) reflects on the perception that schools lag behind in preparing pupils for the economic, social, educational and technological changes which lie ahead. There is also the question of how well teachers are prepared to work with young people who may arrive in their schools from the situation described in the UN report above, or indeed to
equip young people from highly developed countries to cope with the rapid pace of global change that is set to exert such an influence on their futures. Day articulates a common concern, that future graduates may not be able to rely on finding employment in their local area. Kissock (1996) concurs, suggesting that teachers need to be prepared to work in what he describes as a “global village” setting (p.4) and proposes a student teaching placement in a community different from that with which they are familiar is an excellent way of achieving this.

As electronic working moves into the world of education, dramatic changes to learning and teaching are envisioned. Caldwell (2000) discusses the possible impact of this: that electronic working might create new learning environments, for which the traditional classroom, easily recognisable all over the world, is inappropriate. In this new setting the teacher is less likely to be an imparter of knowledge, or hold to key to intellectual capital, and more of a facilitator, a manager of ever more complex and varied learning contexts and environments.

Caldwell develops his ideas further by reminding us that education is heavily influenced by public policy and – to some degree – by public opinion. Governments formulate educational goals and are under pressure to prove these have been reached; as all our newspapers tell us, accountability is now at the forefront of their relationship with the voting population. The easiest way to demonstrate achievement is by testing children against a series of standards, to be reached or surpassed year on year. Labaree (2000) asserts that under this regime of regular testing teachers will become sidetracked by day to day assessment and cease to think in terms of wider educational goals for their pupils. He also maintains that schools are constantly having to justify themselves on the basis of knowledge gained by their pupils, even though that knowledge may not be very useful either in itself or as future support in young peoples’ lives. This is perhaps not entirely fair: many schools try to enrich the learning process by combining skills and understanding with knowledge acquisition, although effective and meaningful implementation and evaluation of such wider aspects can be difficult. Torrence (2007) supports Labaree’s view by saying that the tight specifications relating to assessment in schools both in the US and elsewhere can easily lead teachers into developing a much narrower perspective in their work leaving little time for a more reflective view on how young people should be prepared for their future lives.
Being schooled is an experience common to most people around the world, and recalling their own schooldays will help student teachers empathise with their pupils. But Steiner (1996) reminds us that the world moves on – student teachers must critically reflect on their experiences so they can adapt their methods to meet the needs of the next generation, rather than simply reproduce them *en bloc*. Huckle (1996) usefully defines global interconnectedness thus:

> Globalisation is a process whereby events, decisions and activities in one part of the world come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in distant locations ... (p.31)

He suggests that the view of globalisation as global markets, technologies, consumer wealth and the global media is now somewhat outdated; we are entering a post-modern era of globalisation in which social organisation, politics, culture and, of course, education will all feel its impact. And in the main, he feels, we appear not to be ready for it. Bourne (2003) rather sharply defines current teaching about our future world as a “list of noble intentions and even a series of bodies of knowledge, skills and values ...” (p.6). He proposes that educators should adopt a more critical attitude towards government and federal thinking on teacher education, but fails to identify how this can be done.

Arkin *et al.* (2003) maintain that American citizens do not always understand the conflicts, many of them stemming from American intervention or action, taking place around the world. They explain what they consider to be the reason, which is understandable to a degree: the United States is a huge country. A parallel might be drawn with a United States of Europe. Day (2008) expands on this:

> An American’s knowledge of the rest of the world may also be limited by the size and location of his own country. A belief in the example of their society and the universality of their political and social ideals, often combined with limited experience of “foreign” people, leads Americans to the view that if it works in America, it should work anywhere. If you perceive Americans as not concerned with or knowledgeable about other cultures, ways of life, or value systems, part of the reason lies here. (p.4)

Many Americans draw their information from news media sound bites which lack depth and may be skewed. The teaching of geography has been reduced significantly in American schools
(Shearer, 2003) so many American citizens lack the basic locational knowledge to understand what happens outside their borders. Arkin and Levy (2003) assert that if the US is to remain centre stage in world affairs, schools should become environments where pupils are active learners and participants, able to access information about world affairs and analyse it thoughtfully and usefully. A steep aspiration, as McDougall (2001) ruefully points out:

It is so disheartening that most Americans emerge from their schooling as functional illiterates in geography, despite the fact that 90 percent of US adults consider some geographical knowledge a prerequisite to being a well rounded person … (p.2)

Tye (1999) raises the important point that public opinion in the United States in the 1980s, and even into the 1990s, perceived global education as threatening, and even un-American. It was deemed safest to teach it at arm’s length, exclusively through social science processes and curricula, without discussing the impact on, and responsibilities of, the home nation. Anderson (2001) and Merryfield (2001) are also critical of the reduction of the greater ideas of global awareness down to labels such as global education, which they regard as a misleading pigeonhole, rendering it equivalent to history education or science education. But why does this happen? Burbules and Torres (2000) usefully pinpoint a possible reason: globalisation is feared as an unmanageable juggernaut which will threaten not only the existing big systems but possibly the very communities they serve. They pose these questions:

…. to what extent is the educational endeavor affected by processes of globalization that are threatening the autonomy of national educational systems and the sovereignty of the nation-state as the ultimate ruler in democratic societies? At the same time, how is globalization changing the fundamental conditions of an educational system premised on fitting into a community, a community characterized by proximity and familiarity? (p.6)

This is not an issue for the United States alone. In his study of global education in fifty-two countries, Tye (1999) concluded that aims for achieving a greater global understanding featured in very few. The concept of global education was generally understood, though not in universal use; but some countries regarded it as a rather Euro-American term, being more accustomed to refer to the ideas in question as sustainable development, whilst Czarra (2003) preferred the terms global issues, global culture and global connections. Tye’s (1999) conclusion was that:
In general, teachers are inadequately prepared for global education. Only a few teacher training courses have programs in teaching about global issues; learning style theories and their implications are not widely understood and teachers are not usually trained in a wide range of methods.

In teacher training, global education is in large measure unknown. Global education does not appear in lesson plans in teacher training programs … it does not constitute a priority for professional teacher training … with the exception of intercultural understanding. (p.6)

In spite of the absence of commitment on a wider scale, there are always individuals who pioneer the way. Led by committed individuals, some schools in the United States took up the challenge of incorporating global understanding into their teaching quite early on. Deckert (1998), working in an urban area of great diversity in Chicago, was concerned that her pupils lacked opportunities to examine issues applicable to their local area in a more knowledgeable and informed way. To address this shortcoming, she designed a course, asserting in her introduction:

American society is pluralistic, whether we like it or not. We often find ourselves “clanning” with those like us, with a resulting society of ethnicities living uneasily side by side in separate and often unequal communities. (p.1)

Her lessons encouraged her pupils to learn more about Japan – its history, culture and society – to help them understand what motivates people to migrate. She also wanted them to gain some awareness that people who come from a range of backgrounds but live in the same community need to be interdependent. Bennett (1993) points out that the intercultural sensitivity and interpersonal skills to work across borders and cultures are not always natural or instinctive features of our behaviour, but to be successful teachers we will nevertheless need to acquire them. Brighouse (1996) talks of the urgency of global education for teachers, which he clearly recognises as being vital to his work in UK education in general and in particular to his role at that time as Chief Education Officer in culturally diverse Birmingham.

2005 marked a turning point in the United States for the idea of study abroad. In response to research evidence and public opinion the Lincoln Commission published its report “One Million Americans Studying Abroad” and recommended the US Senate should officially designate 2006 the “Year of Study Abroad” (Congress, 2005). This was a brave attempt to give governmental support to study abroad projects which were slowly developing in the world of education. The
standing of the US internationally had been the cause of much concern, and at home its own citizens’ level of global awareness was worryingly low. A global literacy survey (National Geographic, 2006) found that:

.... 87 percent of students in the United States between the ages of 18 and 24 cannot locate Iraq on a world map, 83 percent cannot find Afghanistan, 58 percent cannot find Japan, and 11 percent cannot even find the United States … (p.2)

Of course, US citizens are not the only population to lack global awareness, and global understanding is not really about locating places on a map; but this simple yet powerful set of statistics was useful in confirming to the US Senate that the problem should be addressed.

Congress Resolution 308 put the responsibility for ensuring the global literacy of US citizens firmly in the hands of the educational system, so it is an important milestone for the study abroad initiative. However, the main thrust of most college overseas programmes was towards business faculties and language schools: it seems the notion of a borderless world (Ceglowski, 1998; Wai-Chung Yeung, 1996) is less easily applied to teacher education. Fernandez (2000) sums it up well:

The culture of teaching, long characterised by conservatism, presentism, privatism and individualism, may prove to be one of the major barriers to change and improvement in schools … there is stability in the old ways of doing things …(p.240)

c) Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this section illustrates the need for a greater global perspective in a context of rapid global change. Families move across national/cultural boundaries; their children need an education, wherever it is offered, which prepares them for life in a changing world. Education struggles to keep up with these changes: test scores and assessments are seen in some quarters as more important than the development of a global framework of critical understanding about the world and an individual’s place in it. Researchers and educators are beginning to realise that it is important to help student teachers prepare for the changing educational world which awaits them in their classrooms of the future. There is less consensus on to how this might be achieved.
2.6 Cases for and against study abroad and a review of some existing study abroad programmes

a) Introduction
The number of US students studying abroad is small, less than 2% of total university students in 2009 but its importance lies in its growing popularity. Colleges and universities wish to be seen to be preparing students for life in an increasingly international or global world. Much of the research literature views study abroad programmes and student teaching overseas very positively; however, there are some dissenting voices. This section looks at what the literature says about the impact of study abroad, and concludes by examining research conducted on some specific study abroad programmes.

b) The case for study abroad
Kaufmann (1983), Mahan and Stachowski (1990) and Cushner & Mahon (2002) all support the view that study abroad promotes significant growth in personal qualities which are important for educators: self esteem, independence, and an understanding that knowledge of the world beyond the United States are all important. Sumka (2005) and Wilson & Flourney (2007) identify significant gains in the understanding of cultural differences, as well as a greater awareness of different ways of seeing and reflecting on issues; this helps challenge student teachers’ existing views, beliefs and assumptions. More recently, Brindley et al.’s (2009) review of student teacher reflections during a one-month internship based in an international school identified a growing sense of professionalism and understanding of cultural differences. There is also evidence of returning students coping well in subsequent jobs with the diverse needs of society (Mahon and Cushner, 2002), showing high levels of flexibility and openness (Kealey, 1989) and applying creative solutions to classroom conflicts as well as promoting intercultural interdependence in their classrooms (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). Student teachers also gain a better understanding of the global nature of teaching: the basic skills and qualities of an effective teacher might well be described as universal (Kissock, 2003).

With federal funding available to support university international programmes and more than 200,000 students going abroad each year, major study abroad programmes now come into
sharper focus. Redden (2007) reports on an ambitious six-year study based at the University of Georgia. An analysis of the outcomes suggests that all study abroad participants significantly improved their academic performance and achieved much higher persistence/graduation rates than their peers upon return. However, for me one issue which stands out from the research is that the tight accountability of the assessment procedures may risk losing or undervaluing the less tangible reflective learning that shapes students’ view of the world; this is a point I need to bear in mind when I carry out my own investigations.

c) The case against study abroad

Hoffa (2005) makes the very important practical observation that international educators spend so much time agreeing with each other about the efficacy and benefits of overseas placements that they tend to lose sight of other very different viewpoints. There is some anecdotal evidence, but very little research evidence, of the case against study abroad, so Hoffa’s enumeration of the arguments, below, is both timely and helpful.

i. Some faculties think study abroad should be a privilege, not a right: only the best students have the skills to cope with a foreign environment.

ii. Study abroad programmes compete with those on the home campus and are less rigorous: students’ overseas work shows a lack of academic rigour.

iii. Once the course fees are paid, students are often marginalised by foreign institutions.

iv. Students have too little classroom-based learning and too much free time.

v. Some students find re-entry difficult; they return ill prepared for work or study back in the US.

vi. Students comment positively on their study abroad experience simply in order to gain the necessary course credits.

The relevance of these arguments is that they tend to reflect faculties’ collective worries about students’ performance both abroad and on their return home. However it also indicates their misunderstanding of the nature of the study abroad experience, often originating in their own lack of personal experience of such placements. Hyser (2005) endorses this view:
Many faculty members, especially in the sciences, feel that a study abroad program
interrupts student progress towards the degree and delays graduation … Others are
misguided in thinking that there are no academic opportunities suitable for their students
abroad … (p.5)

However a closer look at the comments drawn together by Hoffa reveals that they apply to study
abroad rather than to teaching practice abroad. A student teaching practice is a highly focused
activity with significant requirements for preparing and taking lessons. We must also recognise
the possible concern of teacher educators that the personal and social benefits of the overseas
experience may eclipse the professional skills, and that students will return ill equipped in terms,
for instance, of planning or classroom management. However there appears to be little
documented evidence to support this view.

Dahan (2001) supports the idea that teacher educators and faculty should have the opportunity to
work abroad themselves. This will give them not only experience of “the other” but also greater
credibility with colleagues who have such experience and confidence to develop international
dimensions on their own campuses. However, Weisenstein and Baker (2003) found little or no
evidence of international education in many state colleges and their accreditation standards,
which they identify as being in direct conflict with the declared philosophy of national bodies
and education organizations that support the general idea of study abroad programmes. This is a
clear case of a federal policy failing to result in state implementation, with a consequent effect on
teacher education.

In terms of the total student population actual numbers studying abroad are still low, although
they have risen from around 71,000 in 1992 to over 223,000 in the academic year 2005-6 (Open
Doors, 2007). One reason for this, identified by Goodwin and Nacht (1991) in their seminal
study, is that despite a theoretical commitment to preparing students to work in a more globalised
world setting, the actual internationalisation of many US campuses is still very weak and
tentative. They also identified what they termed “a level of academic arrogance” (p.132) on some
campuses which questioned the value of students’ overseas experiences, although this may
simply indicate faculty members own lack of international experience and fear of the unknown,
rather than anything more deeply negative; a view supported by Briggs and Burn (1985). As
Ben-Peretz (2001) points out, faculty members often belong to a generation which had very different experiences from the current generation of students; some teacher educators find the ideas about study abroad difficult to cope with at times.

Sceptics in academic circles tend to dismiss study abroad as time away from real learning under the close supervision of home colleges. Rodriguez (2001) describes programmes in more exotic locations, such as South America, offering images of students “frolicking in lands of tequila and sunshine, rum and rainforests, natives and salsa music” (p.2), which she says fuel negative views of study abroad. She goes on to discuss the issue that privileged students, improving their skills and experience in a country characterised by poverty and inequality can cause resentment in some host countries. She also makes the important point that both sides have an equal responsibility to resist stereotypes, look beyond the negative givens of poverty and under-development and work out a more inter-connected approach to cultural relationships. Study abroad needs to be a give and take experience if the philosophy is to be implemented properly.

Neff (2001) comes down hard on his study abroad university colleagues, who he feels are partly to blame for its negative image by not sharing their ideas: he also feels strongly that they have engaged in so little self-criticism that study abroad lacks a cogent, well argued case. Small wonder that it lacks support:

At least part of the blame for the failure of study abroad to change our ugly American image falls on the study abroad profession itself. International education is still struggling to find its place in academia. To many professors, study abroad is viewed as glorified tourism. Those of us in the profession are accused of trying to pass off a semester in an idyllic location with a low drinking age as a creditable academic experience. (p.2)

Other reasons cited for opposing study abroad for student teachers include concerns about their subsequent employability, tight personal budgetary constraints and security issues. Following the perceived rise in anti-American sentiment abroad resulting from the “war on terror”, some university departments became cautious about sending students overseas. Gobbo et al. (2005), concerned that the phrase “anti-Americanism” (p.45) might itself have caused institutional reluctance to send students abroad, conducted a survey of 82 students attending courses in
London to ascertain whether they had experienced anti-American sentiments during their stay. 97% of the responses indicated that such sentiments did indeed exist, but were directed against American foreign policy rather than individual American students. Some students branded negative experiences as anti-American feeling, but on further investigation these were revealed to be cultural responses to tourists rather than anything specifically anti-American.

d) Study abroad programmes
In the past, study abroad programmes have been limited in number and offered to relatively few university students. Eduventures (2008) has identified three principal routes taken by study abroad students:

- A short group visit, often around a particular theme or focus, such as Shakespearean theatre, Jane Austen or European art and design.
- Semester-long attendance at a university where they follow one of the university courses, often modern foreign languages, with other American students or alone.
- Individual student placements, such as student teaching overseas or research projects.

Many of these programmes were organised by the home university, and the students were either accompanied by members of the home faculty or supervised from the USA. Early research (Pfnister, 1973) looked at study abroad programmes at two European universities, Madrid and Strasbourg, working with an American university. This was in fact a “halfway house” programme, whereby student cohorts were attached loosely to the overseas institution but completed work which received credits at their home university. The participants were not enrolled at the foreign university, and those who went to Madrid felt they had little real opportunity to meet Spanish students: the number of American students together shaped their group dynamics and reduced their ability to integrate into local life. As a result, Pfnister concluded, the concept of the American self was not challenged in any way: the American campus had just shifted eastwards.

Dolby’s (2004) research on American students in Australia describes the interesting situation in which a group of American students found themselves identified as different and odd. As the students in her study were for the most part white, middle class and from Midwestern suburban
and rural areas, they had very little prior experience of meeting people outside their norm. They learnt that Australians had well established preconceptions about America and were not shy of voicing their opinions, and whilst at the beginning of their visit few of the students had thought much about what it is to be American, they returned home having learnt more about their own identity than that of their Australian hosts. Dolby took this as evidence that study abroad is not just of benefit to the individual; it is valuable in helping students understand the concept of their own homeland from another perspective: a phenomenon she describes as “when national identity shifts from a passive to an active identity in the global context” (p.26). Dolby also urged caution when analysing student responses: she found these varied, even within the testimony of a single individual, when recalled in subsequent conversations. Accurate recall is an important point for me to consider, as the students I use in my research will have taken part in the programme over a twelve-year or more time period.

Titus and Bolton Tsantir (2006) carried out a very interesting and informative case study on heritage seeking as a reason for students to select a country to visit. Their location at the University of Minnesota gave their case study a unique perspective because of its culturally diverse population; Minnesota students often choose their host country not because it is new to them, but rather because family connections make it already familiar. Their principal research objective was to understand firstly, how the heritage-seeking phenomenon affects the choice of host country, and secondly, how it affects the overseas experience. As the heritage seeking discussion has traditionally focused on European-American students (e.g. Irish-American students going to Ireland, or Italian-American students going to Italy), Bolton and Titus focused on a newer group – heritage-seeking students of colour, i.e. non-white. The target group was University of Minnesota undergraduates who had studied abroad and self-identified as students of colour.

Their findings include some perceptive insights into the effects of going to their chosen country on both students and their families:

- For the students education abroad is an exploration of their own identities, but some parents are shocked by their children’s desire to return to a country that the parents had left in order to provide a better life for their family.
• In contrast to many study abroad students, some heritage seekers expect to feel a sense of homecoming and acceptance which doesn’t always occur.
• For some students, heritage seeking deeply affects programme choice.
• Many students felt they had acquired a better understanding of their family background and returned to the United States feeling empowered and with a new sense of identity.
• Students’ identity as Americans was deeply affected. Although in the US they had always felt a member of a minority group, they were regarded as American in their host country. Some realised they actually felt themselves to be more American in nature than they had supposed.

Study abroad is a traditional part of foreign language study, and research has shown (Barrutia, 1971; Byram, 1997; Chieffo and Zipser, 2001) that time spent in study abroad is a more effective way of raising competency in language fluency and knowledge than the same time spent in the US, although Adams (2000) cautioned that an overseas placement does not automatically increase students’ language competence. As well as significant gains in language proficiency Adelman (1988) and Adams (2000) found evidence that students benefitted in other areas, such as knowledge of another culture and personal maturity. However there can be integration issues in the host country (Allen, 2002), particularly where there are significant cultural differences; although many language programmes take place in European countries whose standards of living approximate to those in the United States, as opposed to non-European countries which might pose greater challenges. In his investigation of study abroad in what he calls the “non-industrial” world, Racette (1996) found that in such unfamiliar environments students were sometimes unable to fully utilise the potential for learning firsthand because they encountered such a wide range of social, political and economic issues. They spent much of their time and effort combating the differences, rather than accepting them as part of another culture. He recommended reviewing and reorganising study abroad programmes in the US to enable participants to make better use of the placement opportunities. Byram (2008) also describes that when people with different backgrounds, values and behaviours encounter each other the resulting intercultural experience might well be:
‘particularly striking and even unnerving, when there is a clash of values, or beliefs or behaviours....the outcomes are unpredictable ’(p.186).

He also makes the point that it is sometimes not only the cultural difficulties which may bring challenges. Of particular importance for American, and to some degree British students, is the need to understand that democracy may not be the main political way in which their host country is governed. This can generate a new concept hitherto rarely considered in any depth by the participants, having to recognise that the political structure of their home country may not be embraced as the accepted one elsewhere in the world.

Placements of westernised students in westernised locations are not all plain sailing either. Canadian students placed at a British university on a year-long PGCE course (Smith and Holden, 2001) felt that overall their training was relevant and appropriate professionally, and allowed them to adapt their training without too much difficulty to Canadian classrooms. Normally, students sharing a similar background and language would be expected to have few problems with their overseas placements; however, Smith and Holden produced some surprising evidence of problems with social acceptance, both by other students on the course and in their teaching practice schools: they cited accents, nationality, and just being ‘from abroad’ as memorable issues. They also suffered what might be termed “economic shock” at the cost of living in England; this tended to restrict what they could do and for some was a cause of worry throughout their stay.

More recently Dolby (2004), recognising the limitations of research into study abroad which focuses on language competency and academic outcomes, investigated instead the impact of study abroad on national identity, namely being an American. She contrasted the idea of the United States as a relatively organised and stable geographical entity with the notion of America, or “American” – a concept without physical boundaries seen by many other societies as a Utopian ideal – the American dream. Her student interviews were conducted in a unique context – the months following 9/11. However, she concluded that the terrorist attacks did not overly influence the students’ responses; being out of the US while the country was wrapped up in self
contemplation lent a different perspective to their reactions and feelings and broadened their view of what it means to be an American.

Student teaching abroad programmes have been least well developed in terms of numbers. There have been some small, but nevertheless valid, examples of student teaching abroad over the last few decades (Kuechle et al., 1995; Willard-Holt, 2001; Brennan and Cleary, 2007). Roberts (2005) reminded us that these programmes have often been developed by interested lecturers who have either undergone the experience personally or who have expressed the vision needed to prepare teachers for the future. Cushner and Brennan (2007), in line with the examples discussed earlier, conclude that individual, rather than group placements result in a much more worthwhile experience:

All too frequently, those international programs at the university level that do include a study-abroad component place students in self contained “island” programs where they travel to another culture but live together, segregated from the local community. Unfortunately there is very little correlation between acquiring knowledge this way and developing the skills needed to facilitate adjustment and increase intercultural understanding. (p.3)

Most of these programmes have been organised against a backdrop of institutional concern, well documented by Hoffa, as to whether students on overseas placements will reach the necessary US standard to be given their licence to teach. This concern weighs heavily on those who have to decide whether or not to support student teaching overseas. Some smaller college programmes come and go, often affected by the cost of overseas visits, the political situation and, very importantly, the personal commitment of individual college faculty.

Mahon and Cushner (2002), prompted by the perceived need for teachers to have a range of experiences which would better prepare them for life and work, evaluated the impact of an international student teaching experience on the personal and professional development of student teachers. The Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching programme places 60-70 students in a range of foreign locations each year. These students lived for 6-12 weeks away from the close network of friends and family. This stretched them well beyond their comfort zone, but resulted in greater self efficacy; their interaction with pupils and other adults from varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds strengthened their belief in the importance of multi-
cultural education; and they came to recognize that “the overseas experience can be the catalyst that starts teachers on a new path of learning” (p.7).

e) Conclusion
The literature reviewed in this section shows that study abroad is part of a menu of programmes offered by colleges involving other countries. Many are language based, but organised in a variety of different ways with individual placements in the minority. Whilst many good reasons are offered for study abroad there are also some compelling arguments against it. In terms of numbers taking part, student teaching abroad programmes are least well developed. Some faculty members lack understanding of the nature of study abroad; this is often compounded by their own lack of international or cross-cultural experiences.

2.7 Conclusion: the issues and debates which emerged from the review

A) Introduction
A vast amount of literature surrounds and underpins my research topic. By focusing the review on my three main areas of interest – the challenges of preparing students to teach, the impact of national standards on teacher education, and the consideration of a more global approach to study abroad – I was able to create a structure and a pathway to becoming better informed about the issues and to clarify my research question.

One of the main issues which emerged is the continuing and powerful impact of government on education both in the US and the UK, and teachers’ consequent lack of empowerment to move away from the prescriptive limitations set for them. Reviewing the literature allowed me to identify areas which appeared less well researched. Much research focuses on language acquisition, academic outcomes of study abroad, and reflections on personal growth and change, but it emerged that there is far less research into the influence of student teaching abroad on teachers’ careers. This gap in the literature validated the reason for my research and provided a structure for my research question. I take some of the points identified in the cited research as a starting point for the development of my own research question, about reasons for participation, the difficulty of deciding to study abroad, the changing nature of students’ perceptions about
other places and their own national identity, and their concerns about re-entry to the United States, from both a personal and a professional viewpoint.

b) Issues and debates arising from the review

i. There are many concerns about the efficacy and suitability of existing programmes to prepare teachers for the future. Tensions between teacher educators, institutions and schools on one hand and federal or state policy on the other are well documented but the literature also highlights how these tensions can impact on teacher education often restricting the development of innovative ideas.

ii. There is some consensus about teachers’ need not only for good subject knowledge but also a wider range of skills; much less of a consensus about what these skills might be and how they might be acquired.

iii. There is much evidence of the pressure on teachers from closely prescribed curricula, assessment procedures and accountability to agencies outside the school. Stemming mainly from external political sources, they nevertheless exert a significant impact on how teachers learn and perform.

iv. From the research literature, study abroad programmes appear to offer a very positive breadth of opportunities, allowing participants to gain skills which will help them to work in the changing classrooms of the future.

v. There are signs that as the advantages of participation in study abroad programmes become clearer, the US government is slowly beginning to offer support for them. However, faculty members are sometimes doubtful of the efficacy of such placements and it remains a controversial area, particularly in teacher education in relation to the practical field experiences.

vi. Of great concern to many teacher educators and institutions is how far student teaching placements in overseas schools adequately prepare students for teaching back home.

vii. Many of the study abroad programmes are the work of a minority of enthusiastic and committed teacher educators who believe that students can and will, adapt perfectly well to teaching back home in the United States. These enthusiasts brush aside criticisms, leading to charges that they fail to address genuine issues with logically crafted arguments.
viii. The uncertainty about how best to implement teacher education programmes has created a vacuum which allows authors such as Levine to promote their more conservative views very forcefully. Others argue that teachers need to be more fully prepared to educate children from, or located, anywhere in the world, but there is neither practical evidence as to how teacher education might fulfil this need nor an identifiable commitment to implement it. More evidence would be helpful and my own research may assist in providing this.

ix. Worldwide, people are on the move: this fundamentally changes the nature and needs of our local communities, and requires teachers to understand this changing world. My research question is an important means of ascertaining how far student teachers with personal experience of different cultural settings can demonstrate this understanding and meet the needs of future children and communities.

The next chapter builds on this background and provides a rationale for the methodology used to conduct research into the impact on student teachers in a study abroad programme. It begins with an explanation of how the research was planned and why, and identifies the issues which arose during the process. It also discusses the research methods used and why they were the most appropriate way of developing and responding to the research question. Consideration is also given to ensuring the honesty of my research, together with a discussion of its limitations.
Chapter 3 Methodology and methods

3.1 Introduction
Methodology is the term used to describe the consideration of methods or techniques to carry out the research, and the selection of those most suitable to carry it out satisfactorily. O’Leary (2004) describes it as a “framework associated with a particular set of assumptions useful in conducting research such as scientific methods, ethnography or action research” (p.86). Clough and Nutbrown (2002) suggest that methodology also infers justification, and that the term provides “an operational description which will be positively useful in justifying any research design” (p.30). My methodology will be determined by revisiting the questions which emerged from the literature and from my knowledge and beliefs together with my philosophical stance. Refining these, together with establishing a clear purpose for the research will establish the research design.

Silverman (2000) defines the art of the researcher as choosing a suitable methodology: finding the most appropriate ways of investigating, analysing and presenting data. A significant consideration for me was to find an appropriate way of obtaining and managing data from the potentially very large number of programme participants over several years. In order to have any chance of being a successful research project it had to be what O’Leary (2004) calls “do-able” (p.22). It became clear that a mixed method research model, such as that identified by Johnson and Christensen (2004), Greene (2008) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) could allow me to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture my data. I decided to use an initial online questionnaire to access as many potential participants as possible to seek their views and reflections about their student teaching. This was followed up by more focussed face-to-face interviews with a sample of respondents, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the impact such overseas placements had on the lives and careers of the student teacher participants.

This chapter outlines my research action plan. First I look at how the methodology and methods emerged from the research questions, the literature and my own philosophical stance, leading to the justification for both the methodology and the development of a mixed methods approach. I focus on my approach which consists of an online questionnaire and a set of small-scale personal
interviews. In this first section, I describe how I constructed each of the methods and why; how I piloted them and their respective strengths and limitations. In the second half of the chapter I raise issues of validity, reliability and ethical responsibility within the research. I also consider how bias might affect the research and how I deal with it. Finally I reflect on the overall limitations of the methodology and methods I used to conduct the research.

3.2 How the methodology and methods emerged from the research questions, literature review and my ontology and epistemology

Wellington (2005) defines methodology as:

… the theory of acquiring knowledge and the activity of considering, reflecting upon and justifying the best methods. Methods are the specific techniques for obtaining the data that will provide the evidence base for the construction of that knowledge. (p.97)

The selection and justification of both methodology and methods are very important in the research study as the methodology underpins both the rationale and the design of the research. This is not a merely technical process but one that is open to reflective and philosophical debate (Wellington et al., 2005; O’Cathain, 2010). In designing my research project I interrogated closely both my research question and the literature, asking: what is the most appropriate methodological approach and what methods could I use to address these questions? I also considered my own ontological and epistemological beliefs which guided my choices, particularly with reference to the use of my interview schedule (Mertens, 2011).

A researcher’s ontological and epistemological beliefs and assumptions are key factors in determining their methodology and methods (Cohen et al., 2000). Ontology refers to an individual’s assumptions about the nature or essence of things (Sikes, 2006), which have a bearing on what they research, how they go about it, and what they learn from it. Different individuals have their own interpretations of reality, but broadly these polarise into either an acceptance that the world is a given, outside human influence, or that it is socially constructed through human experience, interactions and language (Bracken, 2010). If the first tendency dominates, the researcher is likely to select a methodology which collects data in an objective and quantifiable way, for example a questionnaire. If the socially constructivist view
predominates, data will be collected more subjectively, for instance via personal accounts or interviews in which individuals describe their experience of the world.

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge, its nature, constitution, and the extent to which we can interpret it (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002), and one reason for research is to increase knowledge. If knowledge is assumed to be a concrete reality readily identified, then it follows that it is objectively quantifiable. However, if knowledge is defined by personal experience, thoughts and reflections, it is difficult to research it in such an objective way. It is impossible to conduct any research without taking account of the epistemological issues involved (Sikes, 2006) so researchers need to establish their own ontological and epistemological positions before deciding on the appropriate methodologies and methods for their research.

I believe that each individual’s knowledge is the product of their personal interests, thoughts and prior experiences. My subjective perceptions underpin my ontological understanding; they frame my view of the world and help me create meaningful assumptions about what knowledge is and how we know about it. As a geographer I see some aspects of the world as a “given”, but I recognise the significant impact of human interpretation; thus my thinking aligns with a more interpretivist approach. This approach recognises that the ways in which we engage with knowledge are determined by our assumptions and beliefs; it also emphasises the importance of these beliefs in the acquisition, structure and processing of knowledge (Goldman, 1999).

Clough and Nutbrown (2002) describe the transition from having merely an “interest” (p.45) in a topic to researching it as only being possible when an analysis of events is informed by establishing perspectives outside a person’s normal vision, allowing alternative ways of seeing and experiencing. This involves thinking about other people’s knowledge of the topic, which helps identify gaps in existing knowledge and suggests areas for further investigation. Hofer (2001) reinforces their argument:

Epistemological beliefs influence not only how one learns in school, but also affect how one interacts with new information, draws conclusions, and makes decisions over the course of the life span. (p.353)
I chose to collect initial data by means of an online questionnaire and then selected individuals to interview. But a problem arises here: although interviews, which involve collecting the respondent’s subjective constructions of reality, “fit” the interpretivist approach, questionnaires do not – they are more in line with positivist, scientific research. So my two methods of data collection appear theoretically at least to be at odds with each other, and need justification. Crotty (1998) confirms that qualitative and quantitative research methods are frequently viewed as totally incompatible when used in the same piece of research but he identifies that both together can be useful tools in conducting research if thoughtfully chosen through philosophical thinking and reflective debate. The main point of my research was to find out how their teaching abroad experiences had affected participants both at the time and subsequently; this allowed me to investigate my respondents’ interpretations of social reality through interviews, an approach wholly in accordance with my interpretivist stance. However in order to choose the students for these interviews I used a questionnaire which as Clough and Nutbrown identify (2002) ‘lies at the more scientific end of social science enquiry’ (p.118). By using a questionnaire I was able to establish a broad picture of student experiences and their views, which helped me to generate the questions for interview. I also used a number of open ended questions and boxes to allow participants to record their views in greater detail thus moving away from a more numerical and scientific traditional positivist approach often characteristic of questionnaires. Using both methods provided what Wellington et al (2005) describe as a ‘sequential, logical procedure which encompasses both the interpretivist and positivist models (p.95).

The design of my research reflects my belief that student teachers often construct meaning subjectively; interviews provided the opportunity to engage with their beliefs, thoughts, interpretations and reflections in a focussed and extended way, in the hope of stimulating rich personal responses. The participants in my research were very much concerned to develop their practical teaching skills, and I wanted to know how their experiences had influenced their ideas on how future teachers should be prepared. My research began with an online questionnaire, followed up by a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews which examined the experiences of a selection of respondents in more detail. Crotty (1998) indicates that this combination of methods allows the researcher to see how small scale research findings, for
example, through interviews, can fit into the wider picture provided by data gained through a larger number of questionnaire responses.

a) The importance of reflection and critical thinking in my research

Moon (2006) suggests that allowing time for reflection by the researcher contributes significantly to the quality of research. The importance of reflecting on practice is also supported by Brookfield (1995):

Having a grounded belief in what we do and what we value is fundamental in gaining credibility as professional practitioners. Having a means by which to justify our actions and beliefs is important as it enables us to feel empowered and valued. If we do not question our practice and beliefs there is a danger of remaining static in our thinking and action. (p.35)

Reflection leads to critical thinking, an important prerequisite to a successful research outcome (Papadimos, 2009). Critical thinking is the art of analysing and questioning experience; it encourages open-minded and flexible researchers (Paul and Elder, 2006). This view is supported by Loughran (2002) who points out that “experience alone does not lead to learning; reflecting on [that] experience is essential” (p.35). Critical thinking is also important to the evaluation of research so as to improve not only the research as it progresses but also any conducted in the future (Moon, 2006). Dewey (1910) described each individual idea or thought in the research process as leading to the next, and in so doing creating a thread of thinking. Reflection can, in fact should, slow down the research, providing more time to evaluate this thread of ideas and allowing more thoughtful research and practice to emerge (Nixon et al. 2003), which in turn produces research which is ethically and morally justifiable (Paechter, 2003; Pring, 2004).

One of the important areas for me to engage with was that of critical self reflexive thinking through the critical questioning of my own bias towards thinking that study abroad is necessarily a good thing. This involved a more inward questioning approach which required me to review my basic personal assumptions and open up my thinking to include a broader and more balanced perspective about the possible effect of participation in an overseas student teaching programme.

Reflective thinking also helped me to develop my research strategy, choosing its focus, identifying the research questions, designing the research instruments and finally collecting and
analysing the data. The process did not always proceed logically, with each aspect following on comfortably from the previous one: instead I found myself moving back and forth between the different aspects. For example, while my initial reading of the literature provided a significant amount of information as well as starting points for developing the research question, I was finding new and interesting sources of information all the way through the study. The respondents’ data provided an almost overwhelming volume of material, and I found a period of reflection useful not only to evaluate the responses but also to consider how best to present the data (Hatton-Smith, 1995).

**b) How critical reflection assisted in framing both my research and data collection questions**

To construct my questionnaire I returned to my research question, introduced and justified in Chapter 1. This asks about the effect of participation in an overseas student teaching programme on a) the professional and b) personal development of teachers.

Formulating the research question was vitally important: it not only gave me a sense of direction but would also help me communicate successfully with a variety of audiences in the future. I began the task of creating the question using a process recently endorsed by Pryor (2010) who suggests writing down in a series of diagrams all the features of what might be included in the research, thus creating “a map of significance … which can sometimes be a somewhat messy diagram …” (p.167) but provides an overview of what the research is about and allows interesting strands to emerge. Reviewing the literature and reflecting on the development of the programme itself were other essential elements in devising possible research questions. The efficacy of the programme had been a matter of debate within the programme faculty for some time; while many students had participated, very little formal evaluation had taken place. It was therefore an important professional matter to identify through research whether or not the existing ways of working in the student teaching programme were in fact appropriate to achieve the aim of preparing student teachers (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

It took quite a long time to arrive at my final research question. Silverman (2005) describes it as a lengthy process, building up over time, and it requires the researcher to be prepared to change
ideas, questions and even methods of collecting data (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). This proved to be the case when I refined my question. I originally decided to concentrate on the impact of student teaching abroad on teachers’ careers, as I felt this was under-researched compared to its effect on personal outcomes. Reflecting on my reading of the literature, I realised that I might be wrong: the professional and personal aspects seemed likely to be intertwined to such an extent that if I did not investigate them both I might be in danger of creating a research project which lacked balance and showed poor decision making on my part (Brookfield, 1995). I decided, therefore, to investigate both the professional and personal aspects of the experience to see if, and if so how far, these were intertwined, as well as the part each, or either played in the success or otherwise of the placement. This led to the reconstruction of my research question into two parts. The first concerns a student teacher’s professional experiences, and the degree to which their knowledge, understanding and skills can be transferred to a subsequent teaching post. The second concerns the progress of a student’s personal development: which personal values might have changed as a result of participation in student teaching overseas.

My question, which also acts as a key factor in determining the most appropriate methodological stance to adopt, was defined and clarified in two ways. First, I reviewed and reflected on the teacher education literature to see which questions had already been discussed, and second I responded to the need of the organisation for a rigorous evaluation of the student teaching programme.

Reviewing the literature revealed a hugely contested area which provided many different views about what was needed for the future of teacher education but far fewer suggestions as to how these needs should be met. Some evidence emerged from the literature discussed in detail in Chapter 2, that a major area of concern for many teacher educators and institutions was the ability of participants in student teaching overseas programmes to meet US requirements on standards and assessment (Zamastril-Vondrova, 2005; Imig and Imig, 2006b). There were also doubts about the ability of overseas schools to provide student teachers with the necessary skills to enable them to meet the requirements for being licenced as a teacher in the United States. These concerns were identified by Goodwin and Nacht (1991), Rodriguez (2001), and Hyser (2005) and appeared to me to be very important to follow up. Finally, the literature on study
abroad identified a range of global issues now facing teacher educators. Questions were raised about the kind of knowledge that students would need in the future (Steiner, 1996; Labaree, 2000; Bevilacqua, 2007); the teacher’s ability and responsibility to prepare students for a possibly very different future in a rapidly changing world (Caldwell, 2000); and the importance of developing cultural awareness about others (Brighouse, 1996; Merryfield, 2001).

These findings led me to consider questions aimed at determining how far these placements in culturally and geographically diverse locations contributed to the development of a wider understanding about the nature of teaching (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003) and how this might affect student teachers’ own views about the needs of their future profession. Given that the programme I was involved with offered overseas student teaching placements, it was a matter of concern that many home education departments doubted the efficacy and suitability of such programmes to deliver competent and qualified teachers: so another aspect of investigation would centre on this issue. Figure 3.1 (p.66) links my research questions to the development of my field questions. The field questions, in turn, provided the data for analysis and discussion, reflecting the interconnectedness of Dewey’s thread referred to earlier.

### 3.3 The reasons for my choice of methods

The idea of using a retrospective longitudinal study, focusing on participants who are able to look back on their experiences over a long period of time, is supported by other researchers such as Cohen et al. (2000) and can provide a significant amount of rich data for analysis. In this section I explain and justify the reasons why I chose a mixed methods approach. I also discuss the use of the questionnaire and interview schedules, and finally describe how I tested them both in a pilot study.
Figure 3.1: The relationship between the research question and the field questions in my research design (after Clough and Nutbrown 2002, p.147).

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**The research area**
Identify the focus of research; investigate what is known about the area; generate many questions and then identify potential research questions for refining.

**Research question**
Study Abroad teacher education programme – perspectives on:
- Teachers’ personal development
- Teachers’ career development

**Development of my field questions**

**The questionnaire** (see Appendix 1 p.185)
Asked of many (232) gives:
- Breadth
- Generalisability
- Quantitative data
- A broad picture

**The interview schedule** (see Appendix 2 p.188)
Asked of a few (8) gives:
- Greater depth and specificity
- Personal responses and feelings
- Qualitative data
- A focused picture

Provides data for analysis and discussion
a) The mixed methods approach

To address my research questions I needed to collect a large number of responses from programme participants and then investigate how their involvement had affected them. These two factors led me to favour a mixed methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative techniques, to allow a more focussed investigation into the thoughts, reflections and attitudes of selected participants (Leech et al., 2010). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that mixed methods research combines the best of the major research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research. However, talk of quantitative versus qualitative research is not helpful, as there is considerably more overlap than supporters of either method would concede (Olson, 1995). Trochim (2000) suggests that:

There is much value in mixing a qualitative approach with a quantitative one … the quantitative excels at summarising large amounts of data while qualitative research excels at telling the story from the participants’ point of view, providing the rich descriptive detail that sets quantitative results into their human context ... (p.63)

My most important consideration was to choose the research tool that would be most effective in addressing my research question. Trochim’s point above neatly summarised how both methods would serve my needs. Johnson and Turner (2002) point out the fundamental value of mixed method research is that using different methods of data collection maximises the strengths of each. This reduces the risk of unreliable data: where findings have been demonstrated by more than one type of research method there is a measure of triangulation to substantiate reliability of the responses (Woolley 2009) and one can be more confident of the results. It also provides a bank of data and information which will pave the way for future research into the topic. However, I needed to be careful when analysing data collected by two very different methods, as Gilham (2008) points out:

A multi method approach to research has the potential of enriching, as well as cross validating, your research findings, but it is more difficult to blend all of this together in a coherent report. (p.102)
3.4 The choice of a questionnaire

My decision to use a questionnaire was based on a number of perceived advantages. One was the high number of potential respondents in the pool of past student teachers, distributed across not only the United States but the world (Denscombe, 2007). Then the size of the pool increased the likelihood of obtaining reliable results, as well as generating a bank of useful data. The use of a questionnaire would place some distance between myself and the respondents, and reduce elements of bias and subjectivity (Portelli, 2008): I did not want the outcome of my research to be challenged as lacking rigour or worth because I failed to distance myself from the data collection (Sikes, 2008). The cheap and easy method of communication seemed likely to encourage a good response, and although devising the structure, planning and layout of the questionnaire required much careful and time-consuming preparation (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003), I was fortunate in having the support of a web administrator to help with the construction and compilation of results. My research time was limited, so the technical and administrative support of such personnel was invaluable.

3.5 The choice of semi-structured interviews

Before settling on semi-structured interviews I considered a number of other potential methods of following up the data from the questionnaire (Silverman, 2000; McWilliam and Tan, 2010), including participant observation, telephone interviews and a more open-ended set of online questions. Participant observation in an American school would have been very time consuming to organise and conduct; cost and time zone changes made telephone interviews or “skyping” problematic. I also noted Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2000) comments about the loss of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures and silent thinking time during telephone conversations. A second online questionnaire seemed too similar to the first: I felt a different approach, meeting the participants face-to-face, would be a better opportunity to gauge their personal reactions. One drawback of online questionnaires is that they may achieve only limited depth and detail in the responses, which can at times seem almost impersonal (Walliman, 2001). This limitation confirmed my decision to explore some of the areas touched on in the questionnaire in greater detail via a series of follow-up interviews.

Three types of interview were available for me to use (Flick, 1998; Hinds, 2000):
• a totally structured meeting, where questions prepared in advance would drive the responses;
• an open-ended interview;
• a semi-structured interview.

I decided against a fully structured meeting because of its resemblance to a spoken version of a questionnaire, which might constrain participants’ responses. An open-ended interview might stray away from the questions I wanted respondents to address; it could also generate a lot of unstructured data which would be very time-consuming to analyse. In contrast, the semi-structured interview offered a logical approach which allowed the respondents to develop their thoughts and reflections in a focused, but more considered fashion.

The deciding factor was the award of a University of Sheffield bursary, which enabled me to visit the United States to conduct semi-structured interviews. Thus I was able to collect a wealth of first-hand evidence from individuals, interpreting their stories as Cresswell (1994) suggests, exploring their feelings, viewpoints and reflections in depth. As a single researcher with a fairly tight time frame, and given the cost of reaching participants distributed across the United States, I eventually selected eight potential interviewees who were based in the Minneapolis area. Only a limited number could be arranged in the time available, and one of the main criteria for selection was their availability to attend an interview during my visit; on the other hand, having a single researcher to conduct all the interviews gave a level of consistency to the process whilst also allowing the respondents an opportunity to raise issues which I had not predicted. The method by which interviewees were selected is discussed later in this chapter.

3.6 The pilot study
A pilot study is a recommended way of judging the feasibility of a larger study. It allows the pre-testing of research instruments, such as questionnaires and interview schedules, to highlight any problems which might prejudice the success of the main study (Hinds, 2000). It is a crucial element of good research design and can increase the likelihood (though not of course the certainty) of success (Campbell et al., 2004). As the pilot study samples are usually small they generate very little useful statistical information; there is also the risk of inaccurate predictions about a larger sample. Pilot studies can also be time consuming (Van Teijlingen and Hundley,
2001) as well as frustrating and fraught with unforeseen problems (Mason and Zuercher, 1995). Commencing research without piloting the instruments to be used would be unwise and possibly unprofessional (Bell and Opie, 2002). I now look separately at the pilot studies I carried out on the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview.

**a) Piloting the questionnaire**

A questionnaire which will elicit useful responses can be hard to create. It is often difficult to frame unambiguous questions which will gather helpful information (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). I sought advice on the design of my questionnaire from the programme web administrator, programme organisers and two past participants, one based in the US and one in the UK. Their responses are described below.

First, the programme web administrator helped with practical suggestions about the online format of the questionnaire: considering how respondents might answer the questions, suggesting software programmes which would collect answers numerically, and encouraging responses by making the form aesthetically pleasing. Brown (2010) reminds researchers that “a worthwhile questionnaire has to be personally engaging” (p.181). Second, two programme organisers trialled the questionnaire and suggested ways of improving it. We discussed the use of a Likert scale (a one-dimensional scale from which respondents choose one option that best matches their view), but their advice was that choosing answers from a suggested examples might provide more accurate results. I also asked them to check the clarity of the language used; all the respondents would be North American, and there is always the potential for confusion between American English and British English. As the potential interviewees would have participated in the programme up to fifteen years previously, it was important to focus their attention on their placement straight away. A supervisor suggested opening with a non-threatening but encouraging question, such as “tell me about your overseas experience, what are your memories of it?” This led me to change the wording of the first question to reflect the suggestion made.

The third group to assist were two previous programme participants, now teachers, chosen because they were in England when I wanted to conduct the pilot study. They both completed the full questionnaire and commented on areas I had particularly asked them to review: if
respondents would clearly understand what was being asked of them, were the questions unambiguous; would it take too long to complete the questionnaire; and would the questions elicit appropriate responses (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). One significant change they felt was needed was that as presented the multiple choice questions did not always allow answers to be developed, and they suggested I provide more open-ended response boxes for participants who wished to explain their answers more fully. As a result of the pilot study I was able to discard or rephrase ambiguous questions, clarify some of the multiple choice answer questions, form an idea of how long it would take to complete the questionnaire and construct more open ended questions and comment boxes.

b) Piloting the interview schedule
To create the interview schedule I devised a set of core questions, for all participants to answer, and some supplementary questions (Appendix 2 p.188), the use of which would depend on the interviewee responses. I trialled these questions with the same two programme supervisors and teachers in face-to-face meetings, and received follow-up comments by email from the supervisors and over the phone from the two teachers. The benefit of using the same people was that they were able to follow through the lines of thought from the questionnaire to the interview. I took notes to record the pilot interviews, but this made me realise just how difficult note-taking would be with a much larger number of participants. I found it difficult to concentrate on what was being said and, more importantly, to pick up on the threads which emerged during the conversation. To allow me to concentrate on what participants were actually saying I decided to record all subsequent interviews. The interview pilots demonstrated how easy it was for the researcher, who needs to stay focused, to get sidetracked. Also, occasionally I did not allow the interviewees to finish their answers as I thought I knew what they were going to say; as Silverman (2005) points out, this is a fairly common mistake.

I had a helpful discussion with the programme organisers on how to develop supplementary questions given that the responses of different interviewees might each take a different course. The responses to the first question about their memories of their placement, which had been altered on the advice of a supervisor, tended to be very positive, offering perhaps a rather rosy view of the time spent overseas. I discussed this with the two teachers and as a result added
supplementary questions, asking participants to identify the challenges they faced and describe how easy or difficult it was for them to adapt their teaching to the system in which they found themselves.

The schedule of questions had been designed to try and ensure that time was used to best advantage. In the pilot sessions it became obvious that there were too many questions for the available time, and that some questions elicited answers which repeated previously gathered information. On a technical level, the piloting sessions allowed me to practise interview recording so I did not waste valuable time in the actual interviews themselves.

c) Other issues with interviews
Weaknesses can be inherent in a study which asks participants to recall very specific details after a long period of time, which may influence memory gain or loss and change interpretations of events. The researcher cannot always be certain whether the responses are accurate nor have an element of false memory (Loftus, 1997) in which actual and imagined memories blend together. Verma and Mallick (1999) suggest that whenever possible interviewees should be selected from the same sample who responded to the initial questionnaire, which overcomes the difficulty to some degree. One of my major problems was the length of time the participants wanted to talk; I had to make sure I moved the interview on by the firm use of pointers, such as “Thank you for that. I would now like to move on to …”

3.7 The questionnaire
In this section I discuss first how I structured the questionnaire; second, how the participants were chosen; I describe their characteristics; and finally I identify the issues associated with my questionnaire and how I dealt with them.

I began the data collection with a questionnaire because it was a quick and useful way of establishing a broad picture of the experience and the participants’ views (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). Successful questionnaires need to be clear, well laid out and invite what Denscombe (2007) describes as “crisp and concise” (p.152) responses. The pilot study helped to clarify the conciseness of the finished questionnaire, a copy of which is in Appendix 1(p.185).
a) The structure of the questionnaire
The design of my questions reflected the advice of Brown (2010) and Pryor (2010), who both stressed that before committing to specific questions the researcher should work out what’s worth asking and why. To identify what was important to ask about I returned first to my research question and second to the literature survey. My research was about investigating both the professional and the personal impact of overseas student teaching placement on participants, so it was important to ensure that the questions allowed for responses on both aspects.

The literature highlighted several concerns summarised by Hoffa (2005), many of which relate to the home colleges’ responsibility to ensure that student teachers with overseas placements could achieve the national standards set for teacher education in the US, or teach to the required state standards in their own classrooms on their return to the US (Gunter, 2005; Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997; Riches and Benson, 2010). University teacher educators were concerned about the very practical matter of whether it would be possible to transfer students’ overseas learning experiences back to their home classrooms (McNally et al., 2004; Romano and Cushner, 2007). If my research is to add significantly to the debate, I need to provide answers to these questions. I decided to ask participants which aspects of their placement were similar to or different from the US systems, and more importantly how easy or difficult was it to transfer these aspects to teaching in their home country.

Aware that designing a useful questionnaire is a “very skilled and challenging technical activity” (Hinds, 2000, p.42) I spent time looking at previously published educational research questionnaires before finalising my own. As a result, I decided to divide my own into five sections. Section 1 asked participants for the year of placement, country location, type of school and subsequent teaching experience. As well as obtaining basic information about the characteristics of the research population, this acted as a confidence-building introduction to subsequent questions. Section 2 asked for a more considered reflection about their placements, identifying highlights and challenging elements of their experience.

Section 3 asked them to consider a number of aspects of their placement, for example behaviour management, planning lessons and resourcing, by rating them according to their similarity to or
difference from, the system in their own country, and to rank them in terms of the level of difficulty they experienced in adapting these aspects to their subsequent teaching posts. This section also asked participants to consider a range of statements designed to identify how they felt they had changed personally in terms of flexibility, confidence, perspective and adaptability. Section 4 concerned their employment since graduation. Section 5, added at the suggestion of those who piloted the questionnaire, provided an opportunity for more general comments about their experience, and several participants took the opportunity to write at length here.

In the light particularly of my wish to gain information about how the programme might be improved, I thought it was important to allow participants to record both positive and negative comments. So I created open-ended boxes for many of the replies; for other questions, participants were able to score their views. For example question 2:

“Thinking about your subsequent teaching employment, consider for each of these points, how easy or difficult it was to adapt or transfer what you had experienced in your student teaching to your teaching post. 1= easy 5= difficult. If you click on 4 or 5 please provide details in the comments box which will open up.” (Section 3, Q2)

b) How the questionnaire participants were selected

The selection of the participants was important. I was hoping to use students chosen from our programme database to find out how the student teaching programme had affected participants going back many years, purposive sampling, or what Denscombe (2007) refers to as “handpicked” participants (p.15). Here the researcher already knows something about the participants and deliberately selects those who are particularly relevant to the research topic. This meant it was important to clearly show how the individuals were chosen for each of the sections of the research.

The student teaching programme had been in operation since 1989. During this time methods of communicating with students had changed dramatically, from letters, phone calls and faxes to the widespread use of email. To bring the programme systems up to date, all participants for whom an email address was held – 889 out of 1100 participants between 1989 and 2005 were sent an email asking them to confirm their current email address. 657 did not respond, because
either they chose not to or the e-mail address was no longer valid. The 232 participants who responded formed the basis for my questionnaire survey.

In line with the University of Sheffield Ethics Committee recommendation and guidelines, I had already submitted an ethics approval request describing my research and received approval back (appendix 3 p.189). As part of the ethics protocol an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, together with an invitation to participate, was emailed to each individual (appendix 4a &4b p.190-1). It was explained that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and their names changed to preserve their anonymity. They were reminded of the website address for the programme, and offered the opportunity to read the final research in full. By returning the questionnaire they were deemed to have agreed to take part.

Of the 232 emails sent, 17 bounced back immediately, 139 appeared not to be opened, and from the 76 which were opened I received 66 responses. Figure 3.2(p.74) shows the response rate to this email according to year of participation: the transient nature of email addresses is likely to be the major cause of the low response rate before 2002. Once students have graduated their university email address is defunct within weeks, so even for fairly recent participants email databases very quickly get out of date.

c) The characteristics of the questionnaire participants

Although the number of respondents was small in relation to the total number of programme participants over the years, they represent student teaching participation in a significant number of countries, with varying age groups and types of schools; I felt that this breadth would allow some interesting generalisations to be made from the responses. 68% of the responses received (n=66) were from students placed in the years 2003-6 inclusive, possibly reflecting the more secure and reliable emails links established with recent participants. The placements, in more than 15 countries, were almost equally divided between primary and secondary educational establishments. The most requested placements were in New Zealand (21%), Australia (18%) and the UK (15%); their popularity is clearly illustrated in the placement location graphs in Figure 3.3(p.76) which also show other characteristics of students in each placement year as well as the types of placement schools used for all 66 participants.
d) Issues with the questionnaire

One major issue with the development of a questionnaire is the time it takes (Cohen et al., 2000; Rudestam and Newton, 2001). It is easy to be misled into thinking that a questionnaire can be created and made ready for use quickly, but Silverman (2001) indicates that up to ten attempts are often necessary, with refinements creating a constant need for revision. With the help I received from those who piloted and commented on my drafts I was able to create my final questionnaire after five revisions, but it still took much longer than I had anticipated. However I hoped that this lengthy preparation would lead in turn to a much more helpful and honest set of data.

The questionnaires came back at very irregular intervals, and although I had set a deadline of three weeks for returning the questionnaires at least four came in later, but I decided to include their data in the total anyway. It was also frustrating that so many emails were recorded as
unopened; I couldn’t tell whether they had just not been received. This emphasised the importance of having a means of communicating with students once they leave college or university: the programme manager now asks students for a personal email address to replace their university address and the programme organisers also opened a Facebook page. One of my most difficult decisions about the questionnaire was how many questions to include – how many is it reasonable to expect a respondent to answer? It is easy to forget that answering questions can become boring after a time, and however high their enthusiasm at the start respondents’ energy can soon flag (Hopkins, 1993). If I conducted a questionnaire survey again, I think the main change I would make would be to reduce the number of questions.

3.8 The interviews
The second part of my research comprised face-to-face, more personal interaction with selected participants in semi-structured interviews. The completed questionnaires told me what participants thought about their placements abroad, but were less informative about their impact on their subsequent teaching careers. This was a major part of my research project, and the interviews gave me an opportunity to investigate it, as well as adding depth to the questionnaire responses. The interviews gave me an opportunity to capture at first hand participants’ reflections on their placements and they gave the participants the chance to voice their own feelings and pass on their personal perspective on their experience.

An interview schedule is important: it provides consistency of approach and helps the interviewer to remain focused in the face of wide ranging responses (Wellington, 2000). In this section I first discuss how I constructed the interview schedule and decided which questions to ask; then I describe how the participants were selected and their characteristics. Finally, I look at some of the issues which arose from the use of a semi-structured interview and indicate how I overcame them.
Figure 3.3: The characteristics of the 66 participants in the survey questionnaire

**Location of placement**

- Australia: 12
- Canada: 3
- Central America: 4
- Czech Republic: 4
- Germany: 3
- Ireland: 4
- New Zealand: 14
- Norway: 1
- Russia: 1
- South Africa: 2
- Spain: 4
- United Kingdom: 2
- United States: 1

**Number of Students / Placement Year**

- 1996: 1
- 1997: 2
- 1998: 2
- 1999: 1
- 2000: 2
- 2001: 4
- 2002: 6
- 2003: 9
- 2004: 19
- 2005: 12
- 2006: 8

**Type of Placement School**

- Elementary: 30
- Middle: 5
- Kindergarten: 1
- Secondary: 20
- All Through 5-18: 10
a) Constructing and using the interview schedule
To help me to identify appropriate interview questions I returned to my research question and the questionnaire responses. The initial focus of my research identified areas of interest and topics which were appropriate to pursue in more detail at an interview. I created five main sections for the questions in the schedule:

a) asking about their memories;
b) how far they become a better educator as a result of participation;
c) the impact on their personal and professional development;
d) the impact of this experience on their subsequent career;
e) the importance they placed on all teachers having an international experience.

At the beginning of the interviews I stressed that the programme was in the process of being developed further and that it would be helpful to hear about both positive and negative experiences. I was very aware of the need to keep the questions as open as possible, as well as including a specific question about the particular challenges they had faced overseas. Wellington (2000) recommends sequencing the interview, placing the closed questions early on and following them with open questions needing more reflective and considered answers. I had to make an important decision about divulging the exact nature of the questions prior to meeting the participants. If participants have no knowledge of the questions to be asked their responses may be limited or unfocussed, but if they know the detailed questions in advance they may prepare answers which they think are the required response (Hinds, 2000). I chose a middle way by talking to them by phone prior to our meeting describing the areas I would be asking questions about; so the respondents had time to consider them and provide thoughtful, but not overly prepared answers.

I was anxious that my research should have a value to it and endorse what Patton (1986) says about the need for research to be purposive and that researchers should be interested in undertaking investigations that are not only useful but used. I introduced the interview by describing the purpose of my research and that their responses would be valuable to the future development of the programme. All participants readily agreed to me recording their response by
taking notes and using a tape recorder. As some of the participants talked very fast note taking was quite difficult at times and the tape recordings subsequently proved very useful.

Given that the participant placements were spread over a fifteen-year period (see Figure 3.2) I started the interview with an open question about their memories of their placement, prompting them to recall specific aspects about their placement. As the participants in the pilot interviews had predicted, the responses tended to paint a rather rosy picture of their experience. Verma and Mallick (1999) warn that interviewees do not always respond in foreseeable ways and that interviewers should be ready to be adaptable and follow up or develop interesting responses as they occur. Accordingly, and to allow me to probe more deeply, I had developed a series of supplementary questions designed to help participants reflect on specific aspects, for instance the challenges they faced as well as how easy they felt it was to adapt to teaching in a different country. The full interview schedule is to be found at Appendix 2, (p.188). I needed to make sure my body language demonstrated that I was listening with interest (Berg, 1995) and concentrating on the person speaking. The participants were generally forthcoming: generous with their responses, and enthusiastic in their recollections, which made listening and recording their evidence relatively easy and enjoyable. However, some of their responses provided unrelated material or more detail than I needed, and I had to prompt them to move on.

b) How the interviewees were selected
Verma and Mallick (1999) define the sample in a research project as “a smaller number of elements selected from a population, assumed to be representative of that population” (p.203). However the widespread distribution of the potential interviewees across the US and even overseas presented me with a significant problem: how to select a sample which would be representative of the whole group. I wrote to all the participants who had completed the initial questionnaire, asking for volunteers willing to be interviewed and would be in the Minneapolis area at the time of my visit. The timing was to become the first criterion for selection of participants, but I drew up a further set of criteria to try and maximise representation of the whole group:
1. participants in the programme over as wide a time scale as possible
2. both male and female participants
3. placements in different school phases
4. participants from a number of different countries
5. undergraduate and post graduate participants.

Twenty-four people responded, several wanting to help but not available in the city at the time of my visit. I recorded each respondent against the criteria outlined above; this enabled me to identify ten suitable participants who all agreed to be interviewed. All were very helpful in accommodating my visit and finally, eight were actually available for the time set for the interviews. I sent them all a letter explaining that I was following up the online questionnaire in more detail, in particular to find out a little more about how their placement had affected their subsequent careers. They confirmed their willingness to participate and I arranged to phone them when I arrived in the United States to finalise meeting times and locations.

c) The characteristics of the interviewees
For research to be of value the data must be reliable and valid (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). To check my own data I compared some key facts about my interviewees with their profiles in the main questionnaire and identified some characteristics of the participants illustrated in Figure 3.4. (p.80) Half my interviewees (four) had been placed in New Zealand or Australia, which correlates well with the 40% identified in the questionnaire as being placed in these two locations. Five of my interviewees were placed in primary schools, also shown to be the largest phase group amongst the respondents to the questionnaire. Given that only eight people were interviewed their characteristics reflect the makeup of the questionnaire group to quite a reasonable degree.

d) Issues with the interviews
One of the most time-consuming aspects of setting up interviews with the participants was making arrangements to meet them. I suggested possible times and locations before leaving England but these all had to be confirmed on arrival in the United States. Some minor adjustments to timings were needed, and arrangements made about locations and access to school buildings. The recording equipment was checked each time to ensure it was working and
the interviewees were put at their ease at the start of the interview. I was interested to discover that the quality of the recorded sound was not always apparent until I played back the recordings.

Figure 3.4: The main characteristics of the eight interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>No of weeks</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>Undergraduate / graduate M/F</th>
<th>Placement year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary Ed</td>
<td>Undergraduate Female</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary/middle</td>
<td>Primary Ed/ Maths</td>
<td>Undergraduate Female</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kindergarten/Primary</td>
<td>Early years education</td>
<td>Undergraduate Female</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>All through 5-18</td>
<td>ESL + Spanish</td>
<td>Graduate Female</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Primary/junior</td>
<td>Primary Ed.</td>
<td>Undergraduate Male</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary Ed</td>
<td>Undergraduate Male</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Undergraduate Male</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Graduate Female</td>
<td>2006/7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven of the interviews were conducted on school premises but the eighth took place in a café, and I found the ambient noise also recorded surprisingly intrusive.

Hollway and Jefferson (2007) recommend aiming to have the interviewee speaking for around 80% of the time and also advise that the interviewer must try to overcome the natural tendency to comment too widely or add facts of their own. I had to keep reminding myself of this during the interviews, and refrain from diverting the conversation into a more directed pathway of my own choosing. Several of the interviewees were also keen to describe anecdotes and personal experiences in detail and the interview schedule was useful in helping to keep all of us focussed
on the important questions. Another issue was the time factor: it is surprising how quickly interview time can pass, and as the participants had classes or appointments to keep after the interview, good timekeeping was important. As the interviews progressed, my timing and pace improved significantly.

3.9 What is reliability? What is validity?
Reliability in research relates to the accuracy with which research methods and techniques are able to produce data which stands up to scrutiny and can be used to estimate the degree of confidence in the data. Validity addresses whether the research explains or measures what the researcher intended to explain or measure. It is very important, therefore, that the method of addressing the research questions is appropriate. I, as the researcher, must show that I did not invent my interpretations of the data (Black, 1993) and that they are the product of my own detailed analysis. Good educational research should be rigorous, not only in its planning and execution but in reporting and analysing its findings (Paechter, 2003). Therefore producing research which is both reliable and valid underpins the ethos of the research I set out to complete. I now look at reliability and validity in turn to show evidence of how the research methods I used allowed me to collect data that is both reliable and valid.

a) Reliability in using questionnaires
One of the most important principles in any research is the reliability of the research instruments, the first of which, in my case, was a questionnaire. The greater the number of respondents, the better the chance of generating reliable data: what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as “truthworthy material” (p.65). But even data produced by such quantitative methods as a questionnaire is not guaranteed to be totally reliable: this seemingly “hard” data has to be interpreted and analysed (Fielding and Fielding, 1986) and interpretations – especially when dealing with respondents’ opinions, can undermine reliability. To feel confident that my questionnaire would achieve a high level of reliability I followed Rudestam and Newton’s advice (2001) to maintain a clear audit trail, of how I created the questionnaire and collected the data so that others could re-run the research, produce consistent results and reach similar conclusions. Having piloted the questionnaire I also discussed the resulting data with colleagues, a process which Rudestam and Newton (2001) describe as “keeping the researcher honest and
focused” (p.100) and which also acted as a method of triangulation by providing a means of corroborating the findings.

b) Validity in using questionnaires
Validity is “an important key to effective research...which needs to be maximised” (Cohen et al. 2000; p.105) and I tried to ensure that the data from my questionnaires was as valid as possible to increase the overall validity of my research. My respondents had all actually participated in the programme, and sixty six returned responses were sufficient to provide an interesting sample and useful set of data. The questionnaire was piloted, reviewed and amended as a result. Open text boxes allowed respondents to add their own comments, creating the potential for a level of response which supported the numerical data. Their responses had no bearing on any personal assessment procedures or degree outcome as they had all graduated some time ago.

c) Reliability in interviewing
The process of interviewing is built on the development of a relationship between the interviewer and the participant. This relationship may differ between interviews, even if conducted by the same person, so it is more difficult to achieve reliability with interviews than with a questionnaire. On the issue of reliability in qualitative research, Mischler (1990) and Radnor (2002) both talk about the importance of trustworthy data, the integrity of the researcher and honesty in reporting the findings. I tried to ensure that I used the interview schedules in a similar manner throughout and that I recorded the responses consistently. However Mason (2002) asks if it can be ever possible for the same person using the same interview script (the research instrument) to produce the same answers and findings twice, and if not, how important will this be? Wellington (2000) suggests that it might actually be impossible, and that what really matters at this point in qualitative research is the quality of researcher integrity.

The respondents were interviewed at a particular moment in their lives, so their answers are coloured not only by their experience of study abroad but also the feelings they were experiencing at the time of our meeting. I hope that the actions I took helped to achieve a good level of reliability, particularly through keeping good records of the process which would allow
another researcher to repeat the research but I accept that total reliability is probably not achievable in interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) advise that the reliability of the findings is significantly improved by gathering information from multiple sources, which I tried to achieve by using mixed methods to corroborate data sources: the questionnaire with a large group of people, then interviews with selected individuals.

d) Validity in interviewing
Wellington (2000) is clear that we can never be one hundred per cent sure of achieving validity, in qualitative educational research particularly, but we can be honest and transparent about our methods and our findings. To achieve a high level of transparency I piloted the interview questions, a discussion about which appears earlier in this chapter, and shared transcripts of the interviews with the participants to gain what Silverman (2003) calls “respondent validation” (p.177). The participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and my interpretations, and I felt that recording the interviews made a significant contribution to achieving accuracy of the data. Some participants were surprised at the level of detail in the transcripts, and in three cases this triggered the addition of more comments to the original interview results: one person compiled a whole sheet of new thoughts which he said he had been mulling over since our interview. Cohen et al. (2000) suggest that another way of improving validity is to increase the sample, or the time period in the case of a longitudinal study: so seeking the views of participants going back over fifteen years helped to improve the validity of my research.

3.10 Ethical considerations
Ever increasing attention is paid to ethical considerations in educational research, particularly when the subjects of the research are people to ensure that researchers do not take advantage of those willing to provide data or be tempted to influence the responses in order to achieve predicted or required outcomes. During my research I collected a large quantity of personal data, as well as evidence of participants’ views and beliefs, raising ethical and legal concerns about the rights of participants (Verma and Mallick, 1999). The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) clearly states that the researcher is ultimately responsible for not only ensuring ethical practice in the work but also minimising the risk of harm to participants. It also warns that carrying out research, particularly of a qualitative nature, can be quite intrusive, and participants
have the right to know how, and to what degree, the research may impact on their lives. Bell and Opie (2002) support this point:

We have urged researchers to be precise in defining their role, to be clear about what they mean by anonymity and confidentiality and to make sure their participants interpret their definitions in the same way … (p.241)

Rudestam and Newton (2001) suggest five research principles: confidentiality, non-coercion, consent, care and communication. Denscombe (2003) embodies these in three rules which provide a useful structure for considering the ethical implications of any research: respect the rights and dignity of everyone participating in the research project; avoid any harm to subjects which might arise from participation in the research; and ensure that the research is carried out with honesty and dignity. Informed consent underpins good procedure when approaching potential participants, who need to know the reason for the research as well as who will have access to the data.

Most professional associations and universities, including the University of Sheffield, have established a code of conduct for researchers, so before commencing my research I was required to submit an ethics application for approval; a copy of this is to be found in Appendix 3 (p.189). Participants needed to understand the nature of my research, that their participation was voluntary, and how I would keep their responses confidential. I wrote to all those with an active email address explaining the nature of my research and indicating that I was looking for past students in the programme to complete a questionnaire about their experience (appendix 4a p.190) Conducting the initial survey by email allowed the participants to take part or not, and answer as many or few of the questions as they chose. Although the survey was designed to be anonymous and did not ask for names, in fact over 90% of the respondents gave their full names.

I gave my contact details and offered to answer individual questions before they completed the questionnaire; twelve individuals took up this offer, but they really wanted to hear how the programme was going and tell me about their own circumstances rather than raise any issues connected with the survey. I also told them they would have an opportunity to see the results by logging into the programme website at a later date. Once I had received the returned questionnaires, I emailed the participants to thank them and identified those I had chosen for the
interviews. Participants had already returned a contact sheet indicating if they would be willing to participate in a face to face interview at a later date (See appendix 4b, p.191). When setting up the interviews I had to assess any risks which I or the participants might incur, although as all but one of the interviews took place on school premises this was not a major issue. I sent a letter to all the interviewees explaining how the interview process would work, asking if they had any questions, and saying I would contact them individually to set up meetings. A consent form had already been returned if they were happy to participate; this also asked for a phone number so they could be contacted if there were last-minute changes. Arrangements were made by phone for me to arrive at school reception desks with suitable identification where I would be met by the teachers. In all cases they were very hospitable and helpful with making the arrangements.

3.11 Preparation and analysis of questionnaire data

Using an online data collection programme made it relatively easy to create a database from the online questionnaire returns. The computer software was customised for my research by the programme webmaster, who also set up the online questionnaires. The entire online survey system was custom coded using Microsoft ASP.Net with C# as a programming language. The data was stored in an encrypted state in an SQL database and exported in a format compatible with Microsoft Excel (CSV). Several different reports were created to allow the data to be viewed in different ways; for example, one report collated an individual’s survey responses, while another summarised the statistics for all responses. Examples of these can be seen in Appendix 5 (p.192). All reports were made available via the online administrative interface so they could be exported in PDF format for analysis. Responses in the questionnaire text boxes, for extra comments, were analysed using a content analysis approach described below.

I decided to integrate the questionnaire responses and the interviews, as my reflections on the data had convinced me that these two sets of responses complemented each other well. Integrating the results from two different methods of obtaining data is supported by Colley (2010): “Multiple sources of data and layers of context can be woven into a story and its interpretation …” (p.191). Cresswell (2003) is also positive about presenting varying types of data in an integrated way. These views chimed with my own, that the participants needed to
share centre stage in the presentation of their responses if they were to provide the real story of their experiences.

Qualitative investigations tends to produce large quantities of data recorded in words and ideas rather than numbers and statistics (Rudestam, 2001), and Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest that processing the data can take twice as long as collecting it. Dealing with what Miles and Huberman (1984) describe as “an Alpine collection of material” (p.56) runs the risk of the research losing its way, becoming vague and short on detail (Bathmaker, 2010). To survive the process, I needed a systematic way of storing the responses in a relevant, usable, and accessible form (Gorden, 1992). I found Miles and Huberman’s (1984) three steps to organising data analysis – data collection, data reduction and data display – helpful, as also Wellington (2000) and Cohen et al. (2000) suggestions which were along the same lines. All these examples helped determine my analysis method, as follows:

i. Prepare the data by collating numerical responses and transcribing recorded material.
ii. Read and re-read to get a closer understanding and knowledge of the data.
iii. Choose appropriate themes or categories as a basis for apportioning the data.
iv. Go through the data and allocate it to categories already identified or creating new ones
v. Revisit the literature and research questions.
vi. Choose quotations to give a voice to the data contained in each category.

I now describe how I used these steps to analyse my data in greater detail. Cresswell’s (1998) advice is to commence data analysis by reading and re-reading all the data collected, as this helps to give a feel for the whole picture and allow initial links to separated data within the text to be made. Repeated reading of the interview transcripts, together with listening to the tapes and studying the data collected from the questionnaires, enabled me to develop a feeling for the results I had already obtained. At this stage I found it helpful to make notes and write memos to myself. There is a point at which the amount of data threatens to engulf the researcher and Bathmaker (2010) talks of the importance of being able to step back from “the immediacy of the field and the data” (p.202). This stepping back, for days or even weeks, provided a period of reflection after which I was able to see the evidence from a fresh and less cluttered perspective.
Following Silverman’s advice (2000) that “field notes can never rival the reliability of a good-quality tape and transcript” (p.173) I found that my decision to take notes as well as tape record the interviews produced a surprisingly large amount of data: this threatened to overwhelm me, just as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Bathmaker (2010) had suggested it might. To try and manage the situation I decided that rather than attempt to transcribe all the interviews verbatim, I would follow the advice of Radnor (2002) and Miles and Huberman (1994) who recommend transcribing the principal ideas more generally while recording specific comments verbatim to use as illustrations in the report and analysis. I omitted introductory comments and social chat, as transcribing every word would take too long for a single researcher to complete. I listened to the original recordings and read the transcripts many times, noting useful sections of narrative which I earmarked for possible use.

Returning to my research questions, I developed a data analysis framework based on the professional and personal impact on teachers of participation in the study abroad programme. I developed a grid for each of these two headings and highlighted phrases and sentences from the questionnaire and the interview transcripts: for example, a reason for going overseas, classroom management, planning lessons, supporting specific learning difficulties or English Second Language teaching (ESL). I referenced these with a name and year of participation so the original statement could easily be traced.

Having collected a number of statements and phrases, following the method outlined by Cohen et al. (2000) and Wellington (2000) I grouped them into categories, for instance:

- the reasons why participants chose to student teach overseas;
- the factors affecting their participation;
- similarities and differences between education systems;
- professional and personal challenges experienced by participants.

The next stage was to identify extracts to illustrate what Silverman (2005) describes as “the respondents’ cultural stories” (p156). I wanted my data analysis to include a strong element of participants’ voices as I agreed with Miles and Huberman (1994) that these would add ‘a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader than pages
of summarised numbers (p.1)’. Another major influence on my decision to include significant numbers of first-hand comments was that the research might well be of interest to a wider audience of faculty supervisors and those involved in student teaching overseas, so I wanted to present my research findings in a way which would engage their interest and contribute to the ongoing debate (Fine and Deegan, 1996).

However, I found selecting appropriate verbatim comments much harder than I anticipated. A tension existed between short statements, or sound bites, and longer quotations which seemed to enrich and exemplify the participants’ meaning. Mindful of the need to be creative while presenting a balanced view of what was said, I decided to use longer quotations only where these illustrated “the interviewees’ own interpretations and understandings” (Mason, 2002, p.108) more clearly than my précis of their words, which might lose the essence of what was said. To retain my focus on the original purpose of my research, I kept returning to my research question and I revisited the literature, in particular the surveys about study abroad, to see how far my data reflected the published findings. This review facilitated the critical reflection which helps to identify bad judgement, repeated mistakes or even evidence which I might have missed (Scott and Usher, 1995; Brookfield, 2005). This period of reflection did slow down the pace of the research but gave me thoughtful space during which the research coalesced from many individual fragments into a more cohesive picture.

3.12 Limitations of my methodology and methods

Many forms of methodology and a great range of methods are available to researchers: all have value, plus their fair share of limitations. I needed to consider all the possibilities in the light of my ontological and epistemological beliefs, ethical considerations and the social or educational context, as well as considerations of time, costs and workload, in order to justify the choices I made. Even so, a number of limitations to my research methodology and methods remained, and I look at these in more detail below.

a) Limitations of the methodology

My first limitation arose because I chose to use a mixed methods approach within a qualitative framework. This seemed an appropriate methodology as the questionnaire would allow me to research a wider population, while the more focused interviews would allow me to delve a little
deeper into participants’ thoughts and attitudes. However, using a mixed methods approach definitely increased the scale of the research, in terms of both setting it up and analysing the ensuing data. The research produced a significant amount of data for a single researcher to work with and I had to ensure I was scrupulously transparent and honest about the process and resisted any temptation to take short cuts.

A second limitation centred round the use of a questionnaire which involves a more deductive approach, following a natural science model. I was concerned that what might be seen as simplistic quantitative measurement might not respond so usefully to my research questions (Elliott, 2004) so I used this to generate a range of data which would underpin the large amount of information which resulted from the interviews. My own belief in the importance of social reality being constructed by individuals does not sit so well with such a quantitative approach, so I had to adapt the idea of a questionnaire to accommodate the views and thoughts of participants which highlighted a more inductive approach to the investigation.

A further limitation lies with the ease with which bias can arise in qualitative research. However, I feel that if I clearly acknowledge this possibility, it does not necessarily negate the outcomes. Interviewees’ responses can be biased as they may well try to give responses they think the interviewer would like or might expect (Selltiz and Jahoda, 1962). It is quite possible that the interviewer can introduce bias by asking leading or restrictive questions rather than probing more widely by asking for example ‘tell me more about X’. I tried to ensure that I carefully recorded what had been written, said and discussed and in my analysis where applicable, I quoted the actual words used wherever possible. Taking the advice of Moon (2006) and Papadimos (2009) about the need to develop critical thinking and reflect on my work, by standing back from the research and considering the data collected I tried to reflect critically on my findings. However my own close involvement with the student teaching programme may well have influenced my judgements as a researcher and although I made significant efforts to reflect upon and evaluate my own impact on the research, it is likely my personal view that student teaching overseas is a positive activity may well have allowed some elements of bias to creep in. By acknowledging that bias may well be present rather than try to eliminate it (Bell, 1999) I hope to present a more reliable research study.
Another question I need to pose to myself after reflecting on the questions both in the questionnaire and in the interview schedule, centres around whether or not I allowed sufficient opportunities for drawbacks and difficulties to be raised and discussed by respondents to both the questionnaire and during the interviews. On balance I think that places for commenting on the drawbacks were not sufficiently well identified and if I were to conduct this research again I would consider making these opportunities more obvious in both instruments. A further limitation lies in making a clear distinction between the professional and personal impacts on the participants’ lives. These two aspects are intimately combined and it was sometimes difficult to separate the answers into these two distinct areas.

b) Limitations of the methods

(i) Questionnaires

One of the limitations of a questionnaire arises from the fact that a large sample results in a great deal of data whose analysis may give a numerical description but inevitably lacks detailed narrative or links to real people. I tried to overcome this issue by opening up some of the questions with comment boxes so individual respondents could personalise or explain their choices.

Another limitation is the way a questionnaire is constructed. It has to be easily understood and completed by respondents, hence multi-choice answers: but these are open to the charge of building in bias or failing to provide an answer which meets the response needs of the participant. To address this issue I provided several open boxes allowing participants to comment on their choice of answer; I think this device also makes the questionnaire a more attractive document, both to receive and to complete.

Responses to my questionnaires tell me how many people went to a particular country for their student teaching placement, but – even through the use of the comment box – might be less useful in describing the depth and complexity of their experiences.

Questionnaires are also limited in terms of response levels. While online questionnaires are fairly quick and easy to complete, it is not easy to ensure that respondents remain motivated; there is
always something more interesting online to capture their attention and the questionnaire may languish in their inbox. My questionnaire was sent to people who had participated in the student teaching programme so they had a basic interest in completing it; but it was still difficult to influence the level of response. Online questionnaires are also vulnerable to changing email addresses, and it is difficult to be sure that they have been received. This was certainly a factor in my research: I sent out 232 questionnaires to seemingly live email addresses but only 76 were opened, and 66 completed and returned.

A limitation which emerged only during the analysis of the data was that few responses were received from those who had failed their student teaching overseas or who had left early to return home for a variety of reasons. Whilst the failure rate is low in terms of the total number of students in the programme this lack of responses does mean that there is not the opportunity to engage with the possible concerns of those particular participants and this could be seen as giving a more positive bias to the findings.

(ii) Interviews

The interview provides an opportunity to dig much deeper into individuals’ thoughts, reflections and values; however, without other statistical data to provide the possibility of triangulation these individual’s responses can be viewed as perhaps too anecdotal, lacking in critical evaluation and a weak source of evidence. I chose a semi-structured type of questioning as I wanted the participants to develop their own reflections and thoughts and not be constrained by more specific or closed questions.

A major limitation lay with how I chose the interview candidates. Although I used a clear set of criteria to help make my choice, the principle criterion was that candidates were able to be present at interview during the time of my visit. This effectively disallowed those who offered to be interviewed, but were too far away geographically to meet me. So my interview data might be criticised because its collective viewpoint was based solely on interviewees from Minnesota.

A further limitation was the quantity of interview material that needed to be transcribed. Myers (2002), for example, warns of the sheer volume of data and detail, even with a small number of
subjects; nevertheless I was still surprised at just how much data emerged once it was all transcribed and how long it took to work with it. If I did the research again, I would probably concentrate on one method only – probably the interviews, as I felt these produced a wealth of useful and interesting data.

Interviews also posed a number of practical problems. Setting them up is time consuming, and travelling to them expensive. Telephone interviewing might have been cheaper and quicker, although the time zone difference would have posed a problem, but since University of Sheffield funding gave me the opportunity to interview face to face I did not explore this solution. I saw great value in establishing a rapport with interviewees, as well as being able to see the non-verbal signals which emerged during the interviews.

A final limitation of the interviewing process concerns the honesty of interviewees’ responses. Where evidence has been collected through semi-structured interviews the relationship between the questions asked and the conclusions drawn is not always straightforward (Opie, 2004). This is also stressed by Sikes (2000) who identifies the twin issues of what she calls faulty memory, or a deliberate intention to lie or deceive, as well as interviewees’ desire to provide the researcher with what they deem to be the required answers. I was able to triangulate my interview responses with those from the questionnaire and identify those which seemed contradictory. As the interviews progressed, if I was unsure about a particular response I could rephrase my question or remind them of their earlier viewpoint. In practice this issue did not really arise but I recognised the need to aware of it.

3.13 Conclusion
I believe that the knowledge I gather through the data collection and subsequent interviews will provide me with responses which can form the basis of sound conclusions. Making value judgements is a “fraught enterprise” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001:24) and judgements can never be value-free, whether on the part of the participant who offers them, or the researcher who collects them. Success for the researcher lies in the ability to present a case for each of the various aspects of the argument before adopting a particular view.
In setting up this research project I learned to recognise that many significant factors affect it, some complex, others quite simple, but all requiring consideration. For example, although American student teachers speak English there are linguistic as well as cultural differences which may lead to misunderstandings not only with my research instruments but within their placements with their host schools and supervisors. It can be difficult to accurately represent others and their views in any way but our own, which may incorporate the values of, and bias towards, another set of beliefs and understanding. Participants must have opportunities to clearly communicate their own views and thoughts, so much thought and reflection is needed to choose the most appropriate methodology as it is this, together with the specific methods chosen, which will influence the nature and usefulness of the findings.

My own beliefs are set out here: I hold the view that study abroad can be a positive concept and experience, able to promote a sense of connectedness between participants and those they engage with. I have a deep curiosity therefore to find out if, and if so how far and in what ways, these student teachers feel that their view of the world has changed as a result of their experiences, or if their experience was of any benefit to them in their future work. I am also keen to identify any shortcomings in the programme as these will inform future developments and ensure it provides the best possible structure for placing student teachers. In the next chapter I present the data from both the online questionnaire and the interviews. I return to both my research questions and those which arose from the literature to see how far the results of my research have addressed these and what insights I have gained from the information they provide.
Chapter 4 Analysis of the results

4.1 Introduction
To be useful, research data must be systematically collected and appropriately analysed, in what Bathmaker (2004) refers to as “a way that offers a credible and meaningful account of the data in relation to the research questions ...” (p.166). In deciding how to report and analyse the data I was influenced by Campbell (2004) who noted that:

All raw data are already the story of an event – one person’s account of that event from his or her very particular perspective. When you then add a further layer, that is, your interpretation of the data, it becomes a story of a story of the event, with the event itself gradually disappearing under layers of interpretation. (p.129)

Given that my questionnaire and interviews had captured a significant quantity and variety of first-hand data, Campbell’s view played a large part in my decision to let the participants speak for themselves, rather than risk their individuality disappearing under “layers of interpretation”. My approach to the presentation and analysis was as Wellington describes (2000) to try and identify the “lived experience from which we can elicit the participant’s own views, feelings and perspectives” (p.71). Atkinson and Coffey (2004) also stress the importance of using first-hand narrative: it provides evidence of day-to-day experiences which cannot be tracked through documentary sources. My questionnaire and interviews provided a rich source of first-hand evidence, both positive and negative, illustrating the participants’ experiences and their subsequent reflections on them.

4.2 The organisation of this chapter
In this chapter I present and analyse the results of both the questionnaire survey and the semi-structured interviews. First I explain how the analysis is structured; then I summarise information about the participants in the research. I then present the data collected from both the questionnaire survey and the semi-structured interviews, intertwined in an attempt to create what Silverman (2005) describes as a “clear, cohesive, cogent and readable presentation” (p.311) exploring my research question about the professional and personal impacts of student teaching overseas on the participants. I identify the reasons they gave for choosing to student teach
overseas, then consider in greater detail their views on the differences between student teaching overseas and in the USA / Canada together with the impact that participation in the programme had on their subsequent teaching posts. I go on to analyse other professional and personal challenges of student teaching overseas: its effect on job applications; the impact of memories and experiences and the experience of being a foreigner overseas. This is followed by an overview of the main findings which emerged from the research. Finally I identify emerging issues and ideas which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

4.3 Structuring the analysis

To be credible and reliable, new research should build on both existing knowledge and previous research, and take into account questions which have been raised in earlier research and literature. The data I collected needed to address both my research question and the core issues which arise from the literature survey. I referred back to my research question which asks about the professional and personal perspectives on participants of student teaching abroad, and to ensure that my data addressed the research question I divided the analysis into two main sections which considered a) the professional, and b) the personal implications of student teaching abroad on the participants. Returning to the literature review, three main themes had emerged:

- what student teachers need to learn about the craft of teaching;
- political considerations, and the influence of accountability on student teaching abroad;
- the impact of globalisation on the preparation of teachers.

Several core issues emerged from these broad themes, which I now present and discuss in order to set a context for my findings. These issues are developed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Educational writers tend to agree that teacher education needs to offer participants an opportunity to develop a broader understanding about teaching as a global profession to prepare them for future rapid, wide-scale changes (Jarvis, 1994; Brighouse, 1996; Steiner, 1996; Kissock, 2010). However, questions remain about the most useful ways of doing this, and American teacher educators have some very significant concerns about student teaching abroad which can be summarised as follows:
• whether student teaching programmes other than their own will produce teachers who have the classroom proficiency and management skills needed in North American schools (Caldwell, 2000);
• whether returning student teachers will be able to ensure school pupils achieve good scores in state and national standardised tests (Zamastril-Vondrova, 2005);
• how well study abroad student teachers will be able to work with the American or Canadian curriculum content and lesson planning on their return (Bevilacqua, 2007);
• whether they will be able to successfully assess student learning and raise student achievement in their subsequent teaching positions (Carr, 2002).

These concerns reflect a widespread belief that preparation for teaching should take place in a context of local, rather than global needs (Kissock, 2010), and their identification influenced the way I constructed both my questionnaire and my analysis. Brindley et al. (2009, p.526) suggested that beyond a general surface analysis there was a paucity of current research into study abroad and student teaching in particular. This contributed to my decision to look in greater detail at some of the very specific concerns identified by teacher educators – issues about classroom management skills, lesson planning, and assessing children’s learning – not only to avoid the accusation of superficial analysis, but also to generate useful data about the impact of student teaching overseas in relation to these expressed concerns. The next section identifies the research sample and this is followed by a more detailed analysis of individual responses to the online questionnaire, illustrated by evidence from both the questionnaires and the interviews.

4.4 The research study sample

The study sample was in two parts. The first comprised 232 individuals who took part in the overseas student teaching programme between 1996 and 2006. They were sent an online questionnaire, to which sixty-six individuals responded, of whom forty-eight (68%) had participated between in the years 2003-06 perhaps reflecting the greater ease of keeping track of students electronically post-2001. They had all either completed their student teaching at the end of a university or college education course or were enrolled in a Master’s in Teaching (MIT) course following a first degree. The student placements were almost equally divided between primary and secondary schools in over 15 countries, as illustrated in Figure 3.2 (page 74). The
second study sample comprised eight participants who were interviewed. The criteria for their selection are described more fully in Chapter 3, but an important factor was their availability to meet me during my visit to Minneapolis. A description of their characteristics is to be found in Chapter 3, p.83.

Since completing the student teaching programme, forty-nine (71%) of the sixty-six questionnaire respondents had taught in the United States or Canada and eleven (18%) had taught also abroad at some point in their teaching career. Several of the student teachers who completed their practice abroad had been offered posts in their placement schools, but not all had taken these up these opportunities. On their return to North America, some student teachers found that the economic state of the job market made it difficult to find a post and had worked as classroom assistants, providing specific support for individual pupils, or completed further training as educational psychologists.

4.5 Presentation and analysis of the data generated by the questionnaires and interviews

a) Introduction
The organization and analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires and the interviews relates directly to my research question. The data analysis methods, described fully in Chapter 3, take into account the importance of organising the resulting information into a logically structured account (Orna and Stephens, 1995). This not only gives the reader a clear description of the results, but also helps address the research question. The questionnaire responses are illustrated with examples taken from both the interviews and the questionnaires. An important aim of the analysis, in response to the concerns of American teacher educators about the value of study abroad identified in the literature, is to identify the professional impact on participants of the similarities and differences between education systems in their placement country and their home country. As Rudestam and Newton (2001) and Cohen et al. (2000) suggested might be the case, not all sixty-six respondents answered every question so the percentages in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 reflect the number who actually answered any particular question. Quotations from the questionnaires are identified by the letter Q, and those from the interviews by the letters IW. The location of student teaching and year of participation of the respondents are given, but the names
are pseudonyms. Woods (1999), indicating the importance of including respondents’ voices or views directly, also points out that it can be difficult to decide how much to include from what might be lengthy statements. While most of my direct quotations to illustrate the findings are short, in a few cases a longer quotation is used where I feel that it significantly enhances the explanation. However before describing the professional and personal impacts in detail I look at the respondents’ reasons for student teaching abroad.

b) The reasons given for choosing to student teach overseas
As suggested by both the participants in the pilot questionnaire and programme organisers, this was an introductory question to focus the minds of the respondents. However, as this question was retrospective, and in some cases concerned an experience some time in the past, due allowance has to be made for “rose tinted spectacles” (Tall, 1990). Nevertheless the answers make interesting reading (Figure 4, p.98).

Figure 4.1: Reasons why participants chose to student teach abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number (n=66)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A desire to do something completely different</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from a faculty member</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous travel abroad/away from home</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior knowledge of the place through friends or family</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A chance to broaden your opportunities for a future career</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enhance your professional preparation for teaching</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The desire to broaden opportunities for a future career and to enhance professional preparation for teaching was predictable, but it is interesting that a desire to do something completely different was such a major factor and might be seen as a wish to experience the spirit of adventure in doing something different from normal college life. I had also anticipated, in view of the discussion in the literature (Dolby, 2004; Bolton and Titus, 2006) about the popularity of “heritage seeking” that prior knowledge through friends or family might have influenced their
decisions more strongly. The very low number of students who were advised to study abroad by their college faculty members reflects the concerns of the latter about the value of study abroad in the preparation of teachers (Rodriguez, 2001; Neff, 2001; Mahon and Cushner, 2002).

c) The professional impacts of study abroad on participants
I thought it was important to try and establish how far college concerns about the value of study abroad reflected the reality, by asking participants about the core aspects raised in the literature, by members of my programme faculty and by teachers in the pilot study: firstly, how different were these aspects from schools in their home country and secondly, how difficult was it to adapt them to their subsequent jobs. Their responses are shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Aspects of student teaching abroad which participants considered significantly different from North American schools, and the ease or difficulty of adapting to these differences in their subsequent posts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects that participants were asked to consider</th>
<th>Number (N) and percentage (%) of participants who identified these aspects as being significantly different in their overseas school from schools in North America (N=55 unless stated otherwise)</th>
<th>Number (N) and percentage (%) of participants who identified these aspects as easy to adapt to their subsequent posts (N=51 unless stated otherwise)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning process</td>
<td>16 29%</td>
<td>42 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum content</td>
<td>24 44%</td>
<td>34 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson structure</td>
<td>12 22%</td>
<td>38 76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of school day</td>
<td>27 50%</td>
<td>35 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching styles</td>
<td>17 31%</td>
<td>38 76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management techniques</td>
<td>25 45%</td>
<td>32 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing student learning</td>
<td>24 44%</td>
<td>29 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature and amount of resources</td>
<td>31 56%</td>
<td>38 74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with special needs</td>
<td>20 38%</td>
<td>30 59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responses clearly show that although several aspects were seen by participants to be different, for example curriculum content (44%), resources (56%) and the structure of the school day (50%) the overall view was that all of these were relatively easy to adapt to on their return to American and Canadian schools. The school day was often described as being longer than in American schools but started later, often at 9 a.m. rather than 7.30 or 8 am. 45% of respondents identified that behaviour management techniques were found to be very different with students admonished in front of their peers or given a range of punishments without reference to their parents. Corporal punishment occurred in a few schools. Resources varied significantly from school to school and between countries. Participants talked of reduced internet access which had an impact on the resources available to them to aid in the planning and resourcing of their lessons. I now consider each of these aspects in greater detail and illustrate with the help of individual comments from both the questionnaires responses and the interviews.

(i) The planning process and curriculum content

Although many different approaches to both planning and curriculum content were identified in the overseas schools these were often described as enjoyable experiences, and of the fifty-five respondents who answered this particular question, 82% (planning) and 67% (curriculum) felt these differences presented no barriers to transferability into other systems. One student said what a unique and amazing experience it was to teach about aspects of the Second World War in Berlin itself; another found herself teaching about Vichy France to children whose descendants lived in France during the Second World War. She learned much about the need to handle such issues sensitively when planning lessons and talked of her broader understanding about events in the past and their impact on the local area still in the present day. Some respondents identified the chance to participate in fieldtrips and outdoor visits as being really important in their learning about wider educational opportunities. Jacob, placed in a geography department rated as good by Ofsted, was able to accompany and work with A-level students in a way that would not have been possible in the United States because of health and safety concerns well as a lack of tradition in doing fieldwork. He recalls:

… I remember most the field trips we took. I went along on one that went over a weekend including overnight stays in a rented-out hostel, walks along cliffs, ocean
beaches … Even thinking of all the hoops I would have to jump through to attempt such an ambitious trip here (US) boggles my mind … (Jacob, UK 2005, Q)

Having the chance to work with professionally different programmes was of key importance for some, in particular those who had worked in New Zealand with the Reading Recovery programme. Sadie commented on the advantage it gave her when being interviewed for a job in the US:

They loved the fact that I had taught in a country with a great reputation for literacy, in fact one of the highest literacy rates in the world. (Sadie, New Zealand 2003, Q)

Tara encountered a much higher regard from both teachers and parents for mathematics in the English national curriculum system, used in many schools around the world, than in American schools; but she felt that it put both the teachers and students under a lot of pressure to ensure that the students do well in the tests:

There are also just certain words or phrases that are used in the British system of mathematics that I learned differently. The mathematics is the same in many senses, but the method of solving something, or the words used to describe the mathematical concept, are different. This took a little getting used to but again, I feel very fortunate to have seen this different system. (Tara, Prague 2004, Q)

Noah felt that the experience made him a more resourceful educator. He often felt a lone voice in his field (drama) in American schools, where he not only had to teach the subject but felt he also had to constantly be an advocate for its benefits to education. He continued:

I went to work in a country [UK] where the dramatic arts are a valued part of the curriculum. I got to see the impact this can have on students first hand. The information I obtained while working in this environment helps me be an advocate for an arts curriculum in the United States. Working under UK standards I also obtained the information to have conversations about the arts in an academic context. This “fire power” is helpful when relating the arts to academic standards in the United States. (Noah, UK 2006, Q)

In Korea, Mary realised that she had never experienced the lack of cohesion in pupils’ previous knowledge that she encountered in her placement school. Every pupil in her classroom came from a completely different place in the world and few shared the same experiences; this made it
difficult to find a common baseline in their prior knowledge. She describes herself fully challenged to create starting points for lessons that would be meaningful to all the youngsters:

When teaching lessons I took into account what my students may or may not already know. I constantly reminded myself that my students have come from all corners of the globe. Simply referring to seasons was a challenging task because several of the students have never before been exposed to winter, ice, snow or the freezing cold. These were totally alien concepts to them. (Mary, Korea 2004, Q)

The student teachers appeared to relish the interesting changes they encountered in the curriculum in their host countries and made the most of the opportunities offered to them during their stay. Whilst recognising that differences existed between the curriculum in their host country and that of America or Canada, the majority of participants did not see much difficulty in transposing their new found skills and knowledge to their subsequent teaching posts in their home country.

(ii) The structure of lessons and the school day

Twenty-seven (39%) of the respondents reported the format and length of the school day as being significantly different to those in the United States. The student teachers went into total immersion early on in their placement, so even in the first few weeks their workload was quite heavy, and many were surprised by the amount of hard work they had to put in just to maintain each day in school:

I learnt how much work it takes to be a good teacher. Lessons need to be thoroughly planned out ahead of time to be successful. Plus, teaching itself can be exhausting. It requires doing multiple things simultaneously. For example, at any given time, a teacher might be writing on the chalkboard, monitoring each student, and anticipating the next question the students might have. Teaching also requires a lot of work, such as grading, that is done outside of class time. I knew teaching would be a lot of work, but I did not expect this much. (Jill, Spain 2004, Q)

Phil (New Zealand 1996, IW) raised an interesting difference between his placement school and schools in the US, which was the New Zealand tradition of students and staff gathering together in assembly. He was impressed by how this made the school feel more like a true community and he was able to introduce the idea of a weekly assembly at the first school he worked in Minneapolis on his return from student teaching.
Many student teachers spoke of the need to work hard and how they often felt challenged to cope with longer days in school. However for many of them this overseas placement was the first major extended one they had experienced in a school during their training and it is this which may have given rise to comments about the impact of the work load. This situation may well one they would have also experienced in similar continuous placement within their home country.

(iii) The range of teaching styles

All participants commented on the range of professional skills they acquired during their placements through:

- learning how to teach different curriculum content;
- working with pupils perceived to have behavioural issues;
- coping with a lack of, or very different types of, resources;
- improving their own subject knowledge and language skills or subject matter.

Tanya’s comment on her placement was typical of many:

Teaching in England taught me more about professional skills of a teacher in a different manner than I would have learned from these lessons in the United States … I had to adapt to a different school schedule, system, curriculum, and more different groups of students than I had ever taught before. Teaching at my school taught me to think on my feet more than I have ever had to do before. I had to learn to be an actress, which is a skill that you need no matter where you are in the classroom. So many things were new to me that I had to learn a great deal very quickly. (Tanya, UK 2001, Q)

Only three participants indicated they came from ethnic minority cultures themselves, but two of those felt that the overseas placements had been of immense value to them in learning new techniques and a range of teaching styles to suit their particular situations. Sharon, who was to become an aboriginal education consultant in a Canadian province, commented:

I left NZ with more of a world view and was able to incorporate that mindset into my classroom in a northern Aboriginal community – the bond that was already there between the Maori and myself as an Aboriginal person!!! (Sharon, New Zealand 2002, Q)
Kat, who became a fourth grade teacher in a remote Yup’ik Eskimo village in south west Alaska, working with pupils who all spoke both English and Yup’ik, commented on her teaching practice by saying:

I was very lucky to have the opportunity to (student) teach with some very strong women, and that helped me to move beyond wanting to just be the kids’ friend and to becoming a teacher. It has benefited me greatly now that I teach in a community that has only been speaking English for about 50 years, being able to dive into a new culture and fully experience life in it. (Kat, UK 2004, Q)

Josie felt that the opportunity to teach abroad was always going to expand a participant’s outlook on education, especially once they returned home. She felt that her own personal teaching style was particularly enhanced by ‘a fresh perspective and a new outlook on my particular area of teaching that helped me to bring innovative ideas to my first school that hired me...’ (Josie, Australia 2004, IW)

Participants valued the opportunity to see and experience a range of different teaching styles in their overseas placement which often contrasted with those they had previously encountered but they also appreciated how this also enabled them to develop their own style which they could carry forward into their teaching careers.

(iv) Classroom and behaviour management
Twenty-five (45%) of the respondents regarded as quite significant the differences between behaviour management techniques in their home country and their host school: different expectations within and outside the classroom, the impact of school uniforms and pupils’ different national characteristics, some being loud and boisterous in class. Many talked of the overall struggle in finding the right balance between all the factors – time, classroom management, rapport with pupils, effective instruction, role modelling, behaviour management, as well as learning to be assertive and supportive when needed. While the participants recognised that these were universal aspects about learning to teach, they described that adding these to the idea of being in a foreign country and coping with a totally different system of education as well as language differences, represented a significant challenge for them.
Respondents noticed less contact with the parents than would have been the norm in the USA or Canada at the same stage of children’s development and commented that schools tended to work through a list of small punishments, such as docking free time or writing lines, before making contact with the family to discuss behavioural issues. Carol was struck by the impact of discipline in her Irish school:

The biggest difference I noticed were the disciplinary actions taking place in the schools. At first I thought, because I was placed at an all boys secondary school where they try to model these boys into fine young gentlemen, that was why they were so strict on enforcing respect and manners. I then started to teach at the primary school where it was an all girls schools starting with the second class. I noticed that it was just as strict and I could then confirm that this strict style of discipline is started at an early age of only five years old. (Carol, Ireland 2005, Q)

However thirty-two respondents felt that the differences they encountered would not really matter on their return home as they felt confident enough to adapt and shape their methods to any situation they might encounter. Watching what other teachers did, and given time and support to experiment with the tactics they had learnt, they were able to identify what worked for them and what didn’t. Melissa relished the challenge:

I was excited to move forward into a new school environment and try things out in a new atmosphere. I knew that a lot of the things that worked here won’t necessarily work in another school (back home) and I was looking forward to finding new methods that would work as well. (Melissa, Ireland 2002, Q)

Classroom management varies considerably from country to country and culture to culture, and it was often hard for the student teachers to reconcile the methods of classroom management advocated during their college courses with the very different – and sometimes diametrically opposed – methods they encountered overseas. Malena described the situation in her school:

I really realized how Eurocentric my teaching was … and that was all I knew or all I was taught in my education program! There were so many things that the school did, that I was told were bad or never to do – for example we read Alfi Kohn’s Punished by Rewards but the teachers in Lima gave stickers for everything! They also gave a lot of quizzes and tests for 3rd grade, which I learned to do more on long-term projects. I was reading Lisa Delpit’s Other People’s Children at the time and it helped me put my frustrations about differences in teaching styles and beliefs into perspective. (Malena, Peru 2005, Q)
Jeremy (UK 2002, Q) criticised his class teachers for their insistence that he followed their established techniques for class management throughout his own placement; he felt they were so “hung up on discipline” that he was denied any opportunity to practise his own classroom management ideas at any point during his time there. Classroom management was a source of significant concern for many of the student teachers, as few had much experience of working with whole classes on their own for any length of time. Tina described that particular challenge:

When I came to Spain and I met the children in the school I was so worried that they were going to be unbelievably difficult to manage. These children were so loud and badly behaved it filled me with anxiety to think of being in charge of keeping their attention. Amazingly, I could and did and I am so happy for the opportunity to be with a class that I thought was difficult because it allowed me to work on an area that I was very unsure of in myself. (Tina, Spain 2003, Q)

Tim worked in a school which had both American and British sections running parallel, each following their respective country’s curriculum and ways of organising their pupils. For example pupils in the British school section wore school uniform whilst the American pupils did not. Tim was placed in the British section to ensure he had a greater international experience by teaching through a different curriculum from the one he was used to in the United States. He commented on the impact of school uniform and the importance of teacher expectations in his school section:

Children at the British school (section) seem to be much better behaved than children in the (American) elementary or middle school (section). The uniform could be a factor. Having school uniforms does eliminate social stratification based on socio-economic status, which is a major difficulty in American public schools. I think it has more to do with the expectations from the teachers. Teachers in the British section (in Seoul) have different expectations on behavior and every teacher and administrator there supports these common expectations. In the US, I have seen a tendency for teachers to take care of their own class and not bother themselves with the behavior of other students. (Tim, Seoul 2004, Q)

Classroom behaviour management was seen as a major challenge for the student teachers but in most cases they were able to work with the existing structures in the host schools to help them achieve a good level of skill in managing classes. It was frustrating for some teachers to either be unable to try out management techniques they had previously learned about or have to impose
ways of dealing with challenging behaviour which they considered inappropriate. For most of the students there was a growing recognition that managing classroom behaviour was possibly one of the most difficult aspects of learning how to teach.

(v) Assessing student learning
Interesting comparisons arose in the area of assessing school students. Twenty-four (44%) of the respondents indicated this was an area of significant difference between the countries, but twenty-nine (57%) felt that the assessment system they had worked with during their placement would allow them to adapt relatively easily to assessing students in their home schools. However, they also talked of the complexity and frequency of assessing pupils at both primary and secondary levels and the varying systems which were used in schools. End of year examinations or timed tests were new to many of them, who in previous student teaching placements had become accustomed to mainly using formative assessments. Josh struggled to explain the system he had to use:

The letter grade structure is the same, but they also had “effort grade” so someone who got an A and obviously worked hard at it would get an A4 or A5 (I think), but someone who coasted to an A, scored well but didn’t put out full effort might get A1 or A2. (Josh, UK 2003, Q)

David (UK 2006, Q) thought he had missed out on working with American assessment techniques and learning how to deal with standardised testing. However, he was very much of the opinion that he could master these aspects quickly; they were not an issue for him nor a good reason not to do overseas student teaching. Sarah actually thought that her experience of working with the New Zealand curriculum and assessment procedures gave her an advantage when she talked about her teaching on her return home:

I came into my profession knowing how to adapt to a different curriculum and manner of assessment – a valuable tool as Minnesota soon changed from the Profiles of Learning to State Standards. (Sarah, New Zealand 2000, Q)

Assessing pupils to identify achievement and progress has been in continuous development for a long time and when many of the students were placed overseas, countries using the English
examination systems were rather more advanced in implementing a more formal structure for assessment than for example the United States. Despite the complexity of some of the methods they had encountered in their host schools, most student teachers felt that they had benefited by having this experience which was useful in helping them work with the standardised tests which were rapidly being introduced across the United States at both school and university levels.

(vi) Resources
Many respondents raised the issue of resourcing. For some it was a matter of scarce computer technology, as they hoped to find support on the internet for inspiration and lesson ideas; computer access varied considerably from country to country. Some respondents found that in Ireland their only internet access was in a public library, it was only rarely available in their host homes or rented flats. This was one factor which changed as computers became more widely available: respondents who completed their student teaching more recently felt that this was less of a problem. At the opposite end of the resource spectrum, student teachers placed in St Lucia and Cameroon reported a scarcity of such basic classroom commodities as paper, pencils and board markers. Sue commented:

I brought a lot of supplies with me to share, and the children were thrilled, but it wasn’t enough. I am now ever grateful for the resources at my fingertips. (Sue, South Africa 2005, IW)

This was confirmed by Tilly who describes her classroom thus:

There is no teacher’s desk, no bulletin boards, just simply the students beat up desks and the chalk board … the bathrooms at the school, wait… there are no bathrooms because there is no running water … the only things I have to work with are chalk, my maps and most importantly, my imagination. (Tilly, Cameroon 2004, IW)

The challenge of finding resources was quite an issue for some students. In the small amount of student teaching they had experienced before embarking on their final practice many participants had tended to rely on accessing ideas and materials on the internet and in many of the host countries where internet access was either restricted or expensive they had to develop a range of teaching strategies and resources which were more locally based and personally constructed.
Working with pupils with learning needs and ESL

Thirty (59%) of the fifty-one respondents indicated that in this area they might experience difficulty adapting in their subsequent employment. This was mainly because the USA tends to employ more specialist support teachers, whereas in the placement schools class teachers were often expected to work directly with such pupils themselves. Some respondents reported a number of different ways of providing support for learners in their placement schools, but these varied considerably from location to location, in many cases leading to a lack of both individual support and specialised equipment. Class or subject teachers who lacked appropriate expertise were sometimes expected to provide learning support for students with a variety of needs. However some respondents described a more positive picture as they encountered specialist learning needs co-ordinators in their placement schools who advised teachers on how to adapt their lessons to be more inclusive. Respondents also reported difficulties in distinguishing a lack of competency in English as a second language from another underlying learning need, which could actually be masked by the level of linguistic competence. Their eyes were also opened to the importance of the home environment and how this impacted on the student’s school performance; Sean described his experiences:

It has also been a challenge to accept that students from lower attainment (educational) backgrounds can’t be expected to excel academically. This doesn’t absolve the teacher from maintaining excellent teaching, but it does put achievement in perspective. When I first came to the school I saw what ramshackle conditions students had to learn in, but I had no idea how difficult their home lives were. I had assumed that low achievement at school was the result of outdated teaching methods and paltry resources. Now I understand that the methods practised there aren’t off the mark, even if traditional, and that providing students with the stable environment many are lacking at home is a priority of many of its teachers. (Sean, Ireland 2005, Q)

This quote from Sean is very concerning. The pupils at his placement school lived in a socially and economically deprived area and the school tried to provide a stable and supportive environment to both the pupils and their parents. However the view held by many teachers appeared to be that these pupils would rarely achieve well academically and that the socio-economic status of the area was the principal reason for this. Sean obviously did not hold this view prior to commencing his overseas placement and the worrying outcome is that he appears
to accept that a lack of challenging teaching and a poor school environment are not major factors responsible for failing to motivate young people to raise their knowledge, skills level and above all, their expectations.

Fifty-one (77%) of the sixty-six respondents identified as a professional highlight the chance to work in a culturally diverse society in which many of the pupils and staff were from a variety of countries. Many classes taught by the student teachers included a significant number of students from a different culture or country, and they felt this was a really good opportunity to work with ESL students in a very practical, natural setting, as Annie illustrates:

> There are many immigrant students in schools at home (USA) that will be at various stages of English Language Acquisition (ELA). My (student) teaching experience in Costa Rica, as a foreigner and as a Spanish language learner, has provided me a deep well of understanding from which I will be able to draw from and better serve all of my future ELL [English language learner] students. (Annie, Costa Rica 2005, IW)

Erin (Spain 2005, Q) talked about how becoming fluent in Spanish was significant in helping her gain her post in a very multi-cultural school in the United States. The hiring principal viewed her overseas placement as different and interesting, and was also very impressed that she could speak Spanish so well. Several student teachers commented on how it felt to be in the minority in understanding the local language, and this had a powerful impact on how they prepared lesson materials and worked with the ESL students they encountered both in the host school and in their future jobs. Kirsty commented on working with students in another language:

> My placement marked a huge shift in my life – marked also by my graduation from college and entrance into the professional world. My perspective changed greatly, I was able to attach real people and emotions with global issues and politics I had only read about before. Upon my return this understanding greatly increased my empathy towards the immigrant and Hispanic community in my own city, a community with which (thanks partially to my new language skills) I am now very involved. (Kirsty, Costa Rica 2007, IW)

**(viii) The professional challenges experienced in student teaching overseas**

Faith (Australia 2001, Q) had found her previous semester in college in the United States to be a very stressful and challenging one for her both personally and for academic reasons. She was
pleased to find that her student teaching placement in Australia was a far less stressful experience; not only was she able to enjoy it but it also allowed her to grow professionally as a teacher.

Lindsay (New Zealand 2003, Q) saw the experience in a similar light. During her college years she had been bored with her internships in local schools, and argued that learning to adapt to diverse cultures and education systems in an overseas student teaching placement gave her career a huge advantage, as well as presenting her with a stronger personal challenge.

These views are in contrast to others who found the overseas placement to be more challenging than to remain in the United States. Although forty-seven of the respondents already had some experience of classroom teaching during their college courses, though this varied in both scope and duration, it did not always prepare them for the extent of the experience they would have through the challenge of teaching overseas. Michelle reported that:

> Before student teaching I felt that I had a sufficient amount of teaching experience and going to the Czech Republic would only add a bit more to my résumé, but I did not expect it to alter my life. This assignment allowed me to comprehend another country’s view of education and widen my perspective on the attitudes toward Americans. (Michelle, Prague 2006, Q)

Erica concurs – being pushed in at the deep end, though frightening at first, was a very rewarding experience:

> It showed me that the “American way” isn’t the only way! The skills I learned while teaching abroad helped me reorganize my teaching philosophy and provided me with more in-front-of-class experience than any of my undergraduate classmates had at the time. (Erica, Ireland 2004, Q)

Neil reflected on the comparisons he made as a result of experiencing two different systems:

> I think I learned more about the US educational system by experiencing an entirely different system than I would have by student teaching in the States. Being able to compare and contrast two different systems allows you to really think critically about the best ways to enhance learning for your students. (Neil, New Zealand 2003, Q)
Many had to rethink their previous experience of lesson planning and ways of interacting with pupils and teachers, and often expressed frustration at the need to conform to existing structures and strategies in their host schools. Nick explained this further:

I have had a lot of experience (during student teaching) with differentiated instruction and doing things in ways that I wouldn’t have normally thought of. As for discipline, I have had to make sure that my lessons fit within certain designated time periods and fit with the school’s curricular style. This has put some restraints on me, which while frustrating at times, forced me to really think about my lessons and what was important to fit into them. It’s been good for me to have a lot of structure to my days, even if it might not be the same back home. It is always good to be disciplined and organized. (Nick, UK 2006, Q)

Helen’s (Italy 2002, Q) subject area is music, and she reports that music teaching overseas was very different from music teaching in the United States. She felt that she missed out on subject-specific curriculum and experience with marching bands, and on her return home she had to rapidly learn a significant amount about organisation of multi-age programming, working with new resources, a different curriculum and working with bands. She coped, but the differences proved too significant for some such as Liz, another music student, who was not able to successfully complete her placement overseas:

Part of the reason is that student teaching doesn’t fully prepare you for teaching in the “real world”. In Germany, they didn’t rehearse during the day, they don’t have pep-fests or sporting events to play at, they don’t have marching bands, and they don’t have solo and ensemble contests. Their curriculum is entirely different! (Liz, Germany 2002, Q)

Her “real world” was the United States, where bands, cheer leaders and music at sporting events are part of the daytime school curriculum. However, her failed overseas placement ultimately enabled her to succeed: she took eighteen months off, working full-time in a different profession, but this only made her realize that what she really wanted to do was to go back to school and to teach. She further reflects that:

… had I not failed, nothing that followed, especially my student teaching experience in Minnesota, would have happened. I learned and gained so much through failing, that it has made me a better and stronger person, and I’m quite sure, a better educator.
She did however recommend that for music students in particular it would be more beneficial to study abroad in general terms rather than complete their student teaching abroad as both the subject content and organisation of the curriculum were so different. John also cut short his placement, by mutual agreement between himself and his supervisor. His questionnaire identified a number of issues that he felt had contributed to his failure amongst which he identified ‘the lack of communication, lack of professionalism, and lack of desire to help improve the young generation of teachers’ (John, Prague, 2004, Q). John did not settle well into his placement and did not realise until too late that the amount of work needed to successfully student teach was significant and perhaps provided an even greater workload than if he had remained in the United States. He felt that his class teacher in particular failed to help him develop in the classroom and he himself failed to understand the need to plan his own lessons, provide resources and assess the pupils’ progress. It became a downward spiral of under achievement which resulted in his early return home.

Heidi (Thailand 2004, Q) found the overseas placement more challenging, with less support, than might have been the case at home; however, she felt the experience had given an extra edge of confidence to her teaching. Some respondents found adapting to a school with a well established staff quite daunting; learning the politics of school life was a major challenge in itself. Erin went into some detail about this:

I think it has affected the way I interact with co-workers. The department in which I worked was under a lot of stress and there was a lot of behind the scenes talk. I learned about who to trust and what should and shouldn’t be discussed in a professional setting (staff meeting). While at the time it was discouraging, it was one of the best lessons I could ever learn. (Erin, UK 2004, Q)

Clearly Erin coped with the challenges well, to the extent that she was offered a post in the modern languages department for the following year. Other respondents described the cultural complexities of working with teachers from other nationalities; for instance, they found British humour perplexing, and were surprised that when class teachers shouted at, or seemed to insult, pupils, it did not appear to affect the pupils in the negative way the student teachers anticipated it might.
Sometimes the student teaching overseas experience resulted in a decision to leave the profession. After successfully completing her student teaching in Australia, Kathy decided not to teach when she returned home. She felt dissatisfied with the American system as a whole, citing the impact of politics on education both at both the national and state level, prescription of the curriculum topics and the growing strength of standardised tests. She explains this further:

If I could transplant the Aussie school system into the US (a year-round school year) I would consider teaching again. Teaching in Australia showed me some negatives in the US system that made me not want to be a part of it ... now. Who knows what may happen in the future. (Kathy, Australia 2003, Q)

Kathy completed her placement in 2003 and since then the prescriptive curriculum, together with rise in importance of standardised tests both at school and university levels have continued to develop across the world including Australia.

In total contrast, however, Brad was unimpressed with the system he student taught in; for him the student teaching experience affirmed that:

… the American public educational system is stronger and more impressive than media or politics would have people believe. (Brad, UK 2001, Q)

Brad student taught history in a secondary school in the UK and found that teaching his subject at the General Certificate of Secondary Education level (GCSE) was restricting and often formulaic in terms of how he had to teach each topic. Constant examination practice was a feature of the department’s way of assessing progress of pupils as it was seen as important to ensure that all pupils sitting the examination achieved a pass. Brad’s previous experience of student teaching in the United States was limited and he lacked awareness of the growing impact of assessment and the implementation of standardised testing which was already appearing in American schools. He felt that the system in place in the UK provided a rather closed approach to teaching and that teachers he encountered were dissatisfied with teaching in a system which places such high emphasis particularly on assessment and achievement in terms of examination success. For him the American system had a more open curriculum where the grip of testing and examinations had not yet tightened round schools in the same way at that time.
(ix) The impact of an overseas placement on job applications

An important perceived professional benefit of student teaching abroad was that students’ profiles would stand out when applying for teaching posts in the United States (Jill, Spain 2004, Q). Eleven respondents felt overseas experience helped them successfully answer some interview questions (Simon, Australia 1998, IW) and actually secured them a job (John, New Zealand 1998, IW; Mara, New Zealand 2003, Q). Many felt their time spent overseas student teaching was also an advantage when they began teaching, because it had provided them with a wider range of experience teaching pupils of varying abilities and cultural backgrounds (Jenny, Panama 2004, Q; Tilly, Cameroon 2004, IW; Sue, South Africa 2005, IW). However several students were concerned that they might have missed the opportunity to make the connections often vital to securing a teaching post. Mara (New Zealand 2003, Q) talked about the lack of being in a local network and was worried no one would personally know about her abilities in teaching. While she had no regrets about completing her student teaching abroad, she felt that the experience was not for weak students who were not well prepared or motivated to go overseas: not only might they lack confidence to work in schools in the United States on their return, but they would also be competing for jobs in a highly competitive and dwindling market. Kirsty shared her concerns:

Since I was overseas until the middle of June I had already missed out on prime job searching opportunities and had no opportunity to apply for teaching jobs or get in for interviews. I also missed out on teaching in an elementary school and a middle school even though my license is K-12 and I was actually required to teach at all levels in my home country. (Kirsty, Costa Rica 2006, IW)

On balance, Kirsty thought the benefits of teaching overseas outweighed the disadvantages, particularly as the interviewing principals she encountered were impressed by her experiences. However this was not always the case. Rose discovered that not everyone appreciated her experiences overseas; for her, study abroad was more important to her personal development than to her career:

Few principals that I was interviewed by seemed to take an interest in my student teaching experience which was disappointing. I usually got an “Oh, that’s neat” and then they would move on the next question. Many people don’t seem very interested in hearing about my student teaching experience but then again, it has been three years (since completion). It has not given me an extra edge on getting a teaching position but I think it looks great on my résumé! (Rose, Germany 2003, Q)
On balance, Jim considered his overseas experience had a positive effect on his job prospects:

I believe it helped me stand out from a pool of applicants. I was actually contacted by my school as they had a late quit during the summer. They wanted someone with a diverse background, and while I am not a “diverse” demographic myself, my file did show immersion in another culture and that was enough to whet their appetites. Still there in my 5th year (Jim, UK 2002, Q).

The impact of student teaching overseas on job applications is very varied and often unpredictable to gauge as the comments from the participants indicate. There will always principals of schools who will see the wider benefits of engaging with a teaching practice overseas and others who have concerns about the efficacy of such students being able to work effectively in an American or Canadian school. This all has to be balanced alongside the issues of availability of posts in the United States and the cutbacks in employment of teachers which is a periodic response to the economic situation both nationally and stateside.

d) The personal impact of study abroad on participants

Before their overseas placement, participants’ experience in schools anywhere was often limited. Many had only completed a very small amount of teaching practice and some none at all. They experienced twin challenges: that of a new school setting in a very different location, away from friends and family; and a different curriculum and methodology. Megan articulates this well:

Remembering back to when I first arrived, I was very overwhelmed. I questioned my ability to adapt to the new environment and expectations. Looking back now I am very pleased with the progress I have made in my professional development. (Megan, Italy 2006, Q)

As a result of student teaching overseas, fifty (77%) of the sixty-six questionnaire respondents described themselves as more flexible, more confident and more open to change, all characteristics which they viewed as important in the teaching world. Stacey (Russia 2005, Q) said surviving the need to communicate without the necessary language skills gave her a high level of independence. Bob also reflected on the ways he had changed:

I began to look at the world from a different lens. I began to notice more confidence in myself in the way I carried myself in the classroom. It allowed me to understand that
mistakes are mistakes, and that if you seclude yourself to your own lens then you begin to miss out on what the world has to offer. (Bob, New Zealand 2003, Q)

Jill echoed these views:

It gave me something new as [being] an adult on your own, is life changing. I believe that teaching abroad helped to give me confidence outside of the classroom as well as within. Although I loved teaching in a new culture I think that what I got most out of my [student teaching] was the confidence to travel and meet new people on my own. (Jill, Spain 2004, Q)

About half the respondents talked about the opportunity to view their home country from an outsider’s perspective, to experience what it is like to be a part of a different culture and to recognise what it is like to be “different” from everybody else, for example as an American abroad (Mary, Thailand 2005, Q; Annette, Australia 2005, Q). This enabled them to develop a high degree of empathy towards their future students, who might also be “different” in some way (David, Australia 2004, Q). A year after her return home, Emily (Peru 2005, Q) went back to visit her placement school and her host family in Lima, and describes how they became real and lasting friends. Tilly also spoke of the friendships she made during her student teaching, which was one of the most challenging, but possibly also rewarding, times of her life. She felt that the experience had given her a greater insight into how other people in the world live, which still influences the way she teaches:

If we are to prepare the children we teach to become global citizens and possess a respect for all people and cultures, it is necessary to really understand these other populations. (Tilly, Cameroon 2004, IW)

The opportunity to immerse themselves in a totally different culture was an important aspect of their placement for many respondents. Sally (South Africa 2003, Q) talked of teaching wonderful children from many backgrounds, making lifelong friends, and travelling in a beautiful country with such varied landscapes. She summed up her experience as “one I will treasure forever!” Experiencing Panama from a Panamanian viewpoint rather than as a tourist was Sadie’s high point:

Living the daily routines ... eating their food, shopping in their malls, dancing to their music, traveling on the Panama Canal, exploring with nationals in their home areas ... everything was exhilarating! (Sadie, Panama 2004, Q)
Stella described the lasting impression differences in cultural understanding made on her. Her hosts tended to assume that she understood, or even held, the same cultural values, and simple everyday tasks could open up huge chasms of misunderstanding:

An example of this occurred immediately after our arrival. We went to the grocery store with one of the teachers. At the checkout line we paid for our groceries and she paid for the drink she wanted. A couple of months later we found out that she was offended by our not offering to pay for her drink and thus determined that we may not be compatible with the rest of the staff. I was astounded at first until I came to understand the importance held on interpersonal relationships especially with respect to people of higher status. According to the culture, we should have offered to pay for her drink for two apparent reasons. First, she was a friend who took her time to help us. Second, she was our supervisor in a culture that emphasizes formality where highly prescriptive rules govern interactions. Through this interaction I came to realize the importance of even the simplest of inferences that may cause a misunderstanding between cultures. (Stella, Cairo 2003, Q)

e) Being a foreigner overseas

A topic which elicited much comment and reflection was the way their host countries viewed the student teachers’ own nationality. Some found they were simply perceived as stereotypical Americans, living the “standard” American way of life. It was an interesting realisation for Jim:

Many of my students had not seen an American before. I had to clarify to them that we all are not like myself! I asked my students one day where they would love to go to and the majority of them said that they would go to LA or Hollywood. I was shocked to hear that, but then told them about my time spent in LA versus Europe and New Zealand. (Jim, New Zealand 2005 Q)

Other students had their eyes opened to overseas attitudes to the USA and Americans:

I learned a lot about how people from other countries view Americans, and it is not all positive and happy as most of America would like to believe. Many people thought I was from Canada (with the strong MN accent I guess!!) but when they would find out I was from the US they would say something like “No way, you’re way too nice to be an American” or something along those lines. It helped me to open my eyes about our country and the way we are very privileged compared to others, and it also made me think about how I personally act and should be acting. (Sandra, Australia 2005, Q)

Molly offered these thoughtful reflections on her homeland:
I determined that the USA is quite materialistic and I wasn’t proud of some of the things that we stand for. I also decided that we are too uptight and almost too driven that we forget to stop and just enjoy what we have and where we are in life. The Australian culture was much more carefree than our culture and I appreciated that. (Molly, Australia 2005, Q)

Some students were shocked to find that they were judged on the politics and decisions of their government, rather than their individual behaviour. They also realised that in some countries more young people tend to engage in political debate than in the United States and that people in their host country were often well informed about American politics. Annie wrote at length about her experience of this during her time in the Czech Republic:

The struggle with my American-ness presented itself when I lived and travelled in Europe two years ago. This was my paranoia and has proven to be one of the most challenging aspects of settling in for me, more so even than loneliness or culture shock. The problem is not my love or dislike for my home country. Rather, it is the anti-American sentiment I (irrationally?) assume consumes the world, especially considering American action and foreign policy in the past few years. While I am getting much more comfortable with my American English voice, I remember feeling so vulnerable and paranoid when my roommate would initiate conversation with me in public. People are going to know that we are from the States! But I am neither my government nor my government’s policies, and I do not want to be associated with the negativity surrounding them. The moment I open my mouth I am either loved or hated; it seems there is little neutrality concerning my background. Alas, this has been hard for me and it proved to be the biggest barrier to adjustment. (Annie, Czech Republic 2005, Q)

Being a foreigner in their host country was not a situation that many of the student teachers had considered before travelling. The image of America abroad was, sometimes a stereotypical one much of which would have been gained from television, films and the internet. However they were surprised to find themselves in a situation where people know a significant amount about American politics often more than they knew themselves. At the time of the placements the United States had been involved in protracted conflict in the Middle East and Afghanistan over a number of years and much was known about this by people overseas. The student teachers occasionally found themselves being held to account for political decisions made by their government or having to explain American foreign policy. Some indicated they learned more about their own country by being overseas that they had ever done whilst a resident there.
4.6 The main findings from my research

By reading and interrogating the data generated by the online questionnaires and the interviews, as described more fully in Chapter 3, I was able to create the following summary of the responses.

a) Positive professional effects

An important perceived benefit of an overseas student teaching placement was the opportunity it gave participants to observe and work in other educational systems, often very different from their own. Participants felt this significantly enhanced and extended their professional experience. There was also a clear recognition that many of the challenges they faced in schools, such as classroom management, assessment of attainment, developing appropriate lessons and teaching students from different ethnicities, were not unique to any particular national educational system but common to teachers all over the world. Participants provided evidence that experiencing a wide range of curricula, teaching methods and systems often made them more flexible, and able to respond to a variety of different classroom and school situations in their later careers.

All sixty-six questionnaire respondents believed that the experience of working with a diverse range of learners, including English Second Language (ESL) learners, equipped them with not only the necessary specific skills and knowledge but also the professional confidence to teach in multi-cultural classrooms on their return home. Participants who found themselves as an ethnic minority group in their placement location indicated that this heightened their understanding of, and empathy for, minority groups in their subsequent teaching posts.

Many of the student teachers recognised that some of the professional aspects of teaching abroad would be quite different from those they had been used to in the United States, but the majority of participants felt that transferring their newfound skills and expertise to schools back home would not present a problem. The ability to reflect on practice, both during their placement and in their subsequent teaching posts, strengthened the participants’ perception of what teaching required of them: this made the transition to teaching in the home country much easier. Some
participants also found that hiring principals were impressed by a candidate’s experience of student teaching overseas.

b) Negative professional effects
The inclusion of religious education, physical education and music in mainstream primary schools abroad was a challenge for some participants; there was an expectation that all teachers would teach these subjects, whereas in their home country they were taught by specialists. In secondary schools, some subject areas did not always translate easily into good student teaching practice experiences: music was an example where both the activities and the teaching methods were very different, and the student teachers sometimes found it difficult to adapt. In both primary and secondary sectors, student teachers felt that the pressure of external tests and examinations were a major constraint on developing classroom learning. Some of the evidence suggests that some student teachers found the teaching practice challenging in terms of work load and time needed to fulfil the needs of preparation and follow up. Other participants mentioned that school principals in the United States had expressed concerns that student teaching overseas might not prepare teachers to teach to the state standards and so decided not to risk appointing them.

c) Positive personal effects
Student teaching abroad was viewed by almost all the participants as an opportunity to do something different with their lives, fulfil dreams and develop personal strengths. It developed skills and qualities which helped them become confident, mature, articulate and resourceful teachers, able to cope with adversity, frustration and a range of other challenges in both their overseas placements and subsequent teaching posts. It also opened their eyes to the reality of living in another country, rather than being merely a visitor, with the result that they felt welcomed by and accepted into the community in which they were working. Some students improved their foreign language skills, which also helped their integration into the local community. Many participants made lifelong friends during their placements, continuing to visit them long after their return home.
d) Negative personal effects
Some participants experienced difficulties with language differences, living conditions and cultural misunderstandings, and for a few students the challenge of adapting to such a very different environment, in both the teaching situation and their daily lives, resulted in bouts of homesickness and high levels of frustration. Being outside the United States, and seen as representatives of their country and its political order rather than as individuals, was also a challenging experience. For some an unforeseen consequence of their participation was that they found it difficult to re-integrate back home; friends and family found it difficult to understand or empathise with their experiences and were often not open to hearing about them in any detail.

4.7 Conclusion
In this chapter I presented and analysed the results of both the questionnaire survey and the interviews. In the first part I presented the data, illustrated by firsthand accounts which aim to give what Elbow (1998) describes as “authenticity, sincerity and authority” (p.288) to the findings. In the second part I identified the key findings of my research. Detailed examination of reports about specific elements of classroom practice provide evidence of how respondents coped with the challenges they faced in their placement schools. The picture is one of a growing sense of professionalism as the students progressed through their placement and return home to finish their degree and become qualified teachers. There is also evidence of returning students being able to cope well in their subsequent jobs, and many felt that their time overseas was good preparation for their future careers. Some described significant gains in their personal development and felt they had achieved high levels of flexibility in dealing with a wide range of situations both in and out of the classroom. The placements however were not without their challenges and some student teachers reported that homesickness and the sheer difference of being abroad had a negative impact on their lives, while in some subject areas significant curricular differences generated additional difficulties for some of the participants. In the next chapter I consider my findings in much greater detail in the light of both my original research question and the core issues which emerged from the literature.
Chapter 5 Discussion of the research findings

5.1 Purpose and structure of the discussion chapter
Wellington et al. (2005) define the purpose of a discussion chapter as being to describe and discuss the research findings with reference to how understanding of them has been extended and deepened, in particular by the literature review and subsequent reflection on the data. In this chapter I remind the reader of the background to my research, why I felt it an important topic to investigate and the research question which emerged. I summarise the main issues which emerged from the literature review and discuss the research findings in the light of previous research, looking at the impact of an overseas placement on student teachers, both professionally and personally. I describe how my findings confirm or challenge previous research and look more closely at the concerns identified by teacher educators about student teaching abroad. I identify the new contribution my study makes to the research in this area and finally I suggest how this research might help in the future preparation of teachers.

5.2 The background to my research and research questions
As European Manager for an American overseas student teaching programme I work with the increasing number of student teachers, mainly from the United States, who opt to complete their student teaching in a variety of locations abroad. Previous student evaluations of their experiences have been limited in scope and often anecdotal in nature, so I felt the time was right to carry out more detailed, structured research into the perspectives which emerged on the professional and personal development of a student teacher who had completed an overseas teaching practice. After critically examining and reflecting on the research literature I decided on a two-part research question which examined how participation in an overseas student teaching placement affected student teachers’ a) professional and b) personal development. Sixty-six former students responded to the questionnaire, and I chose eight of these to participate in semi-structured interviews. The responses are detailed in Chapter 4 and discussed more fully in this chapter.
5.3 Main issues emerging from the literature review

a) Introduction
The literature review (Chapter 2) not only considered the activity of student teaching abroad but also examined some wider educational issues in connection with the topic which arose in the literature. The first was the continuing debate about what student teachers need to know and understand in order to prepare them to teach. The second concerned the influence of globalisation, and how this might influence the training of student teachers: the third issue emerged from the questions raised by teacher education institutions about the extent to which overseas placements can prepare teachers to work successfully in American or Canadian schools. I now recap the main issues identified in the literature review before discussing how the results of my research confirm or challenge them.

b) What do student teachers need to know?
The literature revealed that the question on how to educate and prepare student teachers for their careers remains a contested area (Schön, 1983; Kirk, 1988; Hargreaves, 1993; Helsby, 2000). Fairbanks et al. (2000) describe the process of learning to teach, rather like teaching itself, as neither “simple not explicit” (p.11), and the problem is compounded by the lack of consensus about the body of knowledge and central principles needed to train teachers (Korthagen, 2006). The divide between the theoretical and practical elements of learning to teach has widened, rather than narrowed, and while teachers regard classroom practice as a major landmark in their preparation as a teacher they often fail to relate it to its underlying theoretical basis (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997). The pressure to ensure and provide evidence of rising pupil attainment and improving standards means that some teacher education preparation can become no more than mechanistic training, designed to fit in with centrally controlled state and national standards (Romano, 2007; Dorrell, 2008), which creates anxiety for teachers (Sachs, 2000). New ways of thinking about educating student teachers are needed (Moran, 2007) but while many educationalists recognise the importance of this, teacher education programmes are fully occupied trying to respond to external requirements and implementing national policies which change with the political scene (Sachs, 2000; Mahon and Espinetti, 2007). Nevertheless, preparing students to cope with the challenges of teaching in a fast-changing world is still
regarded as a vital part of teacher education (Hargreaves, 1993). Teacher education programmes aspire to develop qualities such as resourcefulness, adaptability, ability to respond to the changing nature of classrooms in their students, and that their student teachers should become “internationally literate” (National Association of International Educators, 2003, p.16): but it is not clear how these qualities are to be achieved. Some authors recognised the rapidly changing nature of teaching, together with the need that students should be prepared to meet the needs of young people who might be in their classrooms fifty or more years hence (Stachowski, 2007; Kissock and Richardson, 2010) but how this was to be achieved is less clearly identified and resolved.

c) The impact of globalisation on teacher education

Hicks (1994), takes a wider perspective, encouraging a debate on how far education will be able to meet the global needs of future generations of young people. With a possible career span of thirty years or more, teachers must be made ready for the responsibility of educating young people for life many years into the future (Kissock, 2007). Merryfield (2000) believes that many teachers are either not prepared for, or do not understand the impact of globalisation on the future lives of their students, and suggests those teachers who are immersed for a time in another culture, in which they themselves are perceived as “different”, are better able to adapt to changing circumstances. The process of reflecting on their home country, the United States or Canada, after experiencing it from different cultural viewpoints, is most important in helping to develop the skills and attitudes which future teachers will need (Valli, 1993b).

Given that classrooms not only in the United States but in many other countries are rapidly becoming more ethnically diverse, experience of teaching in other cultures is becoming a major reason to reconsider the traditional teacher education curriculum (Larkin and Sleeter, 1995). Tisher and Wideen (1990) maintain that “if we want to give our young people the best education possible we must first provide the best education and training to those who teach them” (p.1); it follows, therefore, that international student teaching placements merit consideration. Studying in a foreign country helps students to grow and mature in their beliefs, behaviours and competence (Carlson and Burn, 1990; Wilson and Flourney, 2007). According to Bennett (1993), empathy is an important skill – participating in another’s experience, even if only for a
relatively short time, enables one to “place oneself in another’s shoes” (p.37). Clarke (2004) also emphasised the importance of the international dimension, asserting that it was impossible to educate young people today without it being a very real, significant part of their learning experience. His belief in the importance of equipping future children and adults for life in a very different global society was obvious: however he was less clear about how this might be done.

d) Teacher education institution concerns

The debate about the best ways to educate new teachers for the classrooms of the future is very much at a crossroads. The literature reviewed reminds us that 21st century school students will live most of their adult life in an increasingly complex and interrelated world: Cogan (1982) observes that “preparing them to live as effective, responsible citizens has traditionally been a goal of education … but this goal has become even more complex …” (p.1). Teacher educators find themselves facing significant uncertainty in their work as they try to “prepare others while living in a changing world with competing requirements and expectations of … themselves …” (Ben-Peretz, 2001, p.52). Cochran-Smith (2000) argues that teachers and teacher educators have the power to shape the future of education: teaching and teacher education are both socially constructed, so participants can influence outcomes by engaging with political and public debates. However this is easier said than done; adhering to governmental regulations and guidelines can be overwhelming and individuals can become what Rudduck (1998) describes as “exhausted by the demands of multiple initiatives …” (p.207). Schostak (1996) goes as far as saying that teacher educators are caught in a political trap (p.261): however relevant and innovative they want to make their curriculum, they are hamstrung by the weight of political demands, budgetary requirements, financial constraints and accountability at a national level (Van de Water, 2001). All these factors conspire to reduce teacher educators’ capacity to think about innovations such as student teaching.

The low take-up of student teaching abroad noted in the literature lends support to the prevailing view, that completing all student teaching in American schools remains the best preparation for American teachers (Mahon and Espinetti, 2007). Yet there is also some evidence that the increasing rate of migration into North America is leading to a recognition that teachers must be able to respond to, understand and work with the cultural diversity now evident in many schools
(Ladson-Billings, 2004). They need to be both culturally competent (Cushner and Brennan, 2007) and culturally sensitive (Bennett, 1993). So the question remains as to how teacher education institutions best prepare their students for their future careers.

5.4 The results of the study
a) Introduction
The discussion which follows considers my findings in terms of how they confirm or challenge previous research, or raise new and unexpected insights. The literature referred to here has previously been reviewed in the literature survey in Chapter 2. I discuss the results of my study under three headings first the professional perspectives resulting from student teaching abroad on the participants, second the implications of globalisation for the education of teachers and lastly the personal perspectives of student teaching abroad on student teachers. The first section looks at the professional perspectives which emerged as a result of participation in the programme which include the commonality of educational practices, the transferability of skills and knowledge, the benefits of cross cultural experience, the differences in subject teaching, the range of learner needs and assessment procedures. I end this section by referring back to the more negative concerns about student teaching which were identified in the literature review. These are also discussed in more detail in this chapter.

5.5 The professional perspectives resulting from student teaching abroad
One of my major findings was the participants’ belief that working in another educational system significantly enhanced and extended their professional experience. While they observed and experienced differences in the way schools organised both themselves and their pupils’ learning, they also realised that teaching methodologies, lesson planning, managing behaviour and assessing students were shared practices in a variety of schools around the world. My findings support those of Mahan and Stachowski (1990) and Cushner (2004) who identified that student teachers found some elements of teaching such as classroom management, the way in which schools were organised, standardised testing and the practicalities of working with pupils universal. I also found that student teachers in my sample compared their experiences and practices in North America with those in their host country and took the best from both, transferring skills gained overseas to their subsequent teaching posts with reasonable ease. This
confirms and extends Quezada’s (2004) research into the experience of his own student teachers placed in South America who also found that they were able to match skills and experience gained in their host schools to those needed in schools in the United States.

My research identified significant benefits of cross-cultural experiences. These included gaining a wide range of pedagogical skills and a deeper understanding of the needs of culturally diverse learners, supporting views expressed by Kuechle et al. (1995) and the findings of Quinn et al. (1995) that exposure to a wider world view of teaching resulted in increased professional competence. Working in another culture for an extended period of time, between ten and sixteen weeks, helped student teachers develop their own beliefs and practices, although there was some homesickness and concerns about loss of identity, also noted by Cwick and Benton (2009). The full and critically reflective responses of the participants in my research reflect the findings of Vall and Tennison (1991) and Brindley et al. (2009), whose reviews of student teacher reflections on internships in international schools all identified a growing sense of professionalism and understanding of cultural differences. My findings also confirm the findings of Jongewaard’s (2005) study of forty students who completed their teaching practice in Brazil in the HOST programme where the participants were able to incorporate what they had learned in their overseas experience into their professional philosophy and subsequent classroom practices wherever they taught.

The participants’ reflections reveal that they viewed learning to cope with school and staffroom politics, and experiencing different cultural settings, whether in Cairo or Reigate, as initially unsettling but ultimately enriching experiences which enhanced and informed their future teaching. Classroom management techniques were sometimes different from those used in North American classrooms, with a sharper focus on discipline in countries such as the UK, Germany and Thailand. The student teachers were not comfortable with the use of corporal punishment which although rare, was still used in some places such as St Lucia. Despite these significant differences, the participants appeared ready and able to work in a contrasting context, and identified that they were able to translate their skills and experiences into subsequent teaching jobs, relatively easily, all of which confirms Bridges (1993) findings. Many of the host schools often had limited resources and restricted access to the internet, and the student teachers had to
find other ways of providing stimulating resources and lesson plans. This supports the findings of Wideen and Grimmett (1985), Merryfield (2001) and Quezada (2004) who identified that student teachers in these situations became more creative in their choice of curriculum, lesson planning and delivery.

The primary curriculum that participants encountered in many parts of the world was relatively similar to that of the United States, with high priority given to numeracy, literacy and science. One major difference for the student teachers working with this age group was that they were expected to teach a full range of subjects, including physical education, art and music which, in the United States, would usually be taught by specialists. However, an important aspect of the student teachers’ professional development was the variety of educational experiences they engaged with in both primary and secondary placements, such as historical visits, geography fieldwork and creative arts, particularly drama. Fears about school liability, or the fact that these are regarded as after-school activities, means that these subjects are not commonly taught in North American schools; those who encountered them overseas looked forward to making a useful contribution, for instance in the areas of music, history or physical education in their subsequent teaching posts.

An important area of professional development was the participants’ varied and useful experiences teaching pupils with a range of learning needs. Unlike in the United States, where learner needs classroom support is more readily available, or where pupils are withdrawn to receive specialised help, participants found that overseas they were expected to work largely unaided with a range of diverse learners. Sometimes a classroom assistant was present, but often student teachers were responsible for preparing and teaching lessons and assessing pupil attainment across a diverse range of pupils. For many pupils in the host school, English was a second language, and my research participants indicated that it was not uncommon to have a class which included pupils with eight or more mother tongues. This gave all participants, not just those with specific ESL training, valuable experience which they could use to advantage in their subsequent careers, enabling them to develop an empathy for, and a greater understanding of Hispanic and other immigrant communities in the United States.
The task of assessing pupil attainment against national standards was frequently commented on by my research participants. Kincheloe (2000), Carr (2002) and Zamastil-Vondrova (2005) noted that individual national standards all required regular, rigorous and continuous assessment of pupil attainment. My participants confirmed that this was a major objective in their placement schools, and talked in great detail about the complexity and frequency of pupil assessment in both the primary and secondary sectors, and how at times they were confused by the varying systems in use, particularly the grading structures. They were more accustomed to the formative assessment used in American schools, and end-of-year examinations or timed tests were new to many of them. My findings support those of Hargreaves (1993), Gunter (1995) and Romano (2007), who all remarked upon the challenge of assessment procedures on schools, teachers and education systems around the world. Most of my participants recognised why and how schools were being made more accountable for pupils’ progress and that assessment procedures were designed to identify pupil progress (or lack of it) against external targets. According to Ingersoll (2003) the main reason why about a third of America’s new teachers leave during their first three years is the pressure of and misunderstandings about, aspects of school organisation such as standardised assessment procedures. By recognising the universality of such standardisation and the way in which different educational systems are coping with them, it appears that my research participants have come to a clearer understanding about these assessment procedures, which may help them to adjust to pressures in their subsequent careers as similar assessment systems become more widely used in the United States.

Goodwin and Nacht (1991) identified concerns in American teacher education institutions about the academic rigour and seriousness of overseas programmes, together with a mistrust of the motives for developing them. Rodriguez (2001) too had identified a range of negative comments made by American teacher educators concerned about the content and educational value of study abroad programmes in South America. However my findings do not support these negative concerns. The majority of student teachers who participated in my research said they had worked hard in their teaching practice overseas, and the academic rigour of their work enabled them to successfully complete their degrees and gain their teaching licences on an equal basis with their peers who had carried out their teaching practices in the United States. The participants felt quite positively that their teaching practice overseas had been a highlight in their professional career.
which agrees with the findings of Calderhead and Shorrock (1997); Cushner and Brennan (2007); Riches and Benson (2010) when researching views of their own students.

5.5 The impact of globalisation on teacher education

Reflecting the work of Merryfield (2000), my research suggests that individuals who live outside the comfort zone of their home society for an extended period gain a valuable understanding of what it means to be perceived as “other” when part of an ethnic minority. Participants confirmed that their experience in the host country gave them first-hand insight, in their subsequent teaching posts, into the difficulties faced by many of their pupils. Their overseas placement was the first opportunity many of them had to be independent and make important decisions on their own – making their own travel arrangements, finding accommodation, adjusting to life with a host family, finding their way around a large city – all in a new and different cultural, and possibly linguistic, setting.

My research supports the view that long-term, clearly planned overseas immersion experiences are of significant professional benefit, as the student teachers gained a well developed level of what Cushner and Brennan (2007) refer to as “global cultural competence” (p.10), which the authors define as an “essential and integral part of what it means to be an effective teacher” (ibid). Cushner and Brennan are also clear that student teaching in other cultures enables student teachers to “simultaneously strengthen their practice and personally stretch beyond their traditional zone of comfort ...” (p.6). Prospective teachers gain what Mahon and Espinetti (2007) describe as “multiple perspectives” (p.13) from an overseas experience as well as “a unique opportunity for professional and personal development” (ibid). My findings also confirm those of Sumka (2005) and Wilson and Flournoy (2007) who found that participants made significant gains in understanding cultural differences and developed a greater awareness of the different ways of seeing and reflecting on issues. This in turn challenged their pre-existing views, beliefs and assumptions about people, culture and systems outside the United States.

My participants’ insights into the experience of being an American overseas reflected those of Brennan and Cleary’s (2007) students, who describe the challenging responses that Americans sometimes encounter abroad. My respondents also described their pupils’ desire to learn more
about the United States as they were already familiar with a range of sports and media personalities as well as television programmes illustrating the American way of life. This confirms Merryfield’s (2009) work with Korean students who demonstrated quite a depth of knowledge about American life and politics. My research also identified the often stereotypical view of life in the United States held by schoolchildren around the world who considered Americans to be relatively rich, with a good quality of life where poverty was not a major issue. This came as a surprise to many of the student teachers, who had not really given much thought as to how the United States was regarded by other countries or indeed how they themselves thought about other countries, This is again confirmed in Merryfield’s research (ibid) when she reports on young Americans’ lack of understanding of Korea, which she feels is due mainly to the fact that although the United States is significantly connected to the country through military and economic ties, the “ideas, lifestyles and concerns of Koreans today are simply not taught in American classrooms” (p.225).

5.6 The personal impact of a student teaching experience abroad on participants and how this confirms or challenges previous research.

Student teaching abroad was viewed by almost all the research participants as an opportunity to do something different with their lives, fulfil long-held dreams and develop or enhance personal strengths. They often chose to be placed a long way from home, sometimes leaving North America for the first time in their lives. For a small minority the contrast between their home country and their host country was almost overwhelming in terms of language, landscape and cultural differences but the majority accepted the challenges and developed a range of personal strengths and skills which they felt helped them become confident, mature, articulate and resourceful teachers. Participants themselves reflected that the frustrations, stressful situations and other challenges they encountered from time to time also played their part in enabling them to cope with adversity, both in their overseas placements and in their subsequent teaching. There was a sense that their personal development underpinned their ability to work successfully in their host classroom; professional and personal gains were often intertwined. Several respondents commented that the resourcefulness acquired in their overseas teaching practice enabled them to handle challenges in their subsequent posts with a greater sense of ease than some of their peers who had not been abroad for their teaching practice.
Research discussed in the literature review, by Cushner and Brislin (1996), Stachowski (2007) and Masters (2010) mirrors my own study. They report that overseas placements required participants to confront their personal anxieties and challenge their own limitations; this helped them to develop a range of qualities including increased self-confidence, adaptability, resourcefulness and ability to take risks. My research suggests that it is precisely the difficulties and frustrations that participants encounter in adjusting to their overseas placements which appear to facilitate their personal growth. This also agrees with the findings of Haigh et al. (2006) which identified student teacher personalities and dispositions as significant in determining whether the teaching practice overseas enabled or hindered their development as a student teacher. They also found as I did, that stepping outside their comfort zone was for the student teachers, a significant milestone in their professional and personal growth.

One of the most interesting issues to emerge was the participants’ surprising discovery of their own status as an ethnic minority. They were also sometimes seen as representatives of the United States and its foreign policy, rather than as individuals in their own right; for many, being an American out of America was a salutary but informative experience. In contrast, participants who travelled to their placements around the time of the 9/11 terrorist attack were very impressed by the way their hosts looked after them and helped the students to overcome their feelings of shock and anger. Many participants thought their overseas experience helped them to gain a much wider and more balanced perspective on both their own country and other countries around the world. However, some found their return home quite stressful, as friends and family were unable to empathise with their experiences; additionally, they missed the freedom to organise their lives as personal responsibilities were resumed and independence sometimes curtailed.

One area where my findings differed from the existing research was the participants’ recognition that being placed overseas as an individual rather than in a group could be personally valuable. Smith and Holden’s work (2001) with Canadian PGCE students in London and Dolby’s (2004) with American students in Australia found that students in groups provided useful peer support; in contrast, my participants coped well as individuals or in pairs, often for a considerable period of time; independent immersion in their host country was a useful, if sometimes uncomfortable
experience. Cushner and Brennan (2007) also note the drawbacks of short-term group experiences:

Self-contained “island” programmes ... not sufficiently linked to practice to influence the professional lives of participating candidates in a lasting way. (p.3)

Engle’s research (2007) describes his students’ difficulties adapting to life in a foreign country, which he surmises were due to them being in what he calls the “the iron grip” (p.16) of American culture. He posits one difficulty of short visits: there is not enough time to break free from the protective links with one’s own country and get to know another culture; but my findings indicate that most participants placed either individually or in pairs for their teaching practice appeared to cope well even for a short teaching practice of less than ten weeks. This may, however, be partly because the placement required them to interact and integrate with the educational system and local culture. They knew from early on in the process that they would be placed individually and in order to complete their teaching practice successfully they would need to immerse themselves in their school and community from the outset. Some participants were frustrated by the language barriers and local ways of organising things and inevitably some cultural misunderstandings arose; however, the reflective and thoughtful comments of the majority indicated that their developing skills and resourcefulness enabled them to resolve such difficulties.

My participants also grew significantly in their understanding of the communities in which they were placed, and were able to integrate more successfully than as a mere visitor. Merryfield (2000, 2001) and Romano (2007) also found that although the students were sometimes apprehensive of being placed alone or with a small number of other student teachers it enabled them to engage more freely and intimately with the local community, building relationships which endured beyond their teacher education programme. One student teacher even held his wedding in his host country so the good friends he had made there could attend. Other participants returned to the host country on several occasions to keep in contact with schools and teachers who had become long term friends.
5.7 The concerns of teacher educators

One of the findings which I discussed in my literature review and earlier in this chapter is the lack of information about teacher educators’ concerns on the efficacy of student teaching overseas in terms of how participants will be prepared to work in American schools. I referred to the work Hoffa had carried out in collating the concerns he had encountered but there does appear to be a gap in the research which means that I have found very little research evidence to confirm or challenge. The most interesting point here however, is that few teacher education establishments offer study abroad as an option, presumably on the grounds of concerns which are as yet largely unexamined. With the increasing pressures on performance and accountability in their own institutions in the United States (and elsewhere) it may well be that they don’t have the time or the energy to run new programmes as well as being uncertain as to how well the overseas trained student teacher will be able to cope back in the American school system. This does present itself as a promising area for future research.

One of the major difficulties for teacher education departments in the United States, as elsewhere in the world, is the lack of consensus about what is needed to prepare teachers for their future work; this has been discussed earlier in this chapter. The ensuing uncertainty is confirmed by Korthagen (2006) who argues that despite various attempts to restructure teacher education very little common understanding exists about the central principles on which to base teacher education programmes to ensure they are responsive to the expectations, needs and practices of student teachers. This absence of clear guidance means teacher educators tend to hold on to what they know and distrust innovation. American national documents such as No Child Left Behind (2001) are short on guidance about educating teachers (Stachowski, 2007) and contain what Wallis and Steptoe (2006) refer to as “the meagre minimum ”(p.18) for equipping teachers to work successfully. Teacher educators fear that if their student teachers undertake their teaching practice overseas they will lose the knowledge and preparation provided by the home institution and return ill-prepared to work in US schools. However Tabachnick and Zeichner’s view (1984) that campus-based preparation would be “washed out” (p.29) during an overseas student teacher placement was not borne out by my research: rather, there was evidence that – especially early on in their placement, the university based studies which included theoretical models of learning,
provided a supportive framework to help them adapt to their new classroom situations, and was reflected in their practice throughout the placement.

Hoffa (2005) identifies another major concern of teacher educators: that in terms of curriculum understanding, teaching methodologies and ability to implement national and state assessment procedures, student teaching abroad cannot adequately prepare teachers for North American classrooms. Their preoccupation with the notion of quality in higher education, identified by Zamastil-Vondrova (2005) and already discussed in Chapter 2, stems from their sense of accountability. It is clear from my research that although the student teachers found many differences in the host education systems from those they were used to, they also found that the accountability imposed by national frameworks in education was in fact more universal than might have been at first thought; their overseas experience actually widened both their knowledge about, and their perspective, on assessment and accountability. Certainly none of the respondents felt that working with different teaching methods or assessment techniques had made them less able to take up or be successful in their subsequent teaching posts. Amongst Hoffa’s (2005) findings is the concern voiced by some teacher educators that the personal and social gains of the overseas experience may outweigh the professional benefits, and returning students may not make competent teachers. Education departments worry that the teacher preparation programmes might lack rigour, and that their students might spend more time enjoying the experience of the host country and less time in the classroom. They also fail to acknowledge the importance of an overseas experience in helping participants to “delve into the sensitive issues of race, religion and culture” (Wojcicki and Levine, 2010, p.1) or recognize the opportunities for helping them to gain a greater awareness about intercultural relations which is of great value in their future role as teachers.

Another significant issue which appears to concern teacher education departments in the United States is the level of employability of student teachers who completed their teaching practice overseas. There is little research evidence on this topic, but the students in my study indicated that while they felt their overseas experience gave them an extra dimension when applying for jobs, their employability also depended on the attitude of the hiring principal towards their experience. Given that North America’s pupil population is becoming more ethnically diverse,
their international experiences should mean they are in greater demand; however, they do suffer from one disadvantage, identified by Jacob et al. (2010) and confirmed by my own research – local hiring principals and headteachers do not have the opportunity to observe pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience. Some of the students in my study felt they had difficulty finding jobs only because they had not been able to establish their credibility as teachers in their chosen town; personal knowledge about a candidate’s ability to teach can have a significant impact on whether that person is appointed or not. However the questions about employment possibilities for young teachers must also be seen against a backdrop of economic changes affecting state education budgets and there is likely to be a number of reasons why getting onto the ladder of a teaching career can be difficult in the United States as indeed elsewhere.

5.8 The new contribution made by my research
Much of the earlier documented research concerns study abroad in general, rather than teaching practice overseas specifically, and those educators who do investigate teaching practice undertaken abroad carry out research mainly with student cohorts who participate in a particular year. My research has been a longitudinal study of overseas student placements spanning more than fifteen years, and provides considered and reflective responses from participants balanced with evidence of how their overseas placements helped or hindered their subsequent job prospects. I do acknowledge, however, that given the length of time since some of their overseas experiences their memories may not be totally accurate but nevertheless the evidence they provide offers significant insights into how they gained both in personal development and professional stature.

My research has also addressed some of the concerns of teacher educators, who are concerned that teaching practices overseas, in very different educational systems from those in North America, could leave student teachers ill equipped to cope with teaching in their home country. This appeared not to be the case with the students in my sample. While students acknowledged often quite significant differences between American schools and their overseas host schools such as classroom management, working with learner needs and even the curriculum itself, most felt able easily to adapt these differences to their new posts. They also felt that their overseas
placements made them flexible, knowledgeable and very culturally aware, and that they returned home with a much more balanced and global view about classrooms around the world as well as those in North America. Another new aspect in my research was the number of first-hand, personal experiences which provided a rich texture to the responses. Participants reflecting honestly on their experiences revealed that some aspects of their overseas placements were more frustrating or challenging than they might have been at home. They endured hardships and homesickness as well as difficulties in adapting to their new environment, but for nearly all the participants there was a point during their placement when they began to feel part of their host society rather than a visitor and their first-hand accounts provide compelling reading of their struggles to adapt to their new life.

5.9 How might my findings help in the future preparation of teachers?
At this point in the research my reflections on the evidence led to a change in direction of my thinking. There is quite substantial evidence, both from the literature and my collected data, that student teaching overseas can help participants develop the qualities they need in order to teach, now and in the future, at home and around the world. However, unless teacher educators feel that an overseas experience serves the needs of pre-service teachers, they, as gatekeepers, will be unlikely to support it. While some teacher education departments in the United States (and the UK) are very keen to offer students overseas opportunities, including student teaching, others are not. Their reluctant attitudes are often determined by their own experiences, or lack of them – as Green (2010) points out, “… even some method professors have never set foot in a classroom, or not done so recently …” (p.4). Merryfield (2001) emphasises the important role of teacher educators in inspiring and motivating their students to learn about the world through the eyes of people different from themselves, but when the educators personally lack overseas experience this can be difficult. According to Hoffa (2005), many American educators have not taken any international courses and comparatively few participate in study abroad programmes, so it is not surprising that they fail to recognise their benefits. Hyser (2005) suggests that the lack of enthusiasm of some faculty members may actually be fear of the unknown, generated by their own lack of international experience, a view supported by Briggs and Burn (1985).
Arguably the most important variable in the comprehensive internationalisation of any course in a college is the education department of the University (Kearney and Yelland, 2010). It controls the curriculum and decisions to award academic credit and if student teaching abroad is not seen as important or fulfilling a role, or indeed too challenging for the department, it is far less likely to be offered as an option. Duderstadt (2009) describes some aspects of US higher education as “increasingly risk averse, at times self-satisfied, often ignoring the changing environment” (p.4) and suggests that this complacency underpins the lack of movement in some colleges towards internationalising their student teaching programmes.

In addition to the doubts of academics about the value of study abroad, Raby (2011) cites the 2008 global economic crisis and resulting widespread recession as having a significant impact on international education in American community colleges. She observes that in 2009-2010 and again in 2010-2011, the imposition of significant budgetary constraints meant that very few colleges were able to develop their education abroad programmes. Her view is supported by Blumenstyk (2009) who claims that many college leaders are considering strategic changes to their provision, but in a climate of economic uncertainty few are actively engaging in developing new programmes, including studying abroad in its many forms.

These findings led me to reflect further on the limited positive support being offered to student teaching abroad programmes. Looking back at the data I collected only 6% (four students) said that they had been advised by university faculty members about the possibilities of going abroad to student teach; so 94% were not. In contrast, participants in my research showed a very positive attitude to going overseas with 68% (42 students) expressing a desire to do something completely different while 47% (29 students) felt it was a chance to broaden their career opportunities – a stance rather at odds with the views of teacher educators. However my sample only includes those who had already decided to go and the result has to be seen in the context that not all the student teachers on the teacher education programmes in the universities were interviewed. Nevertheless my research does indicate that the student teachers who participated did so without much support from department staff.
Heyl and McCarthy (2003) suggest that if students are to be provided with overseas opportunities, good integration between all faculty members responsible for developing study abroad programmes is important, and that sometimes even “a single education professor committed to study abroad can make a significant difference for a given cohort” (p.9). However if a single educator in any department found him or herself a lone voice it is difficult to see how far he or she would get. Realistically, enhancing student teachers’ knowledge, experience and understanding of the world around them needs significant coordination, collaboration and determination at all levels of teacher preparation. These ideals have to be seen within the existing workload and accountability levels all of which reduce individual capacity to innovate and develop new approaches. Heyl and McCarthy (2003) believe this will not happen “without the active participation and leadership of our Colleges of Education… in order to facilitate this collaboration, Colleges of Education are the indispensable pivot points …” (p.11). This is why I feel that my research, in providing a longitudinal study, might assist by offering some evidence about the impact of overseas study programmes on student teacher participants. This view is supported by Roberts (2007) who concludes that:

The sustained success of international student teaching programming is dependent on professional development of faculty and institutional support. Teacher educators require a knowledge base and experience in international practices before they can impart it to their students. (p.23)

The need now is for more research to help teacher educators recognise and be confident about the outcomes of student teaching overseas and expand their vision through a range of professional developments which will allow them to capitalise on overseas placements to their full advantage.

5.10 Conclusion
In this chapter I discussed my research findings and looked at how they confirm or challenge previous work in the same area. While many of my findings supported previous work I also was able to challenge some earlier conclusions – perhaps most importantly providing evidence that being placed independently was not a barrier to a successful placement, and that the student teachers worked hard in their placements and on their return were able to obtain their licence to
teach just as their peers who had not travelled abroad. Perhaps the most significant change over the period of the research was my realisation that the concerns of teacher educators about study abroad constituted a series of barriers to its development as a mainstream activity, and that my results might help allay their fears. Many of the participants in my study have been back in the United States for a long time and hold posts in a variety of educational establishments, so for them it seems student teaching abroad posed no drawback to finding work in the profession.

In the next chapter I return to the aim of the study and the research questions to consider if, and how well, my research was able to address them. I identify some limitations of my work and consider the significance of my findings for policy and practice in the field of teacher education and student teaching in particular.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Purpose and structure of the chapter
The purpose of a conclusion chapter is to summarise the main areas covered by the research, revisit them and reflect on what has been achieved. So I look back at my aim, review my key findings in relation to my research question, identify the limitations of my research and reflect on what I might do differently if I were to complete this research again. I make recommendations for future research and discuss the implication of my findings for policy and practice for teachers and teacher educators. Finally, I consider how the research has affected me as a beginning researcher.

6.2 The aim of the study
This study aimed to ascertain how student teaching overseas affected the professional and personal lives of the participants. There has been much debate, already critically examined in the literature as to how student teachers should be educated in order to respond to the future needs of pupils and their schools. Student teachers need to be reflective and analytical if they are to fulfil the role set for them as future educators in the classroom. This study identifies the perspectives student teachers have gained through their experience of a student teaching practice overseas and investigates the impact such a placement had on the participants over a time period of fifteen years. Data was collected using a mixed method approach: an online questionnaire was sent to past participants in this overseas student teaching programme, eight of the respondents being selected to take part a semi-structured interview. A feature of the data collection was that it gave the participants a voice to describe their rich and interesting first-hand experiences which added significant value to the findings.

6.3 Key findings

a) How did participation in an overseas student teaching placement affect the professional development of the student teachers involved?
My research elicited three main responses to this question: broadening professional classroom experience, developing a range of personal skills and learning to teach students with diverse needs: I now consider each of these in more detail.
(i) Broadened classroom experience
Most participants concluded that working in another educational system significantly enhanced and extended their professional practice which helped them in their subsequent posts. They identified several differences in the ways that schools organised themselves, managed classroom behaviour and supported diverse learners. Some student teachers in my sample indicated that a few subject areas – music, for example – were more difficult to adapt to teaching successfully overseas, whilst primary teachers often found it a challenge to teach a wider range of subjects than would normally be expected in their own schools in the United States. However, the overwhelming majority of students did not see these differences as affecting their ability to teach in American schools on their return; in fact, they thought their experiences supported their subsequent teaching, as they were able to incorporate new ideas they had gained, for example different methods of teaching topics, or taking part in school assemblies, into their own practice.

(ii) Increased personal gains
Participants also felt they had gained a range of wide skills both professional and personal which made them more flexible, open-minded and self-confident. They witnessed positive changes in their own ability to cope with the challenges of teaching and spoke of increasing levels of resourcefulness and willingness to take risks in trying out new approaches. Some recounted difficulty in understanding the staff politics in their placement school, and uncertainty over how to proceed. Most respondents felt that the competencies they had acquired during their overseas placement served them well in their subsequent posts. They also reported acquiring a wider world view about educational practices, giving them a broader context in which to place their subsequent experiences in their own country.

(iii) Experience of pupils with diverse needs
Working with pupils with a range of learning needs, including English second language learners, gave the student teachers a heightened sense of professional confidence when dealing with the diverse range of students in classrooms in the United States. Participants were able to weave their international knowledge and experience into their subsequent teaching posts, and through reflecting on their experiences came to recognise that their work overseas – especially with the range of diverse learners – had been assimilated into their work almost without realising it. Some
had also improved their foreign language skills, and found this useful when for example working in Hispanic or other communities in the USA and Canada.

b) How did participation in an overseas student teaching placement affect the personal development of the student teachers involved?

Participants’ responses fell into three groups: the first related to the development of their personal skills, the second to the growth in their global awareness, and the third to their experience of being a member of an ethnic minority outside their own country.

(i) Development of personal skills

Almost all participants viewed student teaching abroad as an opportunity to do something different with their lives, fulfil long-held dreams and develop or enhance a number of personal strengths. They developed a range of personal qualities, such as confidence, flexibility and resilience, which helped them to cope with the challenge of being away from home, often on their own, far from friends, family and their comfortable lifestyle. They sometimes found living and working in a foreign country frustrating, but as their confidence and maturity grew they were able to work with challenging situations. Some reflected that being placed at a distance from their North American work environment and colleagues had enabled them “to view it from both the mainstream and from the margins” (Merryfield, 2000:12). Reflecting on its politics, culture and lifestyles in turn helped them to a more balanced understanding of their home country. This point is well illustrated by Phil, (New Zealand 1996, IW) who suggested that “if you stay in the same place you can’t see things properly: you need to go far away to see where you’re from …”

(ii) Growing global awareness

Living in another country and working with colleagues from the local community gave the student teachers the opportunity to develop a wider global perspective which underpinned their subsequent educational philosophy. The difference and distance did not have to be great to generate this development: students who came to the United Kingdom, for example, found differences as significant for them as those who went to the Cameroon. There was a realisation that it was necessary to understand and adapt to these differences as quickly as possible if they were going to complete their placements successfully. Many student teachers recognised, and
were often surprised by the fact that in many cases peoples’ lives round the world were not so different from those of their own and that in some parts of the world such as Asia, Europe and South America teaching was regarded as a higher status occupation than might be the case in the United States.

(iii) Belonging to an ethnic minority
Many participants were surprised by their status as an ethnic minority in their placement community. They experienced being seen not as an individual who happened to come from the United States but more as a representative of the United States and its government’s foreign policy. In their subsequent careers, this valuable experience helped participants to identify with pupils in a similar position. As David (UK, 2006, Q) described it: “while the US has different cultures, it’s still the US – same President, same greenbacks …it makes immersion in another culture really so important …” While they found the experience initially uncomfortable, most student teachers in my research adapted over time, but a small minority found the cultural differences too great to cope with. These included working within a different language or trying to understand the local expectations about the role of women in the society the students found themselves in. Sometimes it was the small things in life which they found hard to adapt to such as lack of air conditioning in rooms or the rationing of water during the day.

6.4 Limitations of the study
I discussed the limitations specifically associated with my methodology and methods in some detail in Chapter 3, so here I will concentrate on the wider limitations which apply to the research as a whole.

a) The small scale of the study
This was a relatively small-scale study looking at data gathered from sixty six questionnaires and eight interviews. I recognise that the participants’ views, although reflective and considered, may have simply reflected the situations they encountered in particular schools and individual classrooms and so caution must be exercised, therefore, about generalising from the findings and their transferability to a much wider number of schools. The small scale of the sample also meant it might not be regarded as representative of the total number of student teachers who
participated in this particular student teaching abroad programme over the years. However, the sample for the questionnaire responses did represent a variety of different country placements both at primary and secondary levels over more than fifteen years, going some way to offset the low numbers who responded. Whilst the interviews were held in one place the participants had been placed in a variety of primary and secondary schools in five different countries which gave a broader dimension to the responses.

b) False memory
The participants remembered experiences which took place up to fifteen or more years previously. Loftus (1980) reminds us, “remembering is not running an invisible tape recorder back to an event, it is pulling together bits and pieces of information that logically fit together” (p.2). They may unwittingly have painted a more positive picture of these distant events than they would have done if asked at the time of participation. However, there are a number of other reasons why participants might have omitted negative experiences: they may have been embarrassed to reveal them to a researcher they barely knew, or perhaps considered that any negative experiences represented a failure on their part and so just “lost” them in their accounts of their placements. This is a difficult situation to minimise but one way might be to pose a question which specifically asked for more feedback on the negative areas of their experiences so they could be discussed in greater depth.

c) Fewer respondents from earlier years in the programme
During the life of the study abroad programme from 1989 onwards methods of communication changed and the study reflects these changes: email now makes it much easier to keep in touch with past participants. A third possible limitation, therefore, is that the participants in the early years of the programme were difficult to contact resulting in a much higher availability of responses from 2000 onwards. This meant the study lacked detailed information about earlier placements which may have been different in their nature from later ones, for example host schools being less used to hosting student teachers, using more traditional ways of managing behaviour or teaching a curriculum which had not been updated for a long time.
d) Unequal access to the programme
A fourth limitation is that those students who actually participated may not be representative of the student teacher population as a whole. The affordability of study abroad, the personal and cultural backgrounds of individual students, and access to information about such programmes will all have played their part in helping to self select the participants.

e) Distinguishing personal and professional impacts
My research tends to show that student teachers’ personal characteristics of maturity, ability to reflect on their work, and take risks underpin and combine with their professional strengths to ensure the participants became competent, flexible, well-prepared and confident teachers. Whilst I have looked at perspectives on both the professional and personal engagement with student teaching overseas separately to some degree it has become clearer as the study has progressed that the two realms are often difficult to distinguish at times and so studying them separately therefore has perhaps identified a further limitation of my work. I think also that the research question is very open and broad and with hindsight might well have benefitted from a tighter focus being given very early on.

f ) My positionality as researcher
I recognise the importance of the researcher’s role in trying to ensure that personal bias is kept in check (Wellington, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 3, my personal involvement in the organisation of the student teaching programme means I am, in reality, working as an insider. However, so long as I recognise my potential to influence the process, and the collection, presentation and discussion of the data are honest, balanced and accurate, bias does not have to affect or limit my ability to be reflective, thoughtful and constructive. I tried to ensure that I maintained a high level of continuous, critical self reflection throughout the whole research process and I constantly questioned assumptions about myself such as my motivation, values and involvement with the programme and my own position in relation to this research in order to help me identify and guard against bias and to develop a mind-set receptive to new and unexpected findings.
6.5 What would I change next time?

Following review and reflection on this thesis an important issue emerged concerning the professional learning opportunities which arise for student teachers during their teaching practice placements. I now consider and reflect on this further. Although some of the personal learning processes and outcomes experienced by the participants were evidenced in the thesis, these tended to be in response to a variety of questions rather than a specific question about their professional development or professional learning. As both these professional aspects are such major sources of teacher development not to investigate them in more detail is an omission and should be rectified in any further research of a similar nature. To assist this course of action I look first at continuous professional development and how this differs from professional learning. I then reflect on why these are both important aspects of teacher career development and finally I consider a model which I could use to investigate the professional learning experienced by the student participants of the Educators Abroad programme.

Avalos (2011) identifies professional development as being about ‘teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth’ (p.10). Wilson and Berne (1999) talk about how student teachers’ learning can sometimes be of a ‘scattered and serendipitous nature’ (p. 173) but maintain that it is a vital part of their programme because in order to become professional teachers, students need to experience professional learning as well as professional development. McCulloch (2000) takes these ideas much further when he identifies that a constant changing nature to continuous professional development is very necessary to help teachers deal with factors which impact on education in general and teaching in particular. He talks about the need to maintain the professional standing of teachers by helping them to work with the extensive range of sociological and political changes which are now a constant feature of the workplace. He emphasises that the widely held ideas about teacher professional development, which often refer to the more technical aspects of learning to teach, are simply not enough to allow teachers to engage with, and respond to the breadth and depth of issues which face them today. It is important in the early stages of their work that teachers are encouraged to see beyond short term goals in order to gain a more holistic view of the nature and breadth of education by examining
and reflecting on wider political and ethical issues all of which have significant impact on teachers’ lives in the classroom.

Professional learning needs to be a continuous process and is likely to be centred on a teacher’s own ability to reflect critically and internalise a range of experiences which may result from a wider field than just CPD courses. As Lamb (2008) points out, organised courses which often focus on arguments and procedures for raising standards rather than involving critical political and ethical concerns, ‘will not lead to professional learning as this comes through a consideration of, and critical reflection on a teacher’s professional learning needs and interests...’ (p.1).

Goodlad (1991) identifies that professional learning can begin simply with teachers talking to each other to share ideas and views about their practice and how it might be improved. Teachers then need to engage reflectively and critically about such practice in order not only to improve but to challenge and change it. Personal professional learning can also significantly challenge the participants engaged in it for example action research. Avalos (2011) reminds us of the ‘emotional involvement’ (p.10) which arises when teachers are asked to reflect critically on their convictions and previously held beliefs as a prelude to recognising the need for change. Given that both CPD and professional learning are important scaffolding in assisting the development of a teacher, in any analysis of how teachers are developing professionally it is important to assess how these styles of learning impact on the intellectual and moral growth of teachers and their ability to provide a high quality of education in their schools.

So what are these major issues which teachers face in their work which need them to develop critical reflexive professional learning? I have already talked in Chapter Two about the demands of performativity and raising standards and the impact of constant testing of pupils on teachers: other features such as the student cultural diversity, the regulatory impact of Government inspection programmes such as Ofsted, pressure to increase test scores to compete globally, competition between schools and the setting up of new schooling systems, for example academies, all provide significant challenges to teachers who need to engage in high quality professional learning in order make a difference to the lives of the students they teach. These rapid and constant changes will also bring with them a range of emotional and often unsettling situations which combine to result in teaching not always being a positive experience for all.
participants including students. Putnam (2000) supports the need to create learning experiences and professional training for teachers which he describes should be ‘consistent with the learning agenda’ (p.4) but he makes the valid point that schools often tend to dwell too frequently on the importance of individual teacher competencies in practical professional development and need to pay more heed to helping teachers engage in critical and transformational change in relation to the more extensive, and often external political demands being placed on them at both a personal and professional level.

Despite the recognition of their importance, professional development activities currently offered to teachers are described by Borko (2004:3) as often ‘woefully inadequate’ and for her this remains a serious and unsolved problem. Adler (2000) cites as imperative the need for ‘teachers becoming knowledgeable about teaching’ (p.37) whilst Putnam and Borko (2000) talk about the multiple contexts in which teachers find themselves indicate that the social and educational systems which lie beyond the immediate classroom have a significant impact on what they need to experience. However it is not enough for teachers to learn about these professional external and internal demands which will be made on them: teachers have to develop a greater professional understanding which will equip them through the process of critical reflection to gain a deeper insight into the issues these demands can raise. This in turn will enable them to review and act on the need for change in their own professional lives in order to improve their practices. This type of professional learning might well be informal, for example, engaging in discussions with other staff, or using a more formal approach such as creating a learning journal or portfolio. Students in the Educators Abroad programme already compile a portfolio which includes their reflections over the length of their practice and would provide a rich resource to analyse to identify the progress being made in terms of their professional learning during the placement.

So how might I carry out research into this area of professional and personal learning given that it is such an important aspect of becoming a teacher? I found Borko’s identification of the three phases of professional learning a helpful and thoughtful starting point and I now look at how these phases might form the basis for further research. She identifies phase one as the level of personal learning which takes place at an individual site, phase two offering a professional
learning programme where there is more than one facilitator on one site thus building a set of relationships between learner, facilitator and school, and phase three where professional learning occurs in multiple ways with the teacher as the central learner. This model I feel could provide a strong starting point for investigating professional learning as part of this thesis. If I conducted the research again I would use these stages as a basis for research and I now go on to look at how this might work.

I would use phase one to look at the professional learning which the students experienced within their practice school: this is likely to include mentoring by their co-operating teachers, their level of classroom management development and their ability to critically reflect on their achievements during their practice which varies between ten or fifteen weeks in length. This time scale would provide a good opportunity to examine students’ critical reflections to see how far they have grown in their professional learning, i.e. moving on beyond the practicalities of the classroom to achieving a greater critical understanding of the broader social and political contexts in which they are working, such as ‘underachievement’ of pupils or the imposition of national directives. Another interesting research possibility would be to look at the amount and impact of support by the school mentor or co-operating teacher on the professional learning of the student and what effect this had on the students’ own beliefs, values and attitudes. In some schools this support is quite extensive as student teachers are regularly included in what Shulman and Shulman (2004) describe as ‘communities of teachers as learners’, where professional learning is seen as an integral part of being a successful teacher. There is a need however, on the part of all participants for respect and consideration between individuals as such discussions and critical dialogues can have a destructive element to them (Putnam and Burko 1997). This is particularly important for student teachers who are often very sensitive and uncertain about development of their learning and self reflection can often result in self doubt.

It is in phase two that teachers need to reflect more broadly than just on their classroom teaching and as Zeichner and Liston (1996) identify, the reflective processes should extend far beyond the classroom experience and involve looking at the values which guide teachers’ work together with a questioning of their own assumptions and beliefs which underpin them. I see this as an opportunity to investigate the wider range of support the student might experience possibly given
by the external supervisor as well as the school mentor. The student teacher already provides a series of reflective papers over the life of the practice for the supervisor as well as considerations of specific aspects such as classroom management practices, inclusion, identifying pupil progress and so on. These could foster greater discussion linking both the school and the supervisor with the student teacher to help them to explore different aspects of teaching and how far these transform their teaching practice through what Simon and Johnson (2008) refer to as collaborative reflection. There is already evidence of the students’ attitudes, beliefs, experiences and values appearing in their reflective journals and papers written for their supervisors: some students found themselves in schools where there was a good understanding of the importance of critical reflection in developing professional learning but for others their schools were more concerned with the performative aspects of teaching often working from one inspection report to the next. If I were conducting the research again I would want to investigate both if, and how student teachers progress in the development of their attitudes, values and beliefs about educational practice and their own standing as a teacher and a deeper analysis of their reflective reports to their supervisors would provide rich material for this research.

Many students have had very little experience of reflecting on their own beliefs and values prior to their teaching practice: they come from a culture which places great store on success, for example being placed on the Dean’s list at their university (a measure of academic success in the USA) or achieving grade A’s in every academic aspect of their course. However many of the reflections they submit to their supervisor do show examples, often quite painful for the students, of how they are beginning to move away from the concept of technical skills based success to a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of values and attitudes and beliefs in education. I would plan to investigate these reflections in much more detail to identify individual stories, possibly as case studies, about the journey individual students make towards changing their practice through critical reflection and whether or not this results in critical thinking about their work as a teacher.

Phase three recognises that professional learning for the student teacher may not only be stimulated and supported by the school and external supervisor but possibly by the home university in the United States. This wider involvement of support would enable the student
teacher to consider more deeply how state, national and international policies support or detract from their work in the classroom and show them how teachers in the classroom need not only to be knowledgeable about these initiatives but reflective, critical and flexible in the use of them to inform their work (Camburn, Ronan and Taylor, 2003). The students with whom I work are able to learn from two educational systems: the one in which they student teach which is likely to be the English system found in many International schools and the American state system with which their American University is aligned. All teaching practice students have to produce a portfolio for their home Universities as a record of their overseas placement and this will contain a series of reflections and personal accounts of their journey through their teaching practice. It provides a vital role in assessing how far they have progressed in not only learning the craft of the classroom but their willingness to experiment or take risks in their work to enable them to embark on what Grant and Huebner (1998) describe as a process of discovery. As my research was based on a longitudinal investigation of participants over a fifteen year period, it is well placed to identify if, and how the overseas placement stimulated the participants to take risks, challenge their values and attitudes and widen their understanding about the importance of learning about teaching beyond the level of technical success in the classroom.

In conclusion I have considered an important area to include if this research were to be repeated. It concerns the level of professional learning which the student teacher experienced and demonstrated during the time spent on an overseas teaching placement. A final but important question to include would be around the notion of how far any participant was able to continue any wider learning which may have resulted from their reflections made during their teaching practice on their return to a school which might not share this way of working.

6.6 Recommendations for future research
As the review of existing literature demonstrates, there is relatively little research on the topic of student teaching abroad. My research has thrown up several questions for further investigation, some linked directly to my research and others to the wider field of student teaching overseas. I found some small evidence of heritage students going back to their family’s country of origin, particularly in relation to Irish and Scandinavian countries. It would be interesting to investigate more closely the participants’ reasons for student teaching overseas to see how far the heritage
effect was a driver to participate and if so, how the experience matched up to individual expectations. Another very interesting research area for me would be to investigate the influence of the class teacher or mentor in the overseas placement both in terms of the performance of the student teachers as well as the impact of having a student on the class teachers themselves. A look in greater depth at some of the more challenging aspects of placements, such as the range of diverse needs, managing classroom behaviour or the significant forthcoming changes in the curriculum would also be worth considering as research topics.

A thread which ran through both the literature and my research was that of the issue surrounding the assessment agenda both at the school level and the student teacher level. It became clear that using performative criteria and judgements to monitor and measure the effectiveness of practice in schools is on the increase, leading to a heightened awareness by schools and teachers alike of their own accountability. In this environment, teaching can become judgemental, rather than developmental, resulting in significant tensions between wider educational experiences and a state or government agenda based on prescribed targets for all levels of school performance. This in turn raises the concern which is recognised in the literature about the accountability education departments have with regard to the standards their student teachers reach. How can they be sure that student teaching abroad provides the participants with a broader understanding of the purposes and practices of education, as well as a more effective, flexible and reflective approach to classroom practice? An interesting research topic emerges to examine the issues raised from the teacher educators’ perspective and analyse more fully their concerns and debates about the efficacy of student teaching overseas.

A rich seam for further exploration is the question of the employability of returning student teachers – how they are viewed by hiring principals and whether their time abroad was seen as a help or a hindrance in obtaining a post. Finally, for me personally, a very important aspect would be to follow up the views of college and university education faculty about student teaching abroad, and to investigate if my findings could have any impact on whether or not they would consider offering such a programme for their students.
6.7 Significance of the research for policy and practice at different levels

a) Policy and practice at the teacher level
It might seem self-evident that young people need an extensive knowledge of the world, and the skills and the will to engage with people from different countries around the world, but in fact teachers “rarely begin their careers with the deep knowledge and robust skills necessary to bring the world into their classroom” (Devlin-Foltz, 2008, p.3) So why might this situation exist? A principal reason which emerged from my research was that current education policies in both the United States and the United Kingdom are dominated by attainment targets. More, and more frequent nationally imposed standards put significant pressure on teachers to ensure their pupils attain prescribed levels of achievement often to the exclusion of other aims which might also be important for the education of young people. But education needs to take a longer view of learning than these short-term goals of assessment offer. Research by OPM (2008) reveals that teachers are aware of the need to prepare their pupils for their future, not ours. If you type “preparing pupils for their future lives” into a search engine you get hundreds, if not thousands, of results – school mission statements and inspection reports which set out their core values and aspirations for pupils. So awareness of the need to prepare pupils for the future clearly exists, but teachers need the confidence, knowledge, support and vision to put it into practice.

I hope that my findings will help to do just that. The aim of a teaching practice overseas is to give the participants an opportunity to widen their experience in a different system, offering insights and experiences to help broaden their thinking and develop the skills they need to become competent, well prepared and confident teachers. It should also help them to achieve successful practice in their classrooms, balancing short-term reactive goals with a longer, more reflective view of their work. My research appears to show for the sample investigated that their subsequent teaching had been influenced by their overseas placements; they were not only more willing to take risks but also tended to exhibit a wider understanding of education as a world system, rather than one confined to the local environment where they live. They also recognised that teaching young people is a similar task wherever you are in the world.
b) Policy and practice at teacher education institutions

Teacher educators face the challenge of preparing student teachers not only to teach for many years into the future but also to respond to and satisfy a number of national policy directives while providing schools in their communities with the service they expect. Ozga (2004) notes that the “transfer of knowledge from research to practice is not straightforward” (p.3) and suggests that the capacity to absorb new knowledge is heavily influenced by preparedness, prior knowledge and openness to change and risk taking. She recommends that to be successful all partners need to be “involved in the transfer activity to share knowledge bases, cultures and agendas” (p.3). Both Ozga (2004) and Smyth and Gunning (2007) assert that sound research is essential to support the issues underpinning the teacher education programmes, and Ozga clearly feels it is very important that this research is undertaken by academics rather than think tanks who may be working to a specific political agenda and whose reports must therefore be interpreted with care. Researchers tend to have a different agenda from policy makers, but research like mine may also help to support or modify policy by identifying what works in a variety of classroom locations as well as demonstrating its transferability. Teacher educators need strong evidence-based grounds before considering major changes which might bring them into conflict with standards policies and requirements of their own institutions. Hammersley (2002) argues that “teaching is a practical rather than a technical activity … more about making judgments than following rules …” (p.22), but in reality it is hard to opt out of following the rules when teachers and teacher educators are so heavily accountable to target-driven national or state policies. However, if the performance-led agenda is to be allowed to carry on reducing, squeezing and controlling the development of student teachers, we need to push out the boundaries in teacher education departments and break away from what Paine and Fang (2007) describe as “a strong gravitational pull towards habitual ways of behaviour and thinking” (p.21). Again my research clearly states some of the concerns that teacher educators have identified about student teaching abroad. Within the limitations of a small-scale research project, I offer evidence to address the concerns of teacher educators about student teaching abroad and support them in pushing out these boundaries and widening the scope of their student teachers’ experiences.
c) The student teaching abroad programme
Another important area where I hope my research will be valuable is the student teaching programme with which I am associated. For some time our organisation has been looking at ways to review the programme and my findings will provide useful feedback in this respect. The research results may also support future viability discussions with colleges and universities in the United States which might actively be considering participation in the programme. One of my most significant findings in this respect is that while student teachers overseas report a number of differences between American schools and their host country schools, these differences do not make them any less able either to meet state standards to become a licenced teacher or to work successfully in American or Canadian schools. Concerns such as these lie understandably at the heart of many teacher education institutions, and my evidence may go some way towards providing positive and practical responses which might support teacher education institutions in overcoming a fear and a reticence of being the first to head in a new direction (Blumenstyk, 2009; Tucker, 2010).

6.8 How doing the research impacted on me as a beginner researcher
For me writing a full academic dissertation was a completely new experience and it turned out to be a huge undertaking. I was very excited to be collecting the data, asking questions, meeting past students and reading the questionnaires; then the realisation set in that it had become an enormous task which might never end. My American colleagues referred to some post-graduate students as “ABDs”, which I now know stands for “All But Dissertation”: they had done everything except the final writing up.

I very much enjoyed the literature review but on reflection the breadth of my research question meant that it was quite easy to lose my way exploring avenues which didn’t strictly contribute to my research. Researchers often describe one of the difficulties of reviewing the literature as knowing when to stop, accepting that you have sufficient literature to work with, at least for the time being. It was important to keep focussed on the main aspects of my research which were to do with student teaching overseas. However much of the literature focussed on a wider consideration of study abroad and a line had to be drawn in order to resist the temptation to look
at too many, often very interesting aspects which would mean that research on student teaching would lose its central position in the study.

One of my more remarkable personal discoveries concerned the personalities of the American students with whom I worked, both on the questionnaires and during the interviews. I was struck by their very positive attitudes, not only towards my research, but also to their teaching, their placements and life in general. This was quite a culture shock for me, and at first I thought that the positive responses might be uncritical or unconsidered but the depth of thought and use of illustrative examples made me realise that the participants’ enthusiasm was genuine, and showed a great deal of reflective thinking on their part. They had learned much about other cultures during their placements; but I too learned much about their culture during my research.

Over time I became aware that my writing style had changed and the second half of the dissertation may show a growing ability to write as well as a greater maturity of style. Re-reading the earlier chapters confirmed this impression, and my immediate reaction was to consider completely re-writing them; however I also remembered “ABD” and decided against such drastic action. As a result of my research I have co-written my first long paper for an academic journal. I have presented some of the early findings at a conference in the United States and I have three more presentations to make over the coming year in other parts of the world. The journey from student to scholar has been a long one and eventually I hope to arrive at one end having travelled from the other for what seems a very long time.

6.9 Conclusion
In this chapter I re-visited the aims for my research and summarised the key findings. These identified that although the student teachers were often challenged to make sense of their placement environment, they developed a range of professional and personal skills which transferred to their subsequent teaching posts. In addition they gained a useful global perspective, on both teaching and the culture of their placement country. They experienced frustrations and difficulties, and the placement was often far more challenging for them than if they had chosen to remain in the United States. Not only did they have to contend with varying educational systems, sometimes totally different from anything they had experienced, but they
also faced many cultural and emotional challenges as well. However, for all but a minority the experience was a source of immense cross-cultural, first-hand experiential learning opportunities.

I identified the limitations of my research and suggested changes I would make if I were to conduct this research again. I made recommendations for further research both linking back to my own work and within the wider topic of student teaching in general. I looked at the significance of my work and the new knowledge and ideas it brings to the research on this topic. I think two important contributions are the positive light in which participants viewed their experiences, and the identification of specific benefits attached to student teaching overseas, particularly in relation to teacher educators who may as yet be unconvinced as to its usefulness. Their hesitation, due in part to concerns about the efficacy of student teaching overseas and its ability to prepare teachers for schools in the United States, may also partly be the result of innate conservatism in teacher education departments. The positive and practical results of my research will hopefully inspire teacher educators to look more positively on the idea in future.

The education of teachers is indeed a tricky business, and the challenges will not get any easier. The third International Association of Universities global survey (Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2010) reported that 95% of its 745 respondents from 115 countries agreed that the internationalisation process results in significant benefits, most importantly the broader international outlook of faculty and students and an enhanced quality of academic work. Future developments in this field need to include student teaching as part of the internationalising process so that teachers can prepare young people to work in a future world about which we know little except that it will be different. Greenberg (2009) sums it up thus:

There is a need to educate teachers about what others are doing around the world and we need to integrate into our teacher education programs the kind of study and international experience that will make future educators globally competent and knowledgeable about international perspectives and development. (p.31)

I hope that my research will make a small contribution to this process.
References


New York, NY: International Institute of Education.


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Appendix 1  Student Teaching questionnaire (converted from the website)

Section 1  Personal Information

1. Pseudonym
2. Year of placement
3. Country location for Student teaching placement
4. Type of school

5. What are you doing now professionally?

6. How many years have you been in either a part time or full time teaching post?

Section 2  General reflections on your placement

7. Which of these factors were the two most important in motivating you to complete the Student Teaching Program?

- Member of faculty
- Prior knowledge of place through family or friends
- Previous travel abroad
- A desire to do something completely different
- To enhance your professional development
- To broaden your opportunities for a future career

8. Identify three highlights from your teaching experience.
   a) 
   b) 
   c)

9. Identify up to three challenges you faced (either personally or professionally) which you may not have experienced if you had completed your student teaching at home.
   a) 
   b) 
   c)

10 What was the most memorable thing for you about the whole experience?

Section 3 - The Educational setting for your student teaching placement

11. Thinking about the education system you worked in during your student teaching please rate the following aspects of this system according to how different they were from the system you know in your country. 1 = little or no difference. 5 = significant difference.

- The curriculum
- Methods of planning including lessons
- Classroom management techniques
12. Thinking about your subsequent teaching employment, consider for each of the same points, how easy or difficult was it to adapt or transfer what you had previously experienced in student teaching, to your teaching post. 1 = easy to adapt. 5 = very difficult to adapt. (If you click on levels 4 or 5, please provide details in the corresponding "comments" section.

13. To what extent, if any, did the identified differences put you at an advantage/disadvantage when you began teaching?

14. Read the following statements and rank only the three most applicable to you (1=most applicable, 2= next most applicable, 3 = less applicable)

- I learned about a different culture which is beneficial to my teaching
- Student teaching abroad allowed me to understand the culture that some of the children in my present class come from
- I learned about different teaching methods and resources
- It expanded my confidence in my own ability to teach
- I gained a different perspective on my home country through the eyes of people abroad
- I found it challenging to adapt my student teaching experience to posts back in the US
- I learned that teaching is teaching wherever you are in the world
- I learned a lot about how I look at the world
- I gained a different perspective on both education and myself as an educator
• I am more flexible and open to change

15. Which, if any, of your own beliefs, values or perspectives changed as a result of your student teaching placement?

16. How far did the Student Teaching Program enable you to become a better educator?

Section 4 Employment Related Responses

17. Have you held a teaching position since you completed the student teaching program?
YES / NO

18. If you have held a teaching position since you completed the student teaching program in which country was it?

19. How many years have you held a part-time teaching post?

20. How many years have you held a full-time teaching post?

21. If you have held a teaching position since you completed the student teaching program, how was your placement viewed by the hiring principal or school authority?

22. In your perception are there any important aspects of your own education system which you feel you missed out on by doing a student teaching placement through the program? Was there anything you had to learn or discount when you began teaching?

23. What has been the overall impact of the experience on your career to date?

Section 5 General comments

24. Enter any further comments you have about the student teaching program.
(Add box for comments) (Add Thanks box)
### Appendix 2 Interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housekeeping questions and thanks</th>
<th>Principal questions</th>
<th>Supplementary questions (as required)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thanks for meeting/ Check timings Are you happy that I record our conversation? Remind participant of reason as to why we are meeting.</td>
<td>1. Tell me about your overseas student teaching experience? Where were you? What are your memories of it?</td>
<td>• Why did you choose to participate? • What were the most challenging aspects? • What were particular challenges for you? • How easy was it to adapt to teaching back in North America?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What was the effect of participation in the programme on you as an educator?</td>
<td>• Did you miss out on aspects of teaching practice you might have gained if you had chosen to stay in North America? • How do you view schools overseas now? • How do you view schools in North America as a result of your experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Can you describe the effect the placement has had on your own personal development both then and up to now?</td>
<td>• Did the experience change you and your beliefs at all? • Did your personal skills and attributes change as a result of this placement? If so in what way? • How did your host school view you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. How far has the experience impacted on your professional career?</td>
<td>• How was your experience perceived in schools in North America when you applied for a job? • Have you implemented any of the ideas you gained overseas into your subsequent teaching? • If I were to observe you in your classroom would I see any evidence of your overseas experience? • How transferable were the skills you gained overseas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. How important do you feel it is for teachers to have an international experience? What specific benefits or challenges does this give them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. What are the barriers to participation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 Ethics approval letter

Ms P Richardson

23rd May 2006

Dear Paula

Re: Ethics approval

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that your application can be approved with the following conditions:

In section A the student should mark 'X' in the sections involves only anonymised or aggregated data and has the primary aim of being educational (e.g. student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, other than an MD or PhD)

There are some proof-reading errors which could be corrected e.g. section A6.3 and section A11.

In A11, why do staff of the GST program need access to the data, even if anonymised? This could be explained.

I think the study may well prove to be too big. In my view, there is no need to conduct as many interviews - but in terms of ethics, it's fine.

This is subject to receipt of a signed hard copy of Part B (declaration) of the School of Education Research Ethics application form which should be returned to Jacqui Gillett at the above address and which is available to download at:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/ethics

Yours sincerely

Chris Gaffney
Research Degrees Administrative Secretary
Appendix 4a) Invitation to participate in the research study on Student Teaching abroad

From Paula Richardson (contact details removed)
September 2006

Dear Colleagues

Some time ago you probably received a communication from Dr Craig Kissock and Dr Judy Kuechle the co-directors of the Student Teaching Abroad program regarding your participation in the project. You kindly replied and commented on various aspects of the program as well as letting them know where you are now and providing your contact details. Following a discussion with Judy and Craig I am now in the process of setting up a research project to look in greater depth at the effects of an overseas practicum on participants’ professional practice and personal lives. I am enrolled on the EdD programme at the University of Sheffield in the UK and I am hoping to present my research findings as part of the dissertation requirements for the degree award.

So how does that involve you?
I would like to correspond with you, initially with a questionnaire to begin the task of investigating the impact that participation has had on you over the years. I will select some of the responses to follow up by means of either a personal or a telephone interview early next year. Your identities will of course all remain confidential and your responses will be referred to anonymously in the text. I will be happy to share with you the outcomes of my research at some point in the future: this is likely to be on line. Your responses will also help the directors and staff of the program to improve the experience for future participants.

The time scale
I will be sending out the questionnaire from November 2006 onwards to all those who respond to this note indicating their willingness to participate. As you responded to the earlier email sent by Judy and Craig I am assuming that you are happy to contribute further to this research project; however if you do not wish to participate any further that is completely understood. I am also sending out pro forma for you to return to me if you are willing to complete the questionnaire on line.
I would like to thank you in advance for your help and I look forward to working with you in the future.
With best wishes

Paula Richardson
Appendix 4B  Student teaching abroad survey Paula Richardson 2006

I have read the information about participating in this survey and I am happy to complete an online questionnaire and be contacted at a future date about further participation in a face to face interview about my experiences of student teaching abroad. I understand that my responses will be anonymous. I am willing to provide my contact details below.

Signed __________________________ date ____________________

Name
____________________________________________________________________________

Email________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Cell phone number_________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

School details________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

If chosen for interview the best location and details would be:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Other information / details I would like you to know
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for the information. Can you please return the completed forms to me at:

(Email address provided)

 Paul Richardson
Appendix 5  Participant responses to the online survey

Example 1

Participant 16 (Completed Survey)

•Section 1 - Personal Information
  1. Pseudonym
     XXXXX male
  2. Year of placement
     1998
  3. Country location for Student teaching placement
     New Zealand
  4. Type of School
     Secondary
  5. What are you doing now professionally?
     I am pursuing a graduate degree in Education at the University of Alberta. Next year, I intend to begin doctoral study at the University of British Columbia.
  6. How many years have you been in either a part-time or full-time teaching post?
     4

•Section 2 - General Reflections on Your Placement

  7. Which of these factors were the two most important in motivating you to complete the overseas student teaching program?
     1. A desire to do something completely different
     2. To enhance your professional preparation for teaching

  8. Identify three highlights from your teaching experience.
     1. working with Maori students
     2. Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Center
     3. teaching form six Physics

  9. Identify up to three challenges you faced (either personally or professionally) which you may not have experienced if you had completed your student teaching at home.
     1. loneliness

  10. What was the most memorable thing for you about the whole experience?
      • It was my first experience away from North America. It opened my eyes to the world and helped me to think about my place within it.
      • The people at my school were extremely helpful. It was an overwhelmingly positive experience that initiated my desire to travel and learn about as many people and places as possible.

•Section 3 - The Educational Setting for Your Student Teaching Placement

  11. Thinking about the education system you worked in during your student teaching please rate the following aspects of this system according to how different they were from the system you know in your country. 1 = little or no difference. 5 = significant difference.
      • The curriculum content (2)
      • The process of planning for teaching (1)
      • The structure of lessons (2)
      • Behavior management techniques (1)
      • Teaching styles (1)
      • Nature and amount of resources (1)
12. Thinking about your subsequent teaching employment, consider for each of the same points, how easy or difficult was it to adapt or transfer what you had previously experienced in student teaching, to your teaching post. 1 = easy to adapt. 5 = very difficult to adapt. (If you click on levels 4 or 5, please provide details in the corresponding "comments" section.

- Procedures for assessing student learning (1)
- Working with special needs (1)
- The structure of the school day (3)

13. To what extent, if any, did the identified differences put you at an advantage / disadvantage when you began teaching?
There were not any significant differences between the school in New Zealand and other schools I have worked in.

14. Read the following statements and rank only the three most applicable to you. 1 = most applicable. 2 = next most applicable. 3 = less applicable.

- I learned about a different culture which is beneficial to my teaching (1)
- Student teaching abroad allowed me to understand the culture that some of the children in my present class come from (3)
- I learned about different teaching methods and resources (2)
- It expanded my confidence in my own ability to teach (1)
- I gained a different perspective on my home country through the eyes of people abroad (2)
- I found it challenging to adapt my student teaching experience to a teaching position back in my country (3)
- I learned that teaching is teaching wherever you are in the world (2)
- I learned a lot about how I look at the world (2)
- I gained a different perspective on both education and myself as an educator (2)
- I am more flexible and open to change (2)

15. Which, if any, of your own beliefs, values or perspectives changed as a result of your student teaching placement?
The parallels between New Zealand and Canada (i.e. colonial history) were striking. Working in a school with ~50% Maori population allowed me to reflect on the efforts made to provide effective education to Canadian indigenous peoples.

16. Did the overseas student teaching program enable you to become a better educator?
The program provided an opportunity for me to explore one small part of the world, and in doing so opened doors to further global educational experiences. It exposed me to a range of educators with a diversity of approaches and helped to build my confidence as a beginning teacher.

•Section 4 - Employment Related Responses

17. Have you held a full-time or part-time teaching position since you completed the GST program?
Yes
18. If you have held a teaching position since you completed the GST program, in which country? Turkey
19. How many years have you held a part-time teaching post? 2
20. How many years have you held a full-time teaching post? 2

21. If you have held a teaching position since you completed the student teaching program, how was your placement viewed by the hiring principal or school authority? My international teaching experiences have always been viewed as a valuable asset. My experience with the program helped me attain teaching jobs both overseas and in Canada. It was also viewed highly by the department in which I am now enrolled as a graduate student.

22. In your perception are there any important aspects of your own education system which you feel you missed out on by doing a student teaching placement through the program? Was there anything you had to learn or discount when you began teaching? There are small differences between every school and school district. If I had done my internship within Canada I may have learned more about the system in place here but I would have missed out on a much more valuable experience in New Zealand.

23. What has been the overall impact of the experience on your career to date? Extremely positive. I can identify the program as a catalyst of my desire to pursue and study education from a global perspective. It has helped in the attainment of teaching jobs both at home and abroad, and was also useful experience to take with me into my graduate program.

Section 5 - General Comments
24. Enter any further comments you have about the student teaching program. A wonderful program that I always suggest to undergraduate education students

Example Participant 2

•Section 1 - Personal Information
1. YYYY Male
2. Year of placement 2006
3. Country location for Student teaching placement United Kingdom
4. Type of School Secondary

5. What are you doing now professionally? Substitute teaching and full time work in an adult foster care group home.

6. How many years have you been in either a part-time or full-time teaching post? 1

•Section 2 - General Reflections on Your Placement
7. Which of these factors were the two most important in motivating you to complete the Program? 1. Advice from a member of faculty
   2. To enhance your professional preparation for teaching

8. Identify three highlights from your teaching experience.
   1. Opportunity to explore some of the history of England.
9. Identify three challenges you faced (either personally or professionally) which you may not have experienced if you had completed your student teaching at home.

- A student population that was not interested in learning.
- A school that was torn apart by internal politics.
- A total lack of preparedness for the student teachers that were placed in the school.

10. What was the most memorable thing for you about the whole experience?

- The opportunity to see a differing cultural viewpoint from a similar culture.

**Section 3 - The Educational Setting for Your Student Teaching Placement**

11. Thinking about the education system you worked in during your student teaching please rate the following aspects of this system according to how different they were from the system you know in your country. 1 = little or no difference. 5 = significant difference.

- The curriculum content (5)
- The process of planning for teaching (4)
- The structure of lessons (3)
- Behavior management techniques (4)
- Teaching styles (5)
- Nature and amount of resources (5)
- Procedures for assessing student learning (5)
- Working with special needs (5)
- The structure of the school day (5)

12. Thinking about your subsequent teaching employment, consider for each of the same points, how easy or difficult was it to adapt or transfer what you had previously experienced in student teaching, to your teaching post. 1 = easy to adapt. 5 = very difficult to adapt. (If you click on levels 4 or 5, please provide details in the corresponding "comments" section.)

- The curriculum content (5)
- The process of planning for teaching (5)
- The structure of lessons (5)
- Behavior management techniques (5) *It is far easier to use simple psychological redirections in the USA.*
- Teaching styles (5) *Many of the teachers I observed were harsh in England.*
- Nature and amount of resources (5) *Many more resources in USA.*
- Procedures for assessing student learning (5) *England seemed to be opinion based assessing, especially in A level classes.*
- Working with special needs (5) *I did not see any real attempt in England to work with special needs.*
- The structure of the school day (5)

13. To what extent, if any, did the identified differences put you at an advantage / disadvantage when you began teaching?

I am at an extreme disadvantage. The fact that I took place in the program has been working against me in gaining a full time position, as I have been asked "were the schools here not good enough for you?"

14. Read the following statements and rank only the three most applicable to you. 1 = most applicable. 2 = next most applicable. 3 = less applicable.

- I gained a different perspective on my home country through the eyes of people abroad (3)
- I found it challenging to adapt my student teaching experience to a teaching position back in my country (1)
- I gained a different perspective on both education and myself as an educator (2)
15. Which, if any, of your own beliefs, values or perspectives changed as a result of your student teaching placement?
None

16. Did the overseas student teaching program enable you to become a better educator?
I do not believe that the program gave me anything more than a waste of 4 months.

**Section 4 - Employment Related Responses**

17. Have you held a full-time or part-time teaching position since you completed the program? 
no

18. If you have held a teaching position since you completed the program, in which country? None

19. How many years have you held a part-time teaching post?
0

20. How many years have you held a full-time teaching post?
0

21. If you have held a teaching position since you completed the program, how was your placement viewed by the hiring principal or school authority? 
Negatively.

22. In your perception are there any important aspects of your own education system which you feel you missed out on by doing a student teaching placement through the student teaching program? Was there anything you had to learn or discount when you began teaching?
I lost out on making contacts within the local education community. This lack of contacts has been detrimental in gaining substitute work or interviews for full time positions. Within small town Minnesota it is more important to know people who can recommend you rather than an experience.

23. What has been the overall impact of the experience on your career to date?
I have a greater belief in the superiority of the US education system.

**Section 5 - General Comments**

24. Enter any further comments you have about the program.

In my opinion the GST program was the waste of a semester that I could have spent at home, learning the political structure of our school system and making beneficial contacts to become known and accepted within my own teaching community.