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# Canadian English teachers in South Korea: A look at how interpersonal and intercultural communication impacts the experience of working abroad

**Katarzyna Pipin**

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Communication

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To my parents who have instilled in me the importance of education and who offered me support and encouragement throughout the course of this thesis.

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*"Considering that not only the language but also the pragmatics and intercultural conventions of global communication are modeled after native English speech, every native-speaking English teacher abroad is not only a linguistic and cultural ambassador, but also a mediator and facilitator of international communication."*

(Govardhan, Nayar, & Sheorey, 1999, p. 124)

**Abstract**

Teaching English abroad, particularly in South Korea, is a popular choice for many Canadian university graduates. This research begins to examine the unique experiences of young, educated Canadians who lived and worked in this East Asian country for an extended period of time. This study is based on a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with 10 Canadians in the Ottawa area who taught English in South Korea for a period of one year or longer between 2001 and 2006.

The findings show that while most of those interviewed had little knowledge of South Korea before leaving, their communication with other expatriates and the local Korean population resulted in predominantly positive perceptions of both their time abroad and of the Korean culture.

This thesis contributes to the field of expatriate literature, where limited attention has been devoted to teaching abroad, and adds to the field of communication by bringing into it existing literature on expatriate management.

*Key words:* expatriate management, social support, intercultural contact, repatriation.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Personal Interest

In 2004, less than a year after graduating from university, I decided to go abroad to teach English as a second language. While my initial interest was to live and work in the Middle East, my research quickly suggested that the Republic of South Korea in East Asia offered both financial and logistical benefits that could not compete with those of other countries. After two short months of preparation – interviews with schools, a working visa from the embassy and finalized travel and living arrangements – I departed to teach English in Ulsan, an industrial city with a comparable population to Ottawa.

The next year was full of new experiences: learning to live within a different culture, establishing relationships with other foreigners and with the local South Korean population, and adjusting to the stresses of a new job – especially since I had no previous teaching background. Overall, it was a unique time, which I now consider one of the best learning experiences of my life. However, it was not until I returned home a year and a half later, that I began to seriously think about the phenomenon of teaching English abroad. This led to my decision to write this thesis.

The objective of the following chapters is to shed light on the experiences of young, educated Canadians who choose to teach English in South Korea following the completion of university. To gain a better understanding of their experiences, I focused on why people choose to teach in South Korea, how they manage the teaching aspect, how they relate to other English-speaking foreigners as well as to Koreans, and how they perceive their year abroad upon their return to Canada. It became obvious from my

research that communication, both interpersonal and intercultural, was central to the overall experience of teaching English in South Korea.

## Facts and Statistics

Teaching English in South Korea has become increasingly popular among Canadians over the last decade. According to the Embassy of the Republic of South Korea in Ottawa, 549 Canadians were issued E-2 working visas (specifically for teaching conversational English) in 1999. The demand has been steadily increasing over the last 10 years. In 2008, the embassy issued 3,080 of those same visas to Canadians wishing to teach English in this East Asian country (M. Lee, personal communication with Consular Office in Ottawa, September 15, 2009).

This increased interest begs the question: what makes South Korea such a popular teaching destination for Canadian university graduates seeking to work abroad? According to interviews conducted for this thesis, as well as an informal scan of popular online forums such as *Dave's ESL Café*, Korea's competitive salaries, straight-forward application processes, the absence of previous teaching requirements, and high demand for English teachers make it an attractive choice for Canadians looking for employment after university.

Most Canadians interested in working as English language teachers in South Korea are recruited to private foreign-language institutes known as *hakwons* in Korean. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the "English as a Second Language market in Korea is extremely competitive" with hundreds of *hakwons* located all over the country (Teaching English in Korea, 2009, section 2, para. 2). These institutes employ expatriates from English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada,

Great Britain, New Zealand and the United States to teach conversation classes to Korean students of all ages and to business men and women who wish to improve their speaking and comprehension skills.

While some Canadians who travel to South Korea have teaching certification and former classroom experience, most hold only a university degree, which is often in a discipline unrelated to teaching or the study of the English language. They find themselves in a new job, in a foreign country, often with no previously established contacts. Over the course of the year, they learn to adapt to their new environment and to the challenges that come with living and working abroad. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, "Most of these people bring their own unique expectations to their jobs, as well as their own individual reactions to the circumstances in which they find themselves" (Teaching English in South Korea, 2009, section 14, para. 2). As this thesis shows, Canadians who live and teach in South Korea often have limited expectations of what to expect from their sojourn and from the South Korean culture before they leave Canada. After a year abroad, they return to Canada having had unique experiences that leave them personally and culturally enriched with new perceptions of South Korea and its people.

## Theoretical Location

The topic of this thesis, the experiences of Canadian English teachers in South Korea, locates itself in the field of expatriate management, but also relates to interpersonal and intercultural communication. It touches on the areas of adjustment (Puck et al., 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2005; Haslberger, 2005; Selmer, 2002; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991), social support (Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003;

Kraimer et al., 2001; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Adelman, 1988), intercultural contact (Gudykunst, 2005; Hofstede, 1994; Bennett, 1988; Hall, 1970) and to a limited extent, on repatriation (Kohonen 2008, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Osland, 1995; Black, 1992). Consequently, these four areas are explored in greater detail in the literature review chapter, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of what is involved in embarking on such an experience.

The abovementioned concepts were specifically chosen among others in expatriate literature as they are directly linked to the experience of temporarily living abroad and are representative of the themes that emerged from the interview process. While other areas in expatriate management and intercultural communication literature, such as cultural colonization through language, stereotypes, minority vs. majority relations, and expatriate work performance, are also useful to understanding the expatriate's experience, the chosen four areas were most suited to the scope of this particular study.

## Value of Topic

In the context of globalization, this research topic is valuable as it sheds light on an interesting phenomenon. Globalization has not only brought about an increase in international work opportunities, but with the rising popularity of the English language, it has specifically created a need for English teachers. As Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey (1999) note, "English is becoming the world's most taught, learned, and used second or foreign language. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for English" (p. 114). Today, there are 1.5 billion English speakers around the world, with English being an official language in 62 countries (Tsuda, 2008). With increasing international work

options brought on by globalization, and more specifically, with more Canadians teaching English abroad, research like this is helpful in understanding the experience of living abroad and sheds light on factors that may enhance the experience for those considering this type of employment.

## Research Questions

When approaching this study, I decided to focus on three main areas of interest: why these individuals chose to teach in South Korea, what they experienced during their year away, and finally, how did communication in the form of social support influence their time abroad. Out of this initial interest and from the information emerging from the interviews with the participants, it became obvious that communication was integral to the overall experience.

As a result, this thesis attempts to answer the following three questions:

1. Why do young Canadian university graduates go to teach English in South Korea?
2. What is it like to experience living and working in South Korea?
    a. How do these expatriates handle the teaching aspect of their experience?
    b. How do these expatriates interact with other English-speaking foreigners?
    c. How do these expatriates interact with South Koreans?
    d. How do these expatriates perceive their experience and the South Korean culture and its people upon their return to Canada?
3. How does communication in the form of social support influence the expatriate experience?

## Methodology

This thesis takes as its starting point the personal accounts of Canadians who lived and worked in South Korea and attempts to convey the meanings that are at the core of these experiences. As a result, the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews was employed to gain insight and understanding into what it is like to experience living and teaching English in South Korea (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2006; Hopf, 2004; Kvale, 1996).

Ten interviews were conducted between July 2008 and January 2009 with six females and four males recruited through two methods: a poster advertised in Korean restaurants around Ottawa and through snowball sampling (Johnson, 2009). The recruitment and interview process was conducted in accordance with the University of Ottawa's ethical guidelines. Following the interviews, transcripts were analyzed using narrative analysis to determine emerging categories and themes (Neuman, 2004; Reissman, 1993).

## Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into the following five chapters:

*1. Introduction*: This chapter provides an overview of the topic as well as its objectives.

*2. Literature Review*: This chapter outlines the relevant theoretical framework and locates this study's place in existing literature.

*3. Methodology*: This chapter provides an overview of the research method that was used to conduct this study, including: the research strategy, ethical considerations,

recruitment of participants, interview process, data reliability and validity, as well as the analysis.

*4. Results and Analysis:* This chapter presents the results of the 10 interviews conducted with Canadians who taught English in South Korea. It is divided into four main headings: pre-departure reasons for leaving, the experience itself, perceptions upon return to Canada, and finally, the role of communication in shaping the experience.

*5. Conclusion*: The final chapter presents the implications of this thesis, including its limitations and possibilities for future research.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents literature that is related to living and working abroad. First, the discussion begins with a look at the field of expatriate management which outlines why professionals work outside of their own country and the factors that are critical in determining successful adjustment. Second, literature on social support is presented because forming new relationships while working overseas is an important part of determining the success of the overall experience. Third, literature on intercultural communication is outlined as it is an integral part of living and working in a foreign country where interaction with host nationals is inevitable. Finally, repatriation is touched on as the perceptions upon one's return home are a critical component of the expatriate experience. After the relevant theories are discussed, a diagram is presented, which visually outlines where the topic is situated in literature. Subsequently, the objective of this thesis and the research questions that guide it are presented.

## Expatriate Management

The first section of the literature review deals with the field of expatriate management. The literature from this field specifically relates to Canadians who work as English teachers in South Korea. These individuals find themselves living and working abroad due to the increase in professional mobility brought on by globalization (Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey, 1999). While overseas, they have to learn how to manage the experience of expatriation, which involves successfully adjusting to the new surroundings by learning how to function in the host country. This is made easier in part through the development and maintenance of social relationships (Johnson et al., 2003;

Kraimer et al., 2001; Adelman, 1987). The field of expatriate management helps to understand why the Canadians interviewed for this thesis chose to teach abroad and the different factors that they faced in the adjustment process of living and working in a different country.

The first part of this chapter outlines what constitutes an expatriate by defining the term and relating it specifically to English teachers abroad. Following this, adjustment is introduced as this is the predominant focus of expatriate literature. Finally, different dimensions of adjustment are outlined to better understand the factors that determine successful adaptation and that help the expatriate better manage his/her experience.

*Defining expatriate*

As defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, the term *expatriate* refers to "a person who lives outside of their native country" (Pearsall, ed., 2002). This encompasses individuals who leave their homeland to live or travel abroad for an extended period of time. These include, but are not limited to, members of the military and the foreign service, business men and women, missionaries, students, travellers, and of course, language teachers. In the field of expatriate management, authors Littrel et al. (2006) define expatriate employees as "individuals who relocate from one country to another for at least one year," excluding in their interpretation of the term short-term business travel and international assignments (p. 356). Their definition of the term, based on a review of 25 years of research on cross-cultural training, is suitable to this research, especially as it specifically defines a timeline for expatriation. In the case of Canadian English teachers in South Korea, the length of employment abroad is a minimum of one year.

*English language teachers as expatriates*

In today's globalized world crossing borders has become the norm. As companies expand internationally, more individuals are recruited to travel or work abroad. In their effort to integrate theoretical and empirical work on international adjustment, researchers Black, Mendenhall & Oddou (1991) note that scholars have been studying the issue of effective expatriate adjustment since the 1970s, with the last global decade seeing a greater increase in research. They observe that the "internationalization of the world's markets has led to a significant increase in cross-cultural interactions" (p. 291). The new globalized world has created opportunities for international employment where individuals are recruited based on their skills and talents, independent of where they are located. Consequently, the existing global employment opportunities have led to international work experience being recognized as a vital asset in individuals, which is often seen as a competitive advantage (Takeuchi et al., 2005). As Flynn (2008) points out, international experience may be seen by future employers as a positive quality, attributing to it such factors as tolerance of other cultures, problem-solving skills, and a drive for new experiences. While many studies in the field of expatriate management focus on multinational firms and the overseas relocation of their employees (Micciche, T., 2009; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009; Selmer, 1998; Aryee, 1996; Black, 1987), the literature highlights the fact that the globalization of economies and businesses has resulted in an increase in people living and working abroad.

Alongside globalization, the English language has also permeated borders and is considered to be on its way to becoming a global language, and is the official language of communication for many international organizations (Tsuda, 2008). According to

Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey (1999) who in their study evaluate the English teaching situation abroad, English is quickly becoming the world's most taught second language and is consequently the driving force behind an increasing demand for English teachers. As the authors state, "The job opportunities for native English speakers interested in teaching English in foreign countries – which is where most of the English language learning is occurring in today's world – seem to be better than ever" (p. 114). As a result, there has been an increasing need for English language teachers all over the world.

While the opportunities for international employment exist, committing to an overseas job is not just a professional choice, but is a personal decision as well. As Cerdin & Dubouloy (2004) show in their study of expatriation from a psychoanalytical perspective, individual perceptions are often a critical factor behind the decision to leave one's own country. The researchers state that part of the decision can be attributed to the idea of personal maturation and autonomy, which is appealing to the expatriate. As well, they note there is in part an element of "fantasy and idealization in future expatriates' vision of their host country and the life that awaits them there," mixed with the desire to live in another culture and to leave behind personal problems (Cerdin & Dubouloy, 2004, pp. 962-963). The overseas assignment may be viewed by some as an adventure, where the challenges and new experiences can lead to self-discovery and personal growth (Osland, 1995). Tharenou (2003) links the willingness to work abroad to personal characteristics and environmental factors such as personal agency and increasing international opportunities. Ultimately, the decision to work in a foreign country can be attributed to existing global job opportunities, as well as both professional and personal interests.

*Adjustment*

When a person has made the decision to leave one's own country and commit to working in a foreign environment, managing the experience is critical to successful adjustment and to completing the assignment. Much of the literature in the field of expatriate management focuses on the adjustment process, where two distinct components are distinguished. The first is psychological adjustment, which deals with a person's emotional well-being, and the second is sociocultural, which considers one's ability to adapt to a new environment (Selmer, 2002). As the author notes, "psychological adjustment deals with subjective well-being or mood states such as depression, anxiety and fatigue," while "sociocultural adjustment deals with the ability to 'fit in' or to negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture as measured by the amount of difficulty experienced in managing everyday situations in the host culture" (Selmer, 2002, p. 73). Not only will the new expatriate need to adjust to the external factors of living in a new environment, but he/she will inevitably have to deal with the emotional aspects of the experience. These components are considered important factors to adjustment in existing expatriate literature that includes studies on the various dimensions of successful adaptation (Haslberger, 2005; Selmer, 2002; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

Black (1987) defines adjustment in terms of subjectivity and objectivity, noting that "subjectively, it is the degree of comfort the incumbent feels in the new role and the degree to which he or she feels adjusted to the role requirements," and "objectively, it is the degree to which the person has mastered the role requirements and is able to demonstrate that adjustment via his or her performance" (p. 278). The sojourners must

deal with their own emotional grasp of how they are doing, along with their actual physical performance in their new environment. It is apparent that psychological and socio-cultural factors are at play. It is not only the external factors that need to be considered, but the internal or attitude-related indicators as well.

Haslberger (2005) offers a broad definition of adaptation, stating: "Cross-cultural adaptation is a complex process in which a person becomes capable of functioning effectively in a culture other than the one he or she was originally socialized in" (p. 86). He argues that studies which consider multidimensional aspects (McEvoy & Parker, 1995; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Kim, 1988) to adjustment are superior to ones that only explore certain aspects in isolation, such as behavioural, emotional, cultural or environmental (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Grove & Torbiorn, 1985; Oberg, 1960). It is apparent that there are many facets to expatriate adjustment. It is not simply a question of learning the language and becoming physically comfortable or familiar in a new setting, but it extends to many internal factors of a psychological and emotional nature that need to be considered as well.

*Dimensions of the cross-cultural adjustment process*

The review of existing expatriate literature shows adjustment is dependent on a variety of factors, which are indicative of successful adaptation (McEvoy & Parker, 1995; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). As Mendenhall & Oddou (1985) underline, "expatriate acculturation is a multidimensional process rather than a one-dimensional phenomenon" (p. 43). In their review of empirical literature in the field, Black, Mendenhall & Oddou (1991) identify five dimensions of the cross-cultural adjustment process. These include *predeparture training, previous overseas experience,*

*organizational selection mechanisms, individual skills,* and *nonwork factors*. Their research builds on Black's (1987) original identification of three predominant areas of adjustment (general adjustment within the environment, work adjustment and interaction with the population adjustment) that help to understand the cross-cultural adjustment process when living and working abroad. While some expatriates may successfully adjust to their new employment, they may find it challenging to interact with host nationals. Black, Mendenhall & Oddou's (1991) dimensions identify the factors that may be helpful to the adjustment process of living and working in a foreign country.

These factors, which underscore the multidimensional aspect to adjustment recur frequently in various expatriate studies, and are further described below:

*Predeparture training:* This factor explores the level of employment and cross-cultural training one has been exposed to, prior to departing to a new country and the subsequent performance upon arrival. Many studies have looked at the role of prior cross-cultural training (Puck et al., 2008; Mendenhall et al., 2004; Kealy & Protheroe, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Lefley, 1986; Tung, 1981), but as Black & Mendenhall (1990) evaluate in their theoretical framework, "...empirical literature gives guarded support to the proposition that cross-cultural training has a positive impact on cross-cultural effectiveness" (p. 120). This is supported by Puck et al. (2008), who in their study of 339 expatriates conclude that predeparture training isn't necessarily linked to successful adjustment, but factors such as familiarity with host language may be helpful. While studies are inconclusive as to whether or not a person is better prepared for the expatriate experience if he/she receives training prior to departure, knowledge of the

culture and of what to expect in terms of work, may limit some of the shock and surprise of entering a new environment.

*Previous overseas experience:* As implied, this factor examines the extent to which an individual has traveled and to what extent his/her prior exposure to different cultures impacts the ease of adjustment in a foreign country. Studies on this subject vary in consensus, with some authors maintaining that the extent of previous overseas experience does not impact adjustment and others stating that it does to a degree (Takeuchi et al., 2005; Selmer, 2002). Based on her study of the adjustment of expatriates working in Hong Kong who had prior experience with Asian cultures, Selmer (2002) notes, "...prior international experience, whether culturally related or not, does not seem to have much effect on expatriates' psychological adjustment...experience from the very same place, has the strongest positive impact on expatriates' sociocultural adjustment" (p. 83). Selmer's study suggests that previous overseas experience does not have as great an impact on adjustment, as culture-specific exposure that may help to facilitate adaptation. As Takeuchi et al. (2005) note, "expatriates with more numerous or longer prior international experiences are likely to develop more comprehensive cognitive schemata [cognitive frameworks] than those with fewer or shorter prior international experience" (p. 89).

*Organizational selection mechanisms:* This factor refers to how companies decide on which employees to choose for overseas assignments. Similarly to *predeparture training* and *previous overseas experience*, *organizational selection mechanisms* deals with a component of the adjustment process that is controlled *before* an expatriate leaves his/her home country. As Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou (1987) state, businesses focus

on skills relevant to the overseas employment, often overlooking important criteria that may ensure successful adjustment. They opt instead for technical competence with respect to the job, instead of considering the personalities of employees and their willingness to work abroad if they are to succeed in adjusting to living in a foreign country.

*Individual skills:* This factor refers to personal skills, such as the mental health of the individual and his/her ability to adapt to stress, which is necessary for one to transition with relative ease into a new environment. While there are many external factors that affect the adjustment process, the personality of the expatriate and his/her ability to cope can have a tremendous impact on the level of successful adjustment.

*Nonwork factors:* These factors refer to important aspects of living abroad, which are not directly related to work. For example, this would include the level of social support, whether or not a spouse or family is present and is supportive, familiarity with culture, knowledge of the language, etc. These are critical as they contribute to the expatriate's well-being and reinforce his/her ability to cope in challenging situations.

The dimensions of adjustment are central to the study of expatriate research and are examined by numerous scholars, often overlapping. For instance, in another review of empirical studies, Mendenhall & Oddou (1985) categorize overseas adjustment into four dimensions: the *self-oriented dimension*, the *others-oriented dimension*, the *perceptual dimension* and the *cultural-toughness dimension*.

The *self-oriented dimension* refers to activities that "serve to strengthen the expatriate's self-esteem, self-confidence, and mental hygiene" (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985, p. 40). This includes one's ability to enjoy new activities within a new culture, the

ability to manage stress and succeed in the work-related portion of the overseas assignment. The *others-oriented dimension* refers to the expatriate's ability to "interact effectively with host-nationals," which according to Mendenhall & Oddou (1985), encompasses the ability to develop relationships with the local population and the expatriate's willingness to communicate with others (p. 41).

The *perceptual dimension* refers to the differences in perceptions and evaluations that are commonly found in different cultures. To put it simply, the greater the ability of an expatriate to accept cultural differences, the greater is his/her ability to adapt. The *cultural toughness dimension* refers to the fact that some cultures are easier to adapt to than others. Therefore, a person's ability to adjust to life in a new environment depends on the cultural proximity of the country to that of the expatriate's homeland. For instance, Canadians going abroad to work in South Korea are expected to experience more culture shock than those going to work in the United States, where the language and culture differences are less shocking than in the Asian country.

In his study of cross-cultural adaptation, Haslberger (2005) focuses on the multidimensional aspects of adjustment that exist in expatriate literature and identifies four independent constructs, which have an impact on the level of expatriate success. These include:

*Novelty* - This concept encompasses cultural "distance" and previous expatriate experience, which determines one's level of familiarity with a new culture and one's ability to cope in a new environment. Haslberger (2005) notes that cultural distance, meaning how different the country is, is negatively related to adaptation, while prior

experience of living in another country, and therefore familiarity, is a positive aspect of adjustment.

*Discretion* - This refers to the "level of tolerance within the host society" and "the socio-economic status the stranger enjoys in the new location" (Haslberger, 2005, p. 89). Therefore, the more accepting a new society is of the expatriate and his/her lifestyle, the higher the chances are that the expatriate will adapt well to the new environment, especially if his/her social status is respected by the host nationals.

*Self-efficacy* - Haslberger (2005) defines this construct as "the conviction of the person that he or she can overcome the obstacles encountered" (p. 90). This means that a person who is able to take on new challenges such as learning a new language and one who generally has a positive attitude and high confidence is more likely to succeed in a new culture than one who lacks those specific character traits.

*Social networks* - The extent to which the expatriate is able to form positive relationships is also a major factor which determines the level of adaptation success. If one is able to connect easily with others, whether with the local population or with other expatriates, his/her experience may be more positive and he/she will be better equipped to deal with the tribulations of living and working in a foreign country.

In conclusion, this section presented some of the literature from the field of expatriate management that is relevant to understanding the topic of this thesis. Having shed light on what defines an expatriate and linking this term specifically to Canadian teachers in South Korea, adjustment was then explored. As presented by different scholars, successful adjustment is dependent on a variety of factors, which have been

categorized into dimensions. From this, it became clear that expatriate adjustment is a multidimensional process.

This review of scholarly literature demonstrates that there are many indicators and predictors that have been studied and must be considered when determining successful adaptation to a new environment. The following section will focus on social support, which is one of the most influential components of successful adjustment abroad.

## Social Support

This second section of the literature review examines a critical factor to successful adjustment: social support. A review of expatriate literature shows that social support networks are integral to the adjustment process of living in a foreign country (Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer et al., 2001; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Adelman, 1988). The ability to connect with others and communicate with them the conflicting emotions that often arise from the new and often challenging situations that one finds him/herself in, can have a tremendous impact on the expatriate's well-being and on his/her perception of the experience. This field is important to the topic of this thesis because interaction with others – the expatriate community or the local population – is an important part of the Canadian teacher's year in South Korea, impacting one's perception of the experience.

The first part of this chapter looks at the definition of social support to better understand the concept and how it relates to the expatriate experience. Next, its importance as a method of alleviating stress while dealing with the anxiety and uncertainty of living in a foreign country is explored. Then, different types of social

support are presented, followed by factors that help determine the level of social support an expatriate receives during his/her time abroad.

*Defining social support*

*Social support*, *social ties*, *social networks*, *social capital,* are all terms that appear frequently within communication and expatriate literature. They are used interchangeably when referring to relationships that help relieve stress and promote well-being. Most commonly used, the term *social support* is a broad term that encompasses some of the more specific conceptualizations (Goldsmith, 2004).

Albrecht & Adelman (1987) define social support as "verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience" (p. 19). Their definition establishes social support as a form of communication that is helpful to alleviating stress by enforcing one's own confidence.

Fontaine (1986) is more detailed in his definition, stating that social support can be seen as networks consisting of "family, friends, neighbours, work associates, religious groups, recreational and educational associations, formal and informal counsellors, and self-help groups," which help to relieve the stress of overseas relocation (p. 362). As he notes, these networks play a valuable role in helping to serve many emotional and psychological needs, such as "affiliation; reinforcement; recognition; affirmation; assistance in mobilizing psychological resources; sharing tasks; validation of perceptions, beliefs, and actions; a host of resources including money, skills, and information; advice in handling life situations; and sometimes just the sharing of experiences – positive or

negative," (pp. 362- 363). His description suggests social support can serve many needs and can come from many areas, not just close family and friends. It can be found through acquaintances and non-intimate individuals that are present in the expatriate's life.

From the above two definitions, it can be derived that social support is a series of ties to others, grounded in communication, which help to satisfy a wide range of basic human needs, both physical and psychological, when adjusting to life within a foreign culture.

*Social support as stress relief and self-affirmation*

Literature in the area of social support demonstrates the importance of relationships as a means to facilitate the process of living and working abroad, especially in acute times of change or stress (Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003). When a person leaves his/her homeland and familiar surroundings, he/she is likely to experience a great deal of stress and anxiety when trying to adjust to the new environment. Liu & Shaffer (2005) state: "When expatriates enter foreign countries/cultures, their previous social networks become less salient and, until new networks are established, their psychological well-being is threatened by uncertainties in the new local environment" (p. 236). Although previous relationships and support may still be available through the help of modern technology (telephone, e-mail), the distance and inability to understand the expatriate's new situation lessens the impact (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Therefore, seeking out new forms of support to help alleviate stress is an essential step to successful adaptation overseas.

Many researchers have underscored the importance of social support when living in a foreign environment (Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer et al., 2001; Nicholson &

Imaizumi, 1993; Adelman, 1988; Fontaine, 1986; Caplan, 1974). They argue that forming relationships is critical to successful adjustment, especially when living abroad, where the challenges of daily life can often seem magnified. Suddenly, simple situations can become seemingly insurmountable because of the new surroundings, foreign language, and unfamiliar culture, resulting in higher stress and anxiety levels. However, being able to share these challenges with others who can listen and relate can be a helpful form of stress relief. As Adelman (1988) underscores, the "ability to cope with daily stressors, critical life transitions, and environmental or cultural change is inextricably tied to the social ecology in which we are embedded" (p. 183). Therefore, social support networks have a direct impact on anxiety relief. Being surrounded by family, friends, and acquaintances can help in alleviating stressful situations.

Not only do social support networks aid in the adjustment process by relieving stress and meeting emotional needs, but they are also helpful in developing a sense of confidence in the expatriate. As Adelman (1988) points out, "social feedback that reassures persons undergoing cross-cultural adjustment that these are temporary and pervasive reactions to a new situation, can help restore cognitive and behavioural control" (p. 186). Having support in a stressful situation can develop self-esteem and encourage trust in one's ability to handle the situation. Social support networks are therefore essential to relieving the anxiety associated with transferring to a new, foreign environment, as well as learning about one's self and re-affirming self-confidence.

Kraimer et al. (2001) classify three overarching types of benefits to social support: *aid*, *affect* and *affirmation*. *Aid* refers to the assistance that is provided through social support, which includes providing information and assistance that is helpful in

reducing the expatriates' stress. This can be as simple as getting help orienting oneself in new surroundings, such as learning where the local grocery store is or familiarizing oneself with the new environment's public transportation system. *Affect* entails the emotional support derived from developing personal relationships that are supportive and are based on mutual liking and compatibility. Finally, *affirmation* refers to the expatriates' realization, with the help of social support, that he/she is able to handle new and difficult situations.

*Types of social support*

As Adelman (1988) states, "Cross-cultural adjustment, particularly given the disruption of old ties, is dependent on the acceptance and reassurances of others in the new setting. Membership groups, of people undergoing similar changes, often serve to alleviate the stress of culture-shock and provide an ersatz community" (p. 189). Ersatz refers to the substitute social networks that function as a replacement for an expatriate's social ties back home. The new networks can be obtained formally through organized social groups such as sports teams or church associations, or informally through encounters with individuals at local bars or coffee shops.

The author identifies three types of social support, which are important to the adjustment process, and categorizes them as *close ties, comparable others,* and *weak ties*. According to the author, close ties refer to family and friends, whose support and encouragement helps the expatriate to deal with the new situation at hand. Comparable others are those who are undergoing the same or similar experience as the expatriate. These could include various formal or informal groups of individuals who "can serve as loosely structured self-help groups which anchor members in a collective experience"

(Adelman, 1988, p. 191). Through these networks, the expatriate is able to share his/her experiences and learn to cope in a new environment. Weak ties can include impersonal connections or even complete strangers. Adelman notes that although often overlooked, those on the "fringe of a sojourners' social network" are also very important (Adelman, 1988, p. 193). These include members of the local population, such as shopkeepers, neighbours or coworkers. Adelman (1988) notes that: "These providers often live in close proximity and can aid in the everyday, physical and emotional needs" (p. 194). Therefore, these relationships play more of a "functional" role and are crucial to the daily operations of someone who is new to the country and must rely on others for basic information.

Interestingly, in their study of 15 expatriates from France, authors Cerdin & Dubouloy (2004) find that while most of the men and women lead active social lives while abroad, they are aware that their sojourn is temporary. As a result, "all were aware they were only staying a short while and mentioned the short-lived and sometimes superficial nature of the relationships with other expatriates or local people" (Cerdin & Dubouloy, 2004, p. 975). While these relationships can be more intense, there is often less commitment involved. They are convenient and functional, but not necessarily long-lasting.

*Factors in finding social support*

In their investigation of successful expatriate adjustment, Liu & Shaffer (2005) identify three forms of forming social ties: *opportunity forms of social capital, motivational forms of social capital,* and *perceived host country national's ability as forms of social capital.* In their conceptual model for expatriate adjustment and

performance, they demonstrate that opportunities, motivation and ability directly impact the level of successful adaptation.

*Opportunity forms of social capital* refer to the expatriate's ability to access social networks. This is dependent on the density of social capital, which means, for instance, the existing population of other expatriates and the level of access that he/she has to these individuals. This can be established organized activities like sports teams or existing social networks like expatriate bars and hangouts. *Motivational forms of social capital* refer to the expatriates' willingness to partake in the existing social networks that are available to him/her. As Liu & Shaffer (2005) point out, this factor is dependent on the level of trust of the expatriate in his/her environment and the norm of reciprocity, which assumes that individuals will be treated in a similar way as they treat others. For example, if one helps another, it is generally expected that the receiving person will return the favour. Finally, the *perceived host country national's ability as forms of social capital* refers to the local population's capability to help the expatriate adjust to the new environment. Seeing as interaction with host nationals is inevitable, the host country national's willingness to help is an important factor in finding social support. Therefore, factors such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, personal traits and willingness to reach out, are important to the adjustment of the expatriate and his/her ability to form social ties.

Some researchers state that a key factor in forming social support ties is the personality of the expatriate. For instance, Johnson et al. (2003) state that extroversion is a relevant trait that helps the expatriate form new relationships. Other researchers find that sense of humour and ability to be patient also influences better adjustment

(Marquardt & Engel, 1993). In their study of the relationship between expatriates' personalities and the level of adjustment, Huang et al. (2005) identify five personality traits that are widely associated with social support and expatriate adjustment literature. These include *extroversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism*, and *openness to the experience*.

*Extroversion*, refers to an individual's ability to be sociable and outgoing, which the authors contend will allow the expatriate to "adjust better at work, in interactions with others, and in general living activities" (Huang et al., 2005, p. 1660). A*greeableness* is considered to be a person's ability to be understanding and cooperative. As Huang et al. (2005) note, "Agreeable individuals tend to adhere to the norms of other people. They seek acceptance and friendships with others" (Huang et al., 2005, p. 1661). Therefore, this characteristic enables the expatriate to overcome potential problems and to become more accommodating to the host culture. *Conscientiousness* is a trait that refers to a person's respectfulness of others and his/her ability to be responsible in any given situation. According to the authors, "highly conscientious expatriates will try their best to plan everything in advance, leading to a better general living adjustment" (Huang et al., 2005, p. 1661). *Neuroticism* is associated with "negative emotional stability, showing characteristics of nervousness, moodiness and a temperamental nature" (Huang et al., 2005, p. 1660). This kind of personality trait tends to negatively influence one's level of adjustment as the individual is less likely to be in control of his/her emotions and actions. Finally, *openness to experience* refers to the person's "interest in learning new things in the new setting" (Huang et al., 2005, p. 1662). Individuals who arrive in a foreign country

with little or no prior expectations, and who are willing to accept new situations, are considered to generally adapt well to new living conditions.

To conclude, existing research on expatriate adjustment shows that social support is crucial to the process of adaptation. When the expatriate arrives in a new and foreign country, his/her social ties and support networks are severed, and consequently, "the establishment of a personal network in local environment will signal the settlement and will facilitate the maintenance of psychological well-being" (Wang & Kanungo, 2004, p. 786). As this section examined, social support networks, including close and weak ties, are critical to successful adaptation as they provide stress relief and help the expatriate overcome his/her challenges. However, it is important to remember that finding social support networks abroad is dependent on a number of factors, including the personality traits of the expatriate. Ultimately, the successful adjustment process of the expatriate is dependent on the social support that is available to him/her during the time spent overseas. Having examined the importance of social support, the following chapter will look more closely at relationships between expatriates and the host nationals.

## Intercultural contact

The third section of the literature review deals with intercultural contact. Intercultural contact is an integral part of living and working in a foreign country because interaction with host nationals is inevitable and has a profound influence on the expatriate's adjustment process. As studies have shown, encounters that highlight differences in cultures have a direct influence on the sojourner's experience and impact the adjustment successes and failures of working overseas (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Black, 1987). Therefore, the field of intercultural communication, which focuses

on the different aspects of intercultural contact, is important when considering the experiences of English teachers in South Korea. This is especially true considering that the expatriates who succeed in their overseas sojourn are those who overcome intercultural challenges (Gudykunst, 2005). The field is important when considering English teachers in South Korea because during their year abroad, the expatriates live within a host culture that is different from theirs, forcing daily contact and communication.

The first part of this section looks at the definition of culture and cultural adjustment. Next, culture shock is explored, along with its different stages as presented by various scholars. Finally, the role of communication in intercultural adjustment is discussed as well as the cultural differences that are apparent in communication. These areas of study help understand the intercultural factors that come into play during a period of expatriation.

*Defining culture*

Culture can be defined as a "network of shared meanings" or a common view of the world derived from similar experiences (Zapf, 1991). Although culture can be explained as broadly or specifically as one likes, Samovar & Porter (2000) view it as "the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, special relationships, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving" (p. 7). The idea of group experiences is explored by Hofstede et al. (1994) who define culture as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from

another" (p. 5). Gudykunst and Kim (1992) offer a similar view of culture, conceiving it as "systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people" (p. 13). It is important to note the group aspect of the above definitions, which point to a commonality of shared meanings that are unique to different societies. It is a historically shared set of values and beliefs that creates meaning (Hall, 2005; Barnlund, 1998). Culture can therefore be understood as a set of meanings, shared values and viewpoints that are unique to a group of people over time.

*Cultural adjustment*

When an expatriate enters a new culture, he/she must adapt to the different cultural viewpoints that he/she may not have previously been familiar with. Since every nation lives by its own rules and regulations, it is necessary for a newcomer to become familiar with them. These include language, beliefs, cultural norms and practices (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). Depending on the level of cultural differences, this may require significant adjustment, which is "the degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country" (Black & Gregerson, 1991, p. 356). For at least a temporary period, the individual must learn to cope with the differences he/she is encountering between the old, familiar society and the new host country. This adaptation process is experienced by all expatriates who "To a greater or lesser extent, all must cope with a high level of uncertainty and unfamiliarity as they are in an ambivalent status" (Kim, 1988, p. 6). It is a complex process in which the expatriate becomes capable of functioning effectively in a foreign culture that he/she is not familiar with (Haslberger, 2005).

*Culture shock*

Adjustment to a new environment does not occur immediately. In fact, before a level of comfort is reached, a period of disorientation and anxiety is often experienced by the expatriate. When a person leaves one's own country and begins to adapt to living in a new and foreign environment for an extended period of time, there is bound to be some cultural conflict. When different cultures collide, miscommunication is a natural outcome. Oberg first introduced the term culture shock in 1960, which he defined as "an occupational disease" of individuals who found themselves in a very different culture from their own (Brein & David, 1971). This is not a gradual process, but is instead perceived as a shock, with the newcomer's senses being overloaded by a new and changed world (Louis, 1980). As Ruben, Askling & Kealey (1977) note, it is linked to the process of adjustment: "Culture shock focuses on the manner in which persons experience and cope with the cyclic psychological, physiological, and vocational fluctuations associated with the adjustment in the first months in a new environment" (p. 91). It can impact an expatriate both physically and psychologically (Smith, 2008). Ultimately, it is the result of being immersed in a new environment and having to learn quickly how to adapt to many previously not encountered cultural norms and expectations (Harris & Moran, 1983).

*Stages of culture shock*

In their review of psychological factors related to overseas adjustment, Brein and David (1971) identify the different stages of culture shock as set out originally by Oberg (1960). They include:

*Period of incubation* – this is the stage at which the expatriate is feeling great about his new environment. There is a sense of excitement, novelty, and general satisfaction with his/her new country.

*Period of crisis* – this period sets in once the expatriate begins to encounter difficulties and obstacles in his/her daily life. This could include the language barrier, getting around and finding things and places, and meeting new people.

*Period of recovery* – at this point, the expatriate has a handle on the new culture, believes he/she understands the new country and is able to function with less difficulty.

*Period of complete or nearly complete recovery* – at this stage, the foreigner accepts his new environment and, "although he may not be overly enthusiastic about the country, he is at least able to enjoy his experiences" (Brein & David, 1971, p. 218).

*Period of sojourner returning home* – when the expatriate finally returns home, he/she likely to experience reverse culture shock, but to a lesser extent since he/she is already familiar with the culture.

In her interpretation of the different stages of adjustment, Bennett (1998) relies on the U.S. Navy's interpretation of culture shock: fight, flight, filter and flex. In the first stage, the expatriate moves from enthusiasm to fighting, where "self protective mechanisms are engaged." The second stage, one may consider or choose to leave the new environment as a way of coping with the new difficulties he/she is facing. The third stage involves lowering defences and absorbing the new surroundings. Finally, the accommodation stage is reached, where the expatriate alters his/her perspective on the new environment. While the stages are similar to Oberg's, Bennett suggests that culture shock is a subcategory of transition experiences such as the loss of loved ones, or any

change in lifestyle. Culture shock is therefore part of a transition that requires one to adapt to a change in environment, where one is disoriented and overwhelmed for a period of time.

To better understand the newcomer experience, Louis (1980) proposes three key features that are associated with arriving in a new country. The first is change, where the differences between the old and new settings are highlighted. Everything appears new and foreign and the expatriate must adjust to all of the changes in his/her life. There is a learning process that takes place. Second is contrast, when the individual personally takes note of the differences in the new environment. For example, "how people dress in the new setting may or may not be noticed or experienced as a contrast by the newcomer, depending in part on whether dress differs between new and old settings" (p. 236). It is therefore something that is unique to the perception of the individual. Finally, surprise is another feature of the entry process, where the expatriate experiences unfamiliar situations that he/she was not expecting and was unprepared for.

All three approaches to culture shock are similar in that they underscore a period of uncertainty and crisis that slowly dissipates as one learns to deal with the uncertainty of his/her new environment. To a certain extent, they all fit into a predictable pattern that has been described in literature as a curvilinear relationship – the U-curve and W-curve phenomenon (Brein & David, 1971). The U-curve traces the adjustment of the sojourner in the host country – from arrival, to experiences of culture shock, to settling in, and finally to recovery – whereas the W-cure extends to the readjustment process back home (including new experiences of culture shock). Overall, culture shock forms part of the intercultural adjustment experience (Kim, 1988).

The different stages of adjustment to a new environment can bring about a lot of uncertainty and frustration. Therefore, social interaction with members of the local population is necessary to successful adaptation. As Fontaine (1986) notes, "friendships with host-culture nationals are initially more difficult to establish, but may ease long-term adjustment" (p. 365). Again, the necessity and benefits to social support are underlined. Establishing connections with the local population is important as the expatriate is dependant on support from the host nationals in order to become comfortable within the new culture.

*Role of Communication*

The major factor that must be considered when looking at expatriate adjustment is the intercultural communication between the expatriate and the host nationals. The contact which occurs between two different cultures is considered intercultural communication. The newcomer must negotiate his/her position in the new society, which requires understanding of the foreign language and familiarizing him/herself with the values and belief of the new society. Adapting to the new environment requires overcoming the daily stresses and differences. As some scholars have noted, the successful negotiation can have a positive impact on the personal growth of the individual (Kim, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Kim (1988) states: "Indeed, communication is at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation...Through effective communication, strangers are able to gradually increase their control over the environment and over life itself" (p. 59).

Because of the obvious daily interaction, "the sojourner's successful adjustment to an intercultural experience is highly dependent on his achievement of effective

interpersonal relations with his hosts" (Brein & David, 1971, p. 216). Therefore, there must be a positive relationship or at least a mutual understanding on both sides, which requires successful communication. As the authors note, "effective exchange of information, that is, communication, on both verbal and non-verbal levels of behaviour, is considered by the authors as being crucial to the development of such understanding" (p. 216).

The cultural adaptation process is linked directly to communication, as Hall (1959) stated early on, "culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 169). Similarly, Porter & Samovar (1995) underline the linkage between culture and communication: "Culture manifests itself in patterns of language and in forms of activity and behaviour that act as models for both the common adaptive acts and the styles of communication that enable people to live in a society within a given geographic environment at a given state of technical development at a particular moment of time" (p. 19). Their viewpoint implies that culture and communication are directly linked together – culture is expressed through communication and communication facilitates the articulation of culture.

Because culture is closely tied to communication, the successful adjustment of the expatriate is dependant on the effective exchange of information. This means minimizing the amount of misunderstanding between people within the host society and the expatriate. As Gudykunst (2004) notes, "Communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message similar to what was intended by the person transmitting" (p. 29). The better the comprehension and familiarity with the new culture, through language competence and familiarity with

customs for instance, the higher the chances that the individual will be more likely to take part and fit into his/her new surroundings. This is a crucial factor in a successful adaptation process. As Kim (1988) notes, "The greater their social communication participation, the greater their host communication competence, and the better adapted they are likely to be in the host environment" (p. 105). Therefore, there is a clear link between cultural communication and successful adjustment. Kim (2001) notes that an individual's ability to adapt to his/her new surroundings can improve over time.

While communication aids in an individual's adaptation to his/her new environment, personality factors also come into play. As Kim states, "Those who are more open-minded and receptive toward the host culture and who are stronger and more resilient under stressful circumstances are likely to be better able to manage the uncertainties and challenges of the host environment" (1988, p. 67). To that end, Chen & Starosta (2008) identify four personal attitudes that are integral to achieving communications competence. These include *self-concept*, *open-mindedness*, *nonjudgmental attitudes*, and *social relaxation* (p. 221). Self-concept is the way that one perceives him or herself. Self-esteem is integral to how he/she sees the world and determines how positive or negative is their outlook. Open-mindedness refers to how open one is to accepting differences. Nonjudgmental refers to putting aside one's prejudices towards others. Finally social relaxation means overcoming feelings of anxiety and insecurity. These four factors help the individual deal with cultural differences and adapt to his/her new environment, relieving the effects of culture shock and aid in the adjustment process.

*Cultural differences in communication*

Two well-known models for interpreting cultural differences in the field of intercultural communication are Hall's low-context/high-context communication (Hall, 1976) and Hofestede's dimensions of cultural variability (1994).

Hall's work identifies two contexts that impact communication, and that are major ways of transmitting communication in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The first, low-context, refers to information that is "vested in explicit code" meaning the communicator is more clear, open and direct, making the message easier to understand (Hall, 1970, p. 70). Western cultures tend to fit into such criteria, as people are more open in their communication, saying what they mean, with little ambiguity. The second, high-context, means "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" meaning minimal information is available to the receiver (Hall, 1970, p.79). Traditionally, Asian cultures, which are embedded with cultural cues, tend to communicate in an indirect manner that is best understood by members of that culture. The latter is therefore more difficult to understand for someone not familiar with the social cues of the host culture as not all information is spelled out directly. It takes time for an outsider to become familiar with a society's cultural cues and to learn how a particular culture communicates. Until that understanding is reached, communication can be very difficult and frustrating, often leading to miscommunication.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory was based on his examination of work-related values of thousands of IBM employees from 40 different countries in the 1970s. He identified culture based on four levels: power distance, individualism/collectivism,

masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance. The first, power distance, referred to the acceptance of uneven power distribution by less powerful members of society. The second, individualism/collectivism refers to the level of ties between individuals in a given society – for instance, who is more important, the self of the community? Next, masculinity/femininity refers to the distinctiveness or overlapping social gender roles. Finally, the final dimension refers to the extent to which "members of a culture are threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 113). Hofstede later added a fifth dimension, short/long-term orientation, identifying a culture's respect for tradition versus persistence. Both Hofstede's and Hall's frameworks can be referenced to better understand intercultural communication encounters.

The successful negotiation of the cultural environment has been referred to as intercultural personhood (Gudykunst, 2002). This means that the sojourner's experience has contributed to a multicultural identity, the merging and acceptance of the old culture with the new, becoming comfortable with both.

It is obvious from the different challenges that are linked to the stages of cultural adjustment that the level of successful intercultural communication between the expatriate and the local population is important in overcoming culture shock and better adjusting to living within a new culture. Having looked at cultural adjustment, including the stages of culture shock, it can be derived that successful communication is integral to overcoming cultural differences. The following section will explore returning home after being abroad and the perceptions that are formed after the experience of living in a foreign country has come to an end.

## Repatriation

Finally, the last section of the literature review deals with the subject of repatriation. Given the topic of this thesis, repatriation is an important factor to include in this study as the perceptions that Canadian English teachers have of their experience and of the South Korean culture are not fully realized until they return home from their year away.

The first part of this chapter defines expatriation, stressing that the experience of returning home after a year abroad is not always positive. Next, the changing nature of perceptions is discussed, focusing on feelings towards the experience and towards the host culture.

### *Defining repatriation*

While a significant amount of expatriate management research has been dedicated to overseas adjustment, the last two decades have also seen a body of research develop on the subject of repatriation. Defined, repatriation is the "transition from a foreign culture back into one's home culture. It is the experience of re-entering into previously familiar surroundings after having lived in a different environment for a significant period of time" (Adler, 1981, p. 343).

Much of the existing studies on repatriation focus on the re-adjustment challenges associated with returning home after having lived abroad for an extended time (Gaw, 1999; Harvey, 1989). In their study of 5,300 returning scholars to the United States, Gullahorn and Gullarhorn (1963) used survey analysis and interviews to suggest that reverse culture shock can be seen as an additional U-curve pattern, resulting in a W-curve (Gaw, 2000; Brein & David, 1971). The original U-curve suggests a predictable pattern

of expatriate adjustment, linked directly to the time spent abroad – from arrival, to experiences of culture shock, to settling in and finally, to recovery. At first, the sojourner is happy and excited. Then the feelings change as he/she faces adjustment challenges, and finally, with time, the sojourner adjusts and becomes comfortable within the host culture. The same curve can be applied to one's return home, where re-adaptation is necessary. Gaw (2000) suggests that reverse culture shock differs because the returning sojourners already have established expectations of home so the experience of culture shock is not as severe.

While it may seem instinctual that coming home after living abroad requires no adjustment, because it is *home*, it must be acknowledged that this experience is not always a positive one. As Black (1992) notes, "Most individuals experience substantial repatriation adjustment problems that have both individual and organization costs" (p. 190). Some individuals experience the same psychological stress and uncertainty upon returning home as they initially did when entering a new and completely foreign culture.

This thesis will focus on the perceptions and changing attitudes towards the experience itself once the expatriate has returned home. These are dependent to an extent on what perceptions or expectations, if any, existed prior to the departure.

*Preparations prior to departure*

To fully understand one's changing perceptions of the experience, one must consider the expectations prior to departure. Despite the fact that some organizations invest in cultural and personal training programs before sending their employees to work abroad (Littrell et al., 2006; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Fontaine, 1986) it is difficult to accurately prepare employees for the actual experience of living and working abroad.

Many depart knowing little about the foreign country they will be living in and about what they will encounter during their time away.

In the case of individuals seeking to teach English abroad, English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) courses are available, however it is up to the person considering teaching abroad to make the investment of time and money prior to departure. In their study of U.S. MATESOL[1] programs, Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey (1999) find that although preparatory courses exist and are helpful, "the situations abroad could be shockingly different and much more demanding than what are perceived as ESL or EFL situations in many training programs in the U.S." (p. 116). As expected, the actual experience of living and working abroad can be much different from what was initially anticipated by the individual, whether or not he/she had been prepared for the assignment.

*Perceptions on experience upon return*

After the experience of living abroad for an extended period of time, an individual's perceptions of him/herself, the country he/she is living in, as well as of the experience itself, can change substantially from initial perceptions at the start of the journey. As Cerdin & Dubouloy (2004) note, "expatriation brings about significant changes in the individual's perception of himself and his environment" (p. 979). They note in their study that expatriation can be seen as a maturation opportunity and a way to achieve autonomy. Expatriates find themselves alone and independent, "feeling they had at least become themselves, that they were no longer chained to the over-familiar image given out by their close relatives and friends" (Cerdin & Dubouloy, 2004, p. 974).

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[1]MATESOL – Master of Arts, Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Because they are no longer limited by who they are expected to be and what they are expected to do, they are able to discover the person they truly are.

As well, because of the challenges associated with living in a foreign country – learning to live within a different culture, understand a new language, and cope with daily stresses – expatriates not only mature, but they also learn new skills. As Adler (1981) notes in her study of 200 corporate and governmental employees returning to Canada after working abroad, "returnees reported having enhanced skills in making decisions under ambiguous and uncertain conditions, being patient, asking the right questions (as opposed to knowing the answers), seeing situations from a number of perspectives, tolerating ambiguity, and successfully working with a wider range of people" (p. 346). They also report increased self-confidence and improved self-image as a result of having lived independently in a foreign environment for an extended period of time.

In addition to personal growth, expatriates who return to their country, report being more culturally aware. While they may not have known much about the culture they would be living in prior to departure, their experience leaves them more culturally enriched. As noted by Kohonen (2008) in her study of 21 Finnish expatriates, the time spent working abroad not only had an impact on their identity and career aspirations, but their understanding of other cultures: "Some people developed a cross-cultural understanding, enjoying the nuances of the host culture and its social life, while also reinforcing their identification with their home culture" (p. 325). Living within a foreign culture teaches one to be more sensitive to how other people view the world, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of other societies (Flynn, 2008).

In a previous study, Kohonen (2004) notes that international assignments serve not only to advance one's career but it also as an opportunity to learn about one's own identity. In her study of the narratives of Finnish expatriates, the author notes that transformational changes resulted from the expatriate experience. She sates, "For some expatriates, identity change is based more on cultural issues, that is, adopting host culture values and insights" (p. 42). Having been exposed to cultural differences, the expatriates learned to adapt, and returned home more culturally aware.

Overall, choosing to live abroad for a determined period of time can be a tremendous learning experience. It can be professionally enriching as well as personally and culturally fulfilling. When the expatriate moves back home, he/she returns a changed person. As Osland (1995) states, "When expatriates perform their tasks successfully and learn to adapt to other cultures, they experience a solid sense of satisfaction and mastery…But among other changes, expatriates tend to return with greater understanding of foreign lands; increased self-awareness, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills; and more tolerance for differences among people" (p. 47). It is often upon his/her return home that one can reflect on the experience and appreciate its value.

To conclude, it is important to consider that different perceptions of the experience, as well as of one's own personal changes, occur only once the expatriate has returned home and has distanced him/herself from the time spent abroad.

## Conclusion

The theories presented in this chapter aimed to situate the subject that is at the centre of this thesis - Canadian English teachers who leave home to live and work in South Korea – in literature. To better understand the expatriate experience, the literature

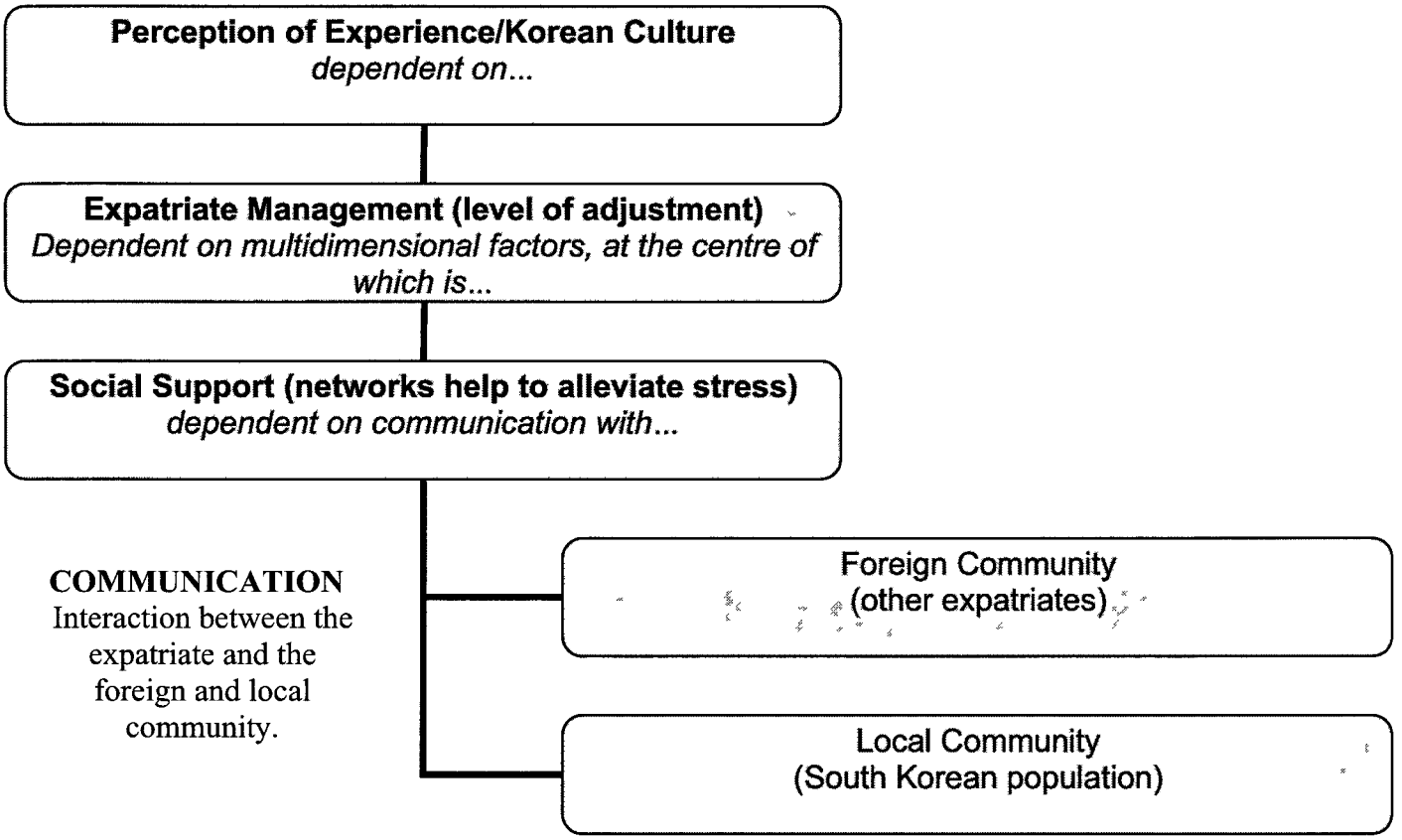
focused on four relevant areas: expatriate management, social support, intercultural communication and repatriation.

The literature helped in outlining why professionals choose to work abroad and the factors that contribute to successful adjustment. Among these factors is the level of social support, which helps to alleviate stress, and is critical to determining a positive experience. As outlined, social support networks derived from different sources are equally important, but intercultural communication with host nationals plays an important part in shaping the expatriate experience. Finally, literature on expatriation showed that perceptions of the sojourn upon return home are also a critical part of the overall experience.

*Visual representation*

To better understand how the different theories relate to the expatriate experience, I have constructed a diagram to show linkages. Below is a visual representation of how the topic of this thesis, *Canadian English teachers in South Korea: A look at how interpersonal and intercultural communication impacts the experience of working abroad*, locates itself in the chosen literature.

**Experiences of Canadian English Teachers in South Korea**




The diagram shows that the experience of working abroad is directly influenced by how the expatriate manages the experience of living and working overseas, which is to say successfully adjusts to his/her new environment. The adjustment is in turn dependent on the level of social support available to the expatriate, both from communication with the foreign community and the local community.

*Objective of study*

The objective of this study is to shed light on the experiences of English teachers in South Korea and to determine how communication impacts living and working abroad. Research suggests that globalization has led to increased international job opportunities

(Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey, 1999). With more individuals working abroad, a focus has developed on what factors lead to higher levels of successful adjustment (Haslberger, 2005; Selmer, 2002; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). One of these factors, social support networks, has been determined to ease the adjustment process (Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer et al., 2001; Adelman, 1988). Communication in the form of social interaction can be viewed as integral to the expatriate experience.

Therefore, the following research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. Why do young Canadian university graduates go to teach English in South Korea?
2. What is it like to experience living and working in South Korea?
    a. How do these expatriates handle the teaching aspect of their experience?
    b. How do these expatriates interact with other English-speaking foreigners?
    c. How do these expatriates interact with South Koreans?
    d. How do these expatriates perceive their experience and the South Korean culture and its people upon return to Canada?
3. How does communication in the form of social support influence the expatriate experience?

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the research method that was used to conduct this study. First, qualitative analysis and interviewing is discussed, demonstrating why this particular research strategy was employed. Next, the ethical considerations, recruitment of participants, interview process, data reliability and validity, as well as the analysis of data, are outlined to explain the approach chosen for this thesis.

## Research Method

To gain insight into the experiences of Canadian English teachers in South Korea, a qualitative methodology was used to gather information. Qualitative research is one of two leading methodological approaches used across different disciplines to explain social phenomena. Simply defined, it is "research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). As Van Maanen (1983) states, qualitative methodology is an approach used to "describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 9).

Quantitative and qualitative methods are two valid ways of gathering research, often complementing one another. For this thesis, a qualitative methodology was adopted as it allowed for prolonged interaction and conversation with participants. By relying on the qualitative method of extended, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to collect information from the narratives that shed light on the thoughts, emotions and perspectives the participants had associated with their individual experiences in South Korea.

Interviewing was chosen as the primary method of qualitative research. This is a way of collecting data by means of asking questions and obtaining answers from the respondent. The method attempts to understand how the subject perceives the world around him/her and makes sense of his/her experiences (Kvale, 1996). As Guba and Lincoln (1981) note, "the ability to tap into the experience of others in their own natural language, while utilizing their value and belief frameworks, is virtually impossible without face-to-face and verbal interaction with them" (p. 155). As a result, interviewing is one of the most widely-used forms of qualitative research, allowing the researcher to gain insight through interaction with others – by probing and listening to the subject's point of view (Hopf, 2004).

While interviews can range from the very structured questionnaire to the open-ended, unstructured conversation, the semi-structured interview was chosen as the best means of collecting data for this thesis as it allowed for focused and conversational style of interview. It allowed the interview subjects to speak freely about their experiences, while at the same time, allowing for follow-up questions to obtain more information or to clarify uncertainties. According to Liamputtong & Ezzy (2006), the semi-structured interview ranges between the "fixed questions and forced responses of surveys" and the "open-ended and exploratory" interview with no fixed schedule (p. 56). It is a way of exploring the interpretations of others while recognizing the role of the interviewer as a participant in the interview process. As the authors point out, the interviewer is an active participant in the interview, encouraging the participant to expand on what he/she is saying. Kvale (1996) likens the interview process to a conversation, where the data collected is considered a joint effort by the interviewer and the participant.

In addition to asking a set of pre-determined questions, the interviewer also poses additional probing questions during the interview to provoke the participant to expand on what he or she is saying. The goal of this study was to gain insight into the unique aspects of living and teaching in this Asian country, so sitting down with the participants for lengthy interview sessions allowed them to speak freely about their experiences using prepared questions for guidance. As a result, the method of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews was decided on for collecting information about the experiences of living and teaching in South Korea.

## Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in conjunction with the University of Ottawa's ethical guidelines. Prior to beginning this research, the university's Ethics Board reviewed the recruitment text to participants, the consent form, and the interview questions to ensure they met the university's ethical standards (Appendix F). As well, each participant in this research was explained the nature of the study in person and on paper, was asked to sign the approved consent form, and was notified that he/she could withdraw from the study at any point.

Participants were also assured that their anonymity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Randomly, each person was assigned a number from one to 10 and was subsequently referred to as "Participant #" in the text of the thesis. This was done to ensure the privacy of each participant and to obtain the most honest and reservation-free answers as possible. The information gathered, including transcripts of the interviews and contact information for the participants, was locked in a secure filing cabinet and will be stored for a period of five years.

## Participants and Recruitment

The criteria for the ideal candidates were established prior to the start of the interviewing process. It was decided that this thesis would focus on Canadian university graduates who taught English in South Korea for a period of one year of longer, within the last decade. This date range was chosen to ensure that the conditions for teachers in South Korea were relatively consistent, meaning that the data collected was based on similar conditions. As well, because the participants were required to recount their experiences after their return to Canada, it was important that the gap between their return and the interview was as minimal as possible to limit the extent of conceptualizing. Since the participants were reflecting on their experiences years later, they had to rely on their memories and this could imply bias, so the shorter the timeframe since their return, the better. That is why the participants who were chosen for this study were all those who returned to Canada within the last 10 years. While one person expressed interest in the study, the fact that she had taught more than a decade ago was determined as a reason to exclude her from the study. The one year condition was decided on as this is the average length of a teaching contract for foreigners in South Korea.

This being a qualitative study, it was also determined prior to the interview process that no more than 10 participants would be recruited for this thesis. As Weiss (1994) states, "Because each respondent is expected to provide a great deal of information, the qualitative interview study is likely to rely on a sample very much smaller than the samples interviewed by a reasonably ambitious survey study" (p. 3). The accounts of 10 Canadians through extended, semi-structured interviews was determined

to be a good sample size for this particular study in order to convey the experiences of English teachers in South Korea.

To gain access to these candidates, who may otherwise not be easily identified, two methods were chosen for recruitment. The first was a poster, which was distributed and displayed in Korean restaurants in downtown Ottawa to recruit participants who were willing to take part in the study (Appendix A). The poster was informative, advertising the parameters of the study. Korean restaurants were targeted because many people who have taught in Korea and have grown accustomed to the food frequent these restaurants on their return to Canada.

The second method chosen for recruiting participants was snowball sampling. As Johnson (2009) notes, "Snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, is a nonprobability method of survey sample selection that is commonly used to locate rare or difficult to find populations" (p. 1). It is further defined as a "method for identifying and sampling (or selecting) the cases in a network" (Neuman, 2004, p. 140). This way of contacting interviewees was chosen in addition to the poster, because given the specificity of the pool of participants, the snowball method was a convenient method of gaining access to respondents. By asking friends and co-workers if they knew of anyone who lived in Ottawa who had previously taught English in South Korea, the researcher was able to gain access to more interview subjects. They were subsequently contacted by email, with the recruitment poster attached, to see if they would be interested in participating in this study. Their participation was completely voluntary.

As it turned out, half of the respondents were recruited using the advertised poster in Korean restaurants, and the other half, through recommendations from friends and colleagues.

## Interview Process

The participants in this study were interviewed between July 2008 and January 2009. Each interview session was conducted in a public place, such as a coffee shop or a cafeteria, with the exception of two, which took place at the homes of the participants for their convenience. The interview process lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the personality of the interviewee. Most sessions averaged an hour in length.

As stated above, 10 individuals were interviewed for this research. Each person was over the age of 18 and left for South Korea within two years of graduating from university. Participants included six females and four males between the ages of 24 and 35. All had taught English in South Korea between 2001 and 2006.

Prior to the start of the interview, each participant was explained the nature of the study and was asked to read and sign the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B). As well, everyone was asked to complete the Introductory Interview Questions Form (Appendix C), which helped to gather general information for the study, such as age, sex, date of completion of university and year he/she lived in Korea.

Eleven pre-determined questions were chosen as the basis for the interviews. They were purposefully structured around themes identified previously from a review of literature, as well as from the researcher's own experience of living and teaching in South

Korea. The list of questions allowed for a similar consistency and flow to each of the 10 interviews.

Each person was interviewed based on this set of pre-determined, open-ended questions (Appendix D) that were designed to allow the participant to speak freely about his/her particular experience. The wording of questions was specifically formed to encourage the interviewee to talk freely. For instance, most questions started with "Tell me..." or "Please describe" – language specifically structured to encourage the participant to talk without constructs. As Liamputtong & Ezzy (2006) note, in a semi-structured interview, "Such questions establish the topic or issue to be discussed, but they do not suggest how to respond. The participant is encouraged to take up the topic and talk about it in their own terms" (p. 62). This ensured that each person being interviewed conveyed his or her experience as they saw it, with little influence from the interviewer.

Probing questions were used whenever the researcher thought it was important for the participant to elaborate on the answer. This is a method often used for eliciting "information to fill in the blanks in a participant's first response to a question" (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2006, p. 63). It was also used as a way to get some participants talking, who were shy or giving short answers. In those situations, the interviewer simply said, "Tell me more about this," or "Can you describe this aspect in greater detail." This ensured that the researcher was able to get the most information from the interview process, and is viewed as one of the benefits of conducting face-to-face interviews (Opdenakker, 2006).

It is important to note that because the interviewer had also taught English in South Korea, this information was disclosed to each of the participants. This can be

considered a form of reflexive dyadic interviewing, in which the interviewer shares personal experiences with the participant to develop trust and help the participant feel comfortable with the interview (Ellis and Berger, 2003). The disclosure was made based on the ethical decision of the interviewer, and was a means of encouraging the participant to feel at ease with sharing his or her experience.

All of the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. This was done to ensure a greater level of detail and accuracy, which cannot be obtained through note-taking, and to allow the interviewer to focus his/her attention on what is being said (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2006).

**Reliability and Validity of Data**

Although reliability and validity are two notions more frequently associated with quantitative studies, these principles of evaluating research also apply to qualitative studies (Neuman, 2004). Defined, reliability refers to dependability and consistency, whereas validity, refers to truthfulness (Neuman, 2004).

For this study, the researcher strived for reliability by collecting information (conducting interviews and recording data) in a consistent manner, using the same process for each participant. In terms of validity, authenticity was the goal. Because, the "enduring truth value" can be difficult to measure (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 58), the researcher chose to follow Liamputtong & Ezzy's (2006) approach of relying on the concept of "rigour" as a way of measuring a qualitative study's authenticity.

As the authors suggest, applying theoretical, methodological and interpretative rigour can help to ensure a study's accuracy. This means that throughout the different stages, the researcher devotes attention to rigour – by providing sound reasoning, clear

documentation and supporting information. They also add that "Knowledge is legitimized when external peers, the people studied and other relevant audiences agree that interpretations and conclusions are accurate reflections of the phenomenon" (Liamputtong & Ezzy, p. 40). In relation to this thesis, the concept of rigour was applied throughout the research process through clear documentation of processes and the use of supporting quotes.

## Analysis

After each interview was completed, the researcher transcribed the recorded dialogue shortly after and made additional notes based on her observations. Once all 10 interviews were transcribed, the process of narrative analysis was started to identify any emerging patterns. As McCracken (1988) notes, a thorough analysis of the collected data allows one to "determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that informs the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular" (p. 42). This gathering and assimilating of information helps the researcher to better understand the information that has been collected.

Narrative analysis was chosen to study the wealth of information gathered from the transcripts in order to make sense of the data, as it is a form of research which focuses on how people construct the world around them (Riessman, 1993). It is a useful method that allows the researcher to "retain a richness and authenticity from original data sources" (Neuman, 2004, p. 328). Through individual stories or narratives, it is possible to construct the context of an account in order to present the truth of a given experience. As Riessman (1993) states, narrative analysis, "takes as its object of investigation the story itself" (p. 1). It examines the account as it is told to the researcher, and is then

compiled together in a specific way as to persuade the reader of its authenticity. As the author notes, narrative can be described as always seeking to answer the question: and then what happened? (Reissman, 1993, p. 17).

The basis of this form of research is the fact that "nature and the world do not tell stories, (but) individuals do" (Reissman, 1993, p. 2). As a result, interpretation and subjectivity are integral to this form of research, which aims to convey and properly represent a particular experience. The respondents recount their experiences in a chronological manner, constructing stories based on what happened and how they felt about the events. As Mankowski & Rappaport (2000) explain, "stories organize experience, give coherence and meaning to life events, and provide a sense of continuity, history, and of the future" (p. 481). They include a sequence of events, are focused on the individual and are usually concerned with a subject that the storyteller cares about (Creswell and Maietta, 2002).

In order to better explain narrative analysis, Riessman (1993) likens this method to photography, an art form which is supposed to represent reality. Although the content of the picture is very real and telling, it only represents the point of view of the person holding the lens. In the same way, a person's narrative is very revealing of his/her own experience. As the author states, "obviously, the agency of the teller is central to composing narratives from personal experience, but so are the actions of others – listener, transcriber, analyst, and reader" (Reissman, 1993, p. 15). Therefore, the person recounting the story is equally as important as the researcher who is conveying it through his/her research. It is the researcher who constructs the questions and prompts for

clarification and more extensive answers and it is the participant who decides how to present his/her experiences.

One of the key elements of narrative analysis is language. The investigator needs to pay close attention to what people say and how they say it when they are being interviewed. The narrative structure is key when describing something that happened in the past. It is therefore necessary to tape and transcribe each interview, so that it may be studied later on. This allows for the narratives to emerge and for ambiguities in language to be heard. When listening to the recorded interviews and transcribing what was said, it becomes easier to recognize patterns and understand meanings from what was said in the interview. It is important to note that narratives are not read simply for their content, but also for their meaning. Therefore, when analyzing narratives, one must not overlook how the respondents constructed their stories and the way they were presented, which gives insight into how the interviewees make sense of the particular events of their experience.

Due to the nature of narrative analysis, traditional notions of validity are difficult to apply. This means that measuring the trustworthiness of the outcomes takes on a different form. For instance, the researcher should consider factors such as persuasiveness, meaning the "theoretical claims are supported with evidence of accounts," the correspondence, which means the results are verified with the interviewees for affirmation, and coherence, where "chunks of interview text about particular themes figure importantly and repeatedly" (Reissman, 1993, pp. 65-68). Addressing these concerns will ensure that the findings are solid and are less likely to be questioned for their legitimacy.

One of the features of narrative analysis is that it focuses on individuals and cannot be used to study large groups of people. This method is meant to study a personal experience and how it is constructed by that one individual – something that is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in a larger group where generalizations emerge or details are lost.

An example of the application of narrative analysis can be seen in Wittenberg-Lyle's (2006) text *Narratives of Hospice Volunteers: Perspectives on Death and Dying.* The author uses interviews to elicit narratives from hospice volunteers in order to examine how their daily experiences with death impact on their personal lives. As she notes, the use of narrative allows one to remember his/her experience and consequently to think about the associated feelings. Wittenberg-Lyle states: "It is the reflective process of storytelling that allows individuals to create meaning and make sense of reality. By recalling their experiences, an individual is able to make sense of what they experienced" (p. 52).

Likewise, in this thesis the researcher asked probing and open-ended questions to solicit narratives from 10 individuals who then recounted their experiences of living and working in South Korea. It was obvious through the way the interviewees structured their stories and through the language they chose that they were often constructing how they felt about their experiences at the same time. Through these individual narratives, it was possible to construct the context of their accounts to present the truth of their given experiences.

After listening to the recordings and re-reading each narrative transcript several times, a more detailed review of each interview was then applied to identify any

emerging patterns and potential themes. A chart was then used to identify reoccurring themes and to order the collected data into categories that emerged through careful analysis of the transcripts (Appendix E).

This chapter outlined the research method used for this thesis, explaining why interviewing was employed as the best strategy for collecting data. The ethical considerations, recruitment of participants, interview process, data reliability and validity, as well as the analysis were then discussed. Having examined the research methodology that was used to conduct this study, the following chapter will present the results of the data collected through interviews with Canadians who taught English in South Korea.

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the 10 interviews conducted with Canadians who taught English in South Korea between 2001 and 2006. Based on an analysis of interview transcripts, this chapter is divided into four main headings. The first discusses factors leading up to the departure, including how people first hear about the possibility of teaching English abroad, why they choose to go to South Korea, and their knowledge of the country before they left Canada. Next, a discussion follows on the experience itself: from the actual teaching aspect, to interactions with other foreigners and with the local South Korean population. As well, the onset of culture shock is discussed. The third section addresses repatriation back to Canada, including perceptions of the overall experience and of South Korea and its culture. Finally, based on the findings, the role of communication in shaping the experience of living and teaching in South Korea is addressed. Throughout the analysis, key themes from the literature review are brought back to better understand how the results of the interviews with the 10 Canadians who taught overseas compare to existing theories in research. These themes include globalization (Tsuda, 2008; Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey, 1999, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991), successful adjustment (Haslberger, 2005; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991), importance of social support networks (Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer et al, 2001; Nicholson & Imaizumi; 1993; Adelman, 1987), and intercultural contact and communication (Gaw, 2000; Hofstede, 1994; Brein & David, 1971, Oberg, 1960).

The information gathered through the interview process is used in this chapter as supporting information in the form of direct quotes from the participants. These excerpts

not only provide support to the results, but they also help to substantiate the authenticity of the study. As Liamputtong & Ezzy (2006) state, "Plenty of direct quotes and complete interviews provide the reader with a clearer sense of the evidence on which the analysis is based" (p. 39). Using primary texts validates the research as well as enriches the thesis with individual accounts that add colour and personal perspectives. Together with the analysis, these quotes help to shed light on what it is like to experience living and teaching in South Korea.

## Section one: becoming expatriates

### *Why do young Canadian university graduates go to teach English in South Korea?*

One of the leading questions that prompted my interest in this study was why do young Canadian university graduates choose to go to teach English abroad? More specifically, why do so many of them choose to go to South Korea in particular? Through an analysis of the interviews, it soon became clear that a few key factors make this country a popular work and travel destination following university.

#### *Hearing about it from friends*

Based on the results of the interviews with Canadians who had taught English in South Korea, most said they had first heard about the possibility of this type of experience through friends or acquaintances who had first done it themselves. They recalled that hearing about their friends' experiences was what intrigued them and made them seriously consider doing the same thing once they graduated from university. Many of their stories sounded similar:

> *"My best friend from high school, she graduated the same year I did – 2002 - and she headed over to Korea in the fall of that year and had an amazing time and was telling me all these stories and what not. I thought she was totally nuts for doing it, but the more she talked about it, the more fun it sounded."* (Participant 1)

*"A friend of mine had gone to teach English in Korea two years prior to my looking into it and she had a great experience."* (Participant 3)

*"I had a friend who was a couple of years older than me who went to teach I guess a year before I went. She was really encouraging me to do it."* (Participant 5)

*"You hear about if offhand and from people that you meet at work and stuff like that, you hear about people going overseas to teach and college students doing that and university students doing that..."* (Participant 7)

It became apparent through these accounts that most people knew of someone who had gone abroad to teach before them and were subsequently told about the experience. Hearing about others' experiences seemed to not only introduce the concept for many, but also to encourage further investigation into such a possibility as it no longer seemed like a foreign idea.

Of all those interviewed in this study, nine had heard about this type of experience through friends, while one learned about it through a poster advertisement on the bus. She noted, *"I saw a poster on the bus that said 'Teach English, Travel the World.' And I said to myself, that's something I could do"* (Participant 2). This is not surprising, as teaching English overseas is often advertised in public places such as school campuses, restaurants and on public transportation. In their assessment of the teaching English situation abroad, Govardhan, Nayar, and Sheorey (1999) analyzed advertizing positions for teaching abroad, finding that the demand for teachers was so high that many postings asked only for "being native or native like" as a requirement. This meant that priority was placed on being a native speaker of English above all else. Such advertisements were not only found in newspapers and magazines, but bulletins and schools. As Participant 5 observed,

*"There are posters all over Carleton. You know, 'Teach English Abroad,' 'Get Paid to Travel,' all that."*

It is therefore not too presumptuous to suggest that university graduates could be familiar with the concept of going to teach English overseas before considering the opportunity themselves. They have most likely been exposed to such a possibility through friends and acquaintances doing the same thing, or through advertising in public places.

*Adventure and opportunity awaits*

From the observations above, the question which emerged was: how does a person make the leap from hearing about another person's experience or seeing an advertisement, to moving abroad for an extended period of time? For many, it was apparent that it was a great opportunity to find interesting employment since they had yet to find the right job or career at home. The increased job opportunities created by globalization and the associated spread of the English language (Tsuda, 2008; Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey, 1999), provided those interviewed with an opportunity to explore their professional aspirations and personal goals. As found by Cerdin & Dubouloy (2004), individual perceptions were critical in considering an international employment opportunity. Not only was working abroad a chance to gain international work experience, but it was a way of gaining independence and exploring personal growth.

As Participant 2 explained, she could not find a job in her field after graduation:

> *"It was next to impossible to get my foot in the door so in the meantime I was working at Winners and I was quite exhausted and my personal life wasn't what I'd hoped it would be either...so I was – what do they call that – existential angst?"*

Another recalled: *"I decided, ok, I'm going to give myself six months to find a job that I could see leading to a career and, if I don't find that, then I'm going to Korea"* (Participant 4). Yet another said: *"I decided I wanted to go...since I didn't have any plans or a job and I made the spontaneous decision and that's how it all came around"* (Participant 9). As they and a few others described, since there was no career or family keeping them in Ottawa, they found it easy to take the opportunity to travel and work abroad.

Others were excited about the prospect of trying something new and different: *"To me it was just a chance for discovery, a chance for adventure,"* said Participant 8. Another pointed to the chance to do something that she may otherwise not be able to do later in life: *"I knew that I definitely wanted to do something big before I started my life in Ottawa with my career...Primarily, it was just to do something big before I settled down"* (Participant 10). These types of sentiments are in line with Cerdin & Dubouloy's (2004) observations that personal maturation, autonomy and a degree of idealization of the experience were appealing factors in the decision. As Osland (1995) notes, the opportunity to work abroad, for some, could be viewed as an adventure and a chance for self-discovery. From the interviews, it was apparent that the participants saw this not only as an opportunity to find work abroad, but it also presented a chance learn about themselves and to see a different country.

*Deciding on South Korea*

Four of the participants who were interviewed said that South Korea was their primary destination of choice based on what they had heard from relatives, friends, or acquaintances. However, most had considered working in different countries but settled

on South Korea due to a variety of factors that will be discussed below. While two people considered teaching in the Middle East, four others wanted to go to Japan instead of Korea before they officially looked into working abroad. In the end, it came down to the decision being a practical choice of what was most feasible for the majority of the respondents.

*Money - the driving factor*

For the majority of the respondents, the driving factor behind the decision to teach English in South Korea was definitely the lucrative salary and benefits. Considering the difficulties some students experienced in finding employment in their own country after university and the need for many of them to begin paying off loans, teaching English abroad was an appealing option for a chance to make money. As pointed out by Mendenhall & Oddou (1991), globalization has created more international work opportunities. At a time when many of those interviewed were looking for jobs after university and needed to pay off tuition, the prospect of finding good jobs abroad was appealing. Seven out of the 10 participants were recent university graduates who were looking to pay off student loans. This was the prevailing answer that was noted through the interview analysis. Some examples include:

*"Paying off my student loans was the deciding factor."* (Participant 1)

*"...going to Korea was to get rid of student debt. Korea had a great ratio of salary to cost of living."* (Participant 6)

> *"When I got married to my husband, he for the longest time talked about going overseas to teach, because he said, you know, this is a way for us to get out of our student loans. Really, when you get so in debt in student loans, really the only way to get out of it is to go overseas and teach..."* (Participant 7)

While others did not mention debt as a reason for going to South Korea to teach abroad, they confessed that money was the primary motivator when it came to choosing where they were going to live and work.

> *"I'm embarrassed to admit this, it was completely mercenary. Korea offered the best packages, financially and all around. I could have gone to Japan as well, but I think Korea was one of the last places that still gave you your completion bonus as well as pay for your airfare both ways."* (Participant 2)

*"...the money was fantastic, which was my primary reason for going. So that's why I chose there."* (Participant 3)

*"The sort of choice of Korea was basically because of better salary, better accommodation, perks, and access to other countries...The job offer was more interesting in terms of salary."* (Participant 8)

*"I heard through the grapevine that you got to make a lot of money in South Korea and at that time that's where a lot of the big bucks were, so primarily it was a financial reason."* (Participant 10)

According to those interviewed, in addition to the competitive salaries, South Korea also offered tempting packages that were difficult to pass up. Some perks that were mentioned included complimentary return airfare, free or subsidized accommodation for the entire year, as well as a bonus for completing the full contract.

*Fast and easy application process*

Another persuasive factor which emerged from the data was the relatively quick and easy application process. Most of those surveyed were able to leave for Korea within just a few months of considering the option. In fact, most participants began working in South Korea within weeks or months of considering the possibility. For example, Participant 4 left for Korea within a month of deciding this was something he wanted to

do. He said the process took *"probably a month. It was really, really quick. And I noticed that with a lot of people. The contracts just pop up."* Another person said, "*Korea offered employment that was almost immediate. Like, sign up and come to Korea next week...and that appealed to me*" (Participant 9).

Participant 2 had a similar experience: *"Literally within days of putting up my resume, I got the offer that I eventually accepted."* This quick application and recruitment process suited all of the respondents, especially since many admitted they did not have any major commitments at the time.

The fact that Korea, unlike other countries offering similar employment opportunities, does not require prior teaching experience makes it an even more appealing option. This is especially important considering that eight out of 10 participants were not teachers by training and had no previous teaching experience. Four had taken Teaching English as a Second Language courses, but only two were teachers by profession. According to the participants in this study, all that they needed to present during the recruitment process was proof of a university degree. This is supported by Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey (1999), who note in their study that English is in high demand, becoming the world's most taught language. The existing job opportunities are better than ever, and the recruitment process is relatively easy in order to attract native language speakers. As well, others note that the prevalence of the English language is permeating borders creating more international employment opportunities (Tsuda, 2008). Global experience is in turn often seen as a competitive advantage (Flynn, 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2005).

*South Korea as a gateway to travel*

Some of those interviewed thought the opportunity to spend a year teaching abroad in South Korea was also a great way to see other surrounding countries. As one participant noted, she wanted to travel. She saw this as a way of getting to know another culture with the opportunity to travel to surrounding Asian countries when her boyfriend visited her from Canada. As she explained, *"I wanted to travel, we thought we could meet up in Thailand at some point, we could do a lot of travelling..."* (Participant 1). Participant 8 also underlined the *"access to other Asian countries"* and said that opportunities to travel in the region were an important factor in choosing South Korea as his destination.

Clearly, although some had previously considered different countries for their working abroad experience, the lucrative packages, easy recruitment process, and geographical location were enough to persuade them to choose South Korea as their final destination.

*Where is South Korea anyway?*

Interestingly, most of those who shared their stories had very little knowledge or interest in South Korea prior to their departure. In fact, all but one of the respondents had very limited knowledge of this East Asian country and were not shy to say so. Some examples of people's admitted ignorance include:

> *"I couldn't even have told you, this is sounding really bad, but where Korea was on a map. I was that ignorant about the whole thing. I remember going to Chapters or Coles and looking for books on the Eastern part of Asia. I saw Lonely Planet Southeast Asia and I thought it sounds about right and I thought – why isn't Korea in this section?"* (Participant 1)

*"Before I left, I knew absolutely nothing. Not a damn thing to be honest."* (Participant 4)

*"My dad got me one of those travel books about Korea. It was really, really helpful, because I knew pretty much nothing about the country."* (Participant 7)

*"Since my knowledge of Asia in general was very limited, I had no preference of whether I could go to Japan or Korea. To me it was just a chance for discovery, a chance for adventure."* (Participant 8)

Most people spoke about their limited knowledge of the country with a sense of awe as they reflected on just how little they knew about South Korea before their departure. While a few prided themselves on having tried Korean cuisine at Ottawa restaurants before moving there, most said they had not prepared themselves at all to deal with any of the differences in cultures, such as language or customs, that they were about to experience. This lack of predeparture knowledge and training, as well as culture-specific experience, is linked by some scholars as a factor that influences the adjustment process (Selmer, 2002; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou; 1991). If the expatriate has knowledge of the country and culture and has received some training, the extent of culture shock may be lessened upon arrival in the new environment. However, the majority of the Canadians interviewed departed for South Korea with minimum knowledge of the country and any training – language or teaching – that could have been helpful in easing the transition process of living in a foreign country.

It is important to note that, unlike companies and firms that may invest in cultural training before an individual is sent abroad, those who wish to teach English are largely on their own (Littrell et al., 2006; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Fontaine, 1986). Since this

is a personal decision and English teachers are not employees of international firms, it is up to them to educate themselves about the country and culture and to invest in ESL/EFL courses. However, despite any level of preparation before departure, Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey (1999) still find that the actual experience is shockingly different from any prior expectation.

## Section two: the experience

### *What is it like to experience living and working in South Korea?*

According to the participants in this study, the experience of living and teaching in South Korea begins the moment one steps off the plane. As Louis (1980) explains, the newcomer experience is marked by three different features: change, contrast, and surprise. From the moment they arrive in the new country, expatriates notice the changes between the old and new settings, the changes in the new environment and are faced with unexpected circumstances. As the author noted, differences and similarities between the old and new environment are noted, contrasts are made, and surprising situations that are new and unexpected occur. According to the respondents, they were either overwhelmed with the newness of everything – different sounds and sights – or they were surprised at how similar the country seemed in comparison to Canada. Some examples of initial observations are:

*"Getting there, I'd say the first thing that stood out was the urbanization of Seoul...it was like nothing I'd ever seen before."* (Participant 6)

*"I was actually shocked at the amount of English that was there...and I guess the population was overwhelming."* (Participant 10)

*"It was probably less shocking than I had expected. It was shocking, don't get me wrong, but I didn't have a chance to be that overwhelmed."* (Participant 5)

All of them agreed on experiencing the feeling of tremendous fatigue from the long journey. The fourteen-hour flight, in addition to the domestic travel within Canada and Korea, made the first few days of arrival extremely difficult for all of these new expatriates.

After analyzing the interview transcripts, three main categories emerged as the major components of experiencing living and teaching English in South Korea. They include the teaching aspect, interaction with the English-speaking/foreign population, and interaction with the local South Korean community. As well, the onset of culture shock is also a relevant factor in the experience of moving to a new country for an extended period of time.

*Teaching*

The fatigue after a long journey and the feeling of being overwhelmed by new sights and sounds was magnified by the fact that many of those who arrived had to start teaching within a day or two of getting off the plane. It was obvious from the narratives they shared that the participants were not expecting to begin to work so fast after arriving, and had to adjust very quickly to what was expected of them. Some examples of this reaction include:

*"I got to drop my suitcases off and then it was: so take a quick shower and then come on in to work. And I was like, are you kidding me? You're not giving me a day or two to recover from jet lag?"* (Participant 4)

*"I got off the bus and I was completely overwhelmed and I was in the classroom by the next day."* (Participant 5)

This can perhaps be considered the first intercultural communication challenge that most of the new teachers experienced upon arrival as they were faced with cultural values they were not familiar with. While they may have arrived with a certain preconceived perception of how the experience would unfold, they quickly realized that there were unsaid expectations placed upon them. All of the participants explained their shock and frustration at the fact that they had to start work so quickly, noting that it was not discussed directly and not open for debate. This is consistent with Hall's (1976) low-context/high context framework for understanding the transmitting of communication. The Canadians, arriving from a low-context country where open and direct information was the norm, were faced with implicit orders that were not discussed openly. Over time, they learned about South Korea's values of hard work and the importance of education, as well as the respect towards their boss and elders that would help them gauge their place in the new society.

All of the participants taught at private language institutes called *hakwons* in Korean, which specialize in different subjects such as languages, mathematics, sciences, art, and even sports. They are separate from the traditional school system and are for-profit, after-school academies that compete for business and are popular learning centres for children of all ages in South Korea.

As mentioned before, most of those interviewed had no previous teaching experience before signing a teaching contract to work in South Korea. Of the two who were professional teachers, one taught English as a second language. The eight others had

no prior teaching experience, but four had taken Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages courses in preparation for their year abroad. For many, this was also their first professional job following graduation from university. As a result, they admitted to having little knowledge and many reservations about this aspect of their expatriate experience. This points to previous studies on predeparture training which examine the usefulness of prior preparations on the adjustment process (Puck et al., 2008; Mendenhall et al., 2004; Kealy & Protheroe, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Lefley, 1986; Tung, 1981). While evidence is inconclusive about whether or not training better prepares the expatriate, it cannot be denied that prior familiarity of what to expect, especially concerning language or culture, may be helpful in preparing a person for the expatriate experience. Knowing what one can expect in terms of work and culture can aid in an easier adjustment process. As well, *individual skills* and *nonwork factors*, although not formally discussed, became apparent from the respondents as helpful to the adjustment process. Those who possessed skills such as the ability to cope with higher levels of stress or were more extroverted, seemed to fare better in the adjustment process. Nonwork factors such as the level of social support and knowledge of the host language were also beneficial to the expatriates.

As the individuals noted, many were not prepared for what to expect professionally and culturally.

*"I had no experience at all and not much experience working with kids either."* (Participant 2)

*"The extent of my teaching experience was really working with people as a manager of a retail store, training them on how to do things. So it was kind of overwhelming..."* (Participant 4)

*"I had never taught before and I didn't even like kids before I started. But they just threw us in a classroom."* (Participant 5)

> *"I was really, really anxious....you know, these are people who want to learn English so I know what they expect of me. I know I was extremely nervous the first night. I was very self-conscious. Like, are these students just humouring me, can they see that I'm completely incompetent at this?"* (Participant 7)

*"The actual TESOL certification, I found didn't bring anything. It was a complete waste of money."* (Participant 10)

The absence of a teaching degree or any pre-departure training left many feeling unprepared and scared because they had no teaching experience. However, many had not considered this aspect until their arrival in the classroom on the first day. As Participant 2 described, the first few days of teaching her seven-year-olds were terrifying: *"All that stuff they teach you, once you actually get into the classroom...kids that age smell fear just like dogs do. Within ten minutes I had used up my lesson plans. The remaining hour was spent plucking them off walls where they were crawling. I went into the teacher's room afterwards and said, somebody please tell me it gets easier!"* She was not alone in feeling this way. All of the participants, even the professional teachers, said they had to get used to the teaching, which was different from what they had expected.

However stressful the first few days were, teaching became a lot easier within a short period of time for all of those who participated in this study. After the initial few weeks of getting to know the kids and what was expected of them, everyone said that they had very little problems with the work involved. This was due in large part to the

help they received from colleagues, who acted as integral sources of support. As some authors state, social networks help to fill emotional, physical and psychological needs (Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer et al, 2001; Nicholson & Imaizumi; 1993). Adelman (1987) notes, these networks help in providing: "skills, and information; advice in handling life situations; and sometimes just sharing experiences – positive or negative" (pp. 362-363). This type of social support reflects Adelman's *comparable others* classification, where the support and encouragement is derived from those undergoing a similar experience (1988). Other types of social support, including close ties and weak ties, were also helpful and are discussed below. The newcomers had help from teachers who were already established at the schools who shared with them basic teaching skills and tested methods. According to their accounts, they quickly learned that teaching English in South Korea (depending on the age group) came naturally and was just as much about teaching as it was about using different methods to keep the children occupied and entertained. They recalled that playing games, memorizing sentences and having basic conversations were all methods they used to teach their classes. Some explained:

*"As far as teaching went, I was kind of surprised to find out that is was basically reading and repeating."* (Participant 1)

*"I quickly learned that the job itself was half teaching and half sort of entertaining the kids and making sure that they sort of enjoyed spending time in the class learning, but also having fun."* (Participant 8)

> *"Because we were the only teachers at a brand new school...we could do pretty much what we wanted to do, so it was just trying different things out and if it didn't work, then we would try something else. And we played a lot of games because it was a lot easier on us."* (Participant 10)

Many noted that keeping the *hakwon* owners happy was a big part of their job as the institutes were private and attracting and keeping students happy was why they were there. There was a lot of pressure from the school's directors to ensure the students were learning, having fun and went home to their parents satisfied.

From the interviews with these expatriates, it became obvious that although teaching was a significant part of their year in South Korea, it was only one factor in their overall experience.

*Interaction with other English-speaking foreigners*

Contact with other foreigners – English native speakers – was an inevitable aspect of living and working in South Korea for all of the participants in this study. Most taught alongside other English teachers at their schools, where there were anywhere from one other English native teacher to as many as 25, depending on the size and location of the school. In highly urbanized cities such as Seoul or Busan, there were not only multiple foreign teachers at one school, but there were many English schools clustered together in the same neighbourhoods. In such cases, the interviewees said it was easy to naturally befriend them and spend time with them outside of work. Only two teachers, who lived in smaller cities, found themselves as the only foreigners at their school. As stated above, this type of social support can be described as comparable others, meaning they are sharing similar experiences. According to Liu & Shaffer (2005), they can be classified as opportunity forms of social capital, meaning the expatriate has unlimited access to social networks. This is the case when multiple English teachers are present at one school. As the authors point out, motivational forms of capital must also be considered. This means

the expatriate's willingness to join existing social networks around him/her is also an important factor.

From the different narrative accounts of the participants, most said they made efforts to socialize with other foreigners within the expatriate community where they were living. They congregated at "foreigner" bars, clubs, or met through organized activities such as soccer, church groups or restaurants – predominantly on the weekends when they were not working. In fact, half of the participants made an effort to immediately immerse themselves in the foreign/English-speaking community in their city after their arrival. This is consistent with research in social support, which shows that seeking out new forms of support is helpful in alleviating stress and coping with living in a foreign environment (Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer at al., 2001; Nicholson and Imaizumi, 1993; Adelman, 1988; Fontaine 1986; Caplan, 1974). As the respondents recounted, they made efforts to establish new contacts upon arrival:

> *"I got to meet people my first weekend there. It was a pretty big party culture...I started playing ultimate Frisbee, so that was Sunday afternoon. There was a contingent of people that I met that had scooters, so they would get together and go riding on weekends."* (Participant 1)

> *"There were about a half a dozen (teachers) at my school. Two from Canada, one from New Zealand, at one point there was a fellow from the States, at one point there was one from Britain, there was a girl from Ireland... However, those didn't make up the bulk of my friends. I would go to Itaewan every weekend, where my church was."* (Participant 2)

> *"I had relationships with other teachers who lived in the same neighbourhood. A lot of us lived in the same neighbourhood, so it was nothing to knock on someone's door."* (Participant 6)

> *"I sort of became involved in going out with other foreign teachers through the teachers working at my school. I became familiar with all the different hangouts...There were a number of bars where the English teachers would*

> *congregate on weekends and my impression was that, by the number of people going to these bars, that there was a very lively community."* (Participant 8)

From what the interviewees said, meeting other foreigners was a way to learn about their new environment – how to get around, where to shop, what to say – and it was also a form of social recreation when they were not working. Their recollections support Adelman's (1988) theories of social support as helpful in relieving stress and finding their bearing in a new environment. They also confirm Kraimer et al.'s (2001) framework of overarching types of social support – aid, affect, and affirmation – which help the expatriate cope by providing assistance, emotional support and confirming their ability to handle new and difficult situations. As Participant 1 explained, her roommate was instrumental in helping her find her bearings and connecting her with other English-speaking foreigners: *"She took me grocery shopping and showed me what was what and we went out that weekend...there was one expat bar that everyone went to called McKenzies and she took me there and started introducing me to people."* She said her contact with her roommate and other teachers at her school allowed her to meet many other English-speakers in the city where she worked. This was the same for all but one of the participants (Participant 4), who all noted that if they had wanted, it was easy for them to get immersed in these existing expatriate communities as they were prominently established in most of the major cities.

Participant 4, whose opportunity form of social capital was limited because he was the sole foreigner at his school and immediate community. He said he was very isolated due to the fact that he lived and taught on an island with a very small foreigner population that was primarily made of engineers and safety people from the local ship-building industry. As he observed:

> *"All of them were foreign, but even foreign to me in that they didn't speak English. And all of them seemed to be really angry at the fact that they were there in Korea, really didn't respect the culture or anything like that. I went over with a very open mind and I didn't want to fall into that kind of group."*

While he said he would occasionally travel to meet other English-speaking foreigners, it was not a priority for him to seek this community out because he had enough social contact with the local community. He was happy to immerse himself in his every day life and connect with the Koreans he met at his school and in his neighbourhood.

The anger that some of the participants referred to that existed within the expatriate community towards South Korea and its people can be attributed to the experience of culture shock. Brein and David (1971) classify this as Oberg's *period of crisis*, which sets in after the novelty and excitement of the new environment wears off. Bennett (1998) classifies this as period of *fight* where "self protective mechanisms are engaged" (p. 219). This is a period that occurs when the newcomer becomes frustrated with his/her new surroundings due to miscommunication and the inability to cope with new cultural cues. Most of the respondents noted that they experienced some level of frustration and culture shock after a few months of living in the country. They were no longer visitors, but had to cope with the reality of settling into a foreign society for the next few months.

Interestingly, while some made efforts to connect with members of the expatriate community as a way of coping with the new environment, a few made conscious and deliberate efforts to avoid them. Their reasoning was primarily that they wanted to get a true cultural experience, where they could learn the customs and language. This, according to them, could not happen if they had mostly English-speaking friends. As a

result, they avoided the common foreigner hangouts that were established by the expatriate communities. These individuals seemed most happy with their experience as it seemed that they were more mentally and emotionally prepared for living within a new culture. The fact that they wanted to learn about South Korea's customs and even attempted learning the language, made their adjustment easier as they were equipped with skills to help them understand their situation and better communicate with the local population.

Participant 9 was one Canadian who made a concerted effort to avoid spending most of his free time with other expatriates, choosing instead to seek out and befriend South Koreans. In his view:

*"There were two types of people in Korea in my analysis. There was the foreigner who left home enthusiastically wanting to learn about a new culture, to travel, get immersed in a new environment. And there was the other type who I think was escaping something."*

He was critical of the expatriate lifestyle abroad and chose not to be a part of that community. Although he did have a few foreigner friends, he had very limited interaction with the expatriate community, choosing instead to immerse himself in the South Korean culture and spending most of his free time with local South Koreans.

*Interaction with South Koreans*

When one is living and working in a foreign country, interaction with the local population is inevitable. However, the extent to which one chooses to immerse him or herself within this population is directly dependent on the individual. This is the observation made from each participant's revelations when asked about the involvement with the local South Korean community.

Most of the participants confessed that their interaction with South Koreans was limited to working at the school. Since it was convenient for many to spend time with other foreigners who spoke the same language and shared a similar culture, their relationships with the local population suffered as a consequence. As Participant 1, who immersed herself in the foreign community and led a very social life from the first few days of her arrival, pointed out:

> *"It made it a lot more fun and a lot more enjoyable, but at the same time I don't think I got as much of a cultural experience as I had intended to get...so it wasn't a lot of integrating, going out sightseeing. That was problematic."*

Her interaction with the local South Korean community was similar to that of many of the other Canadians who were interviewed: it was minimal. This was partially due to the fact that she prioritized her relationships with other foreigners.

The average interactions noted through the interviews were limited to encounters with store clerks, neighbours and the children they taught. These are classified by Adelman (1988) as weak ties in that they may be limited or impersonal connections with strangers, but are nonetheless important to the adjustment process. Sometimes, there was an effort made to be friends with other Korean teachers at the school, but it was mainly spending lunch together at the school or going for the occasional dinner. Asked about their contact with South Koreans, some participants said:

> *"(My contact was with) the teachers exclusively. I eventually got in contact with some of the Korean witnesses who weren't in the English congregation, but they spoke a little English. There was one in particular. He was a doctor and I spent a bit of time with his wife and kids. He was one of the few friends I had in Kwachan itself."* (Participant 2)

> *"The only reason we got involved with the local area or with Koreans was that at our school we had teaching assistants and they were all Korean. And the great thing was that they were willing to take us out and show us around and be translators when they needed to be so that's what got us a little more involved.*

> *But otherwise, we didn't really mingle much. Like you wouldn't go to a shopping mall and hang out with a bunch of Koreans. You would go with your foreign friends rather."* (Participant 3)

> *"I did most (of the groceries) at family-owned markets. And I got to know all the people there really well. There was one lady who had a picture of my cottage in her store. There were all of the people who owned noribangs (Korean karaoke). I was always the singing crazy white guy."* (Participant 4)

*"We befriended Korean teachers at our school...we just saw them at the school, but we didn't see them outside of school ever."* (Participant 5)

*"Other than meeting my wife and going out with Korean teachers and meeting some Koreans at the bars that we would go to, I don't recall doing anything more than that. It was mostly work related."* (Participant 8)

*"Because we were so involved with the foreigners, we didn't really get to participate in any social events with the South Koreans, so that was purely work related."* (Participant 10)

While it was obvious that prioritizing the expatriate community was an impediment to establishing better relationships with South Koreans, it was clear that cultural differences also acted as barriers. Some participants noted that the Koreans were more traditional and conservative, which differed from their own values. Others said the inability for them to communicate well in either language prevented them from forming deeper bonds.

It appeared that even when the participants made an effort to socialize with the local South Korean population, it was generally with people who spoke advanced English. As Participant 7 said, *"There was the one girl that I met. She was Korean, but she lived in America with her husband for a while so I got along fairly well with her."* It

seemed that the level of English spoken by the Koreans was an integral factor in whether or not some Canadians socialized with them.

Of the 10 participants, three made a concerted effort to immerse themselves within the Korean community. Their free time was mostly spent going hiking in the mountains, visiting Korean temples, attending festivals, trying out restaurants, and being exposed to cultural things that some said other foreigners would perhaps miss out on.

> *"We were going to noribangs (Korean karaoke bars) like every night. We went out for dinner every day – it's not like dinner here. Not a big deal. So it was great. I never questioned how much of what I was saying he understood and I think it was vice-versa. Now I consider him like my brother. When he's getting married I'll go back there to be there for it."* (Participant 4)

> *"I already had some (Korean) friends that had been students of mine in Canada so I would see them on a regular basis. At least see each of them a few times a month. It was pleasure related entirely, not work. I also made friends with a Korean noodle shop owner. She invited my family and she kind of adopted us, we called her our Korean mom."* (Participant 6)

> *"Very early on I met a Korean doctor who was hiking on his own and I was hiking on my own. Koreans are very quick to introduce themselves and welcome you to their country. So I got talking to him, he gave me his number and it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to me in my year because we would go hiking together, I would travel around the country with him and his friends. I joined these hiking clubs where you'd show up at six a.m. in the morning and a school bus full of Koreans and we would drive across the country to hike somewhere. On the way back, we'd dance and drink soju or whatever."* (Participant 9)

Regardless of which community the participants in this study immersed themselves in – expatriate or local - it became obvious when analyzing their narratives that these relationships had a tremendous impact on their time spent living and working abroad. While many chose to immerse themselves primarily in the expatriate community, most felt their relationship and understanding of the local community was important in determining their level of comfort within the society. As Brein & David (1971) observe,

the individual's "successful adjustment to an intercultural experience is highly dependent on his achievement of effective interpersonal relations with hosts" (p. 216). While the relationships may not be as deep, they are equally important in ensuring the expatriate has a sense of comfort in his/her new surroundings.

*Culture shock*

Social support networks play an integral role in minimizing the culture shock that often is associated with travelling abroad. When asked about any of the challenges of adapting to living within a new culture, everyone who participated in this study alluded to experiencing culture shock on some level during their stay in South Korea. While two participants seemed to experience it initially within the first few weeks of their stay, most experienced it a few months into their stay. This is consistent with Oberg's (1960) stages of culture shock, as he notes that the period of crisis usually does not set in until the expatriate begins encountering difficulties. At first, there is a sense of excitement and novelty associated with living in a new environment, but it is not for a few weeks or months that the individual may be confronted with the challenges of living in the foreign society.

As one person described, for many the first few months after their arrival were exciting, but as time went on, reality set in. It was then that frustrations with the new culture and its effect on the expatriate's life set in.

> *"...there were definitely days when I was ready to jump on the next plane or yell at the next Korean I saw...you know, eventually you just want to hear someone speak English. Or not to have people pointing at you on the street...there were days when it was definitely really hard."* (Participant 1)

> *"I think the first three months were sort of a honeymoon phase as I recall – everything is beautiful, everything is interesting. And then as you realize you're going to be here for the long haul for a year or more, things get annoying. Things*

> *that may have been funny and out of the ordinary at first could become irritating at times."* (Participant 9)
>
> Another person said: *"I was just trying to take everything in the first few months and just really enjoy stuff and take it for what it was and it wasn't really until I had been teaching for a month or two that the real sort of oh my goodness this is not like Canada, what am I going to do kind of thing really hit me...a little bit of depression. I had the realization that it was really difficult."* (Participant 7)

From their accounts, culture shock was not something that happened right away, but it occurred a few months into their stay. However, these emotions seemed to pass and were eased by relying on others – friends and acquaintances, who could share the same anxieties or who were there to listen or to simply distract a person from what they were feeling. It was with the help of social support that the expatriate gained a better understanding of the culture and was then able to function at a more comfortable level. After overcoming the period of crisis, the Canadians would settle into what Oberg (1960) called the stage or complete or near-complete recovery, accepting their new environment and even enjoying their experience (Gaw, 2000; Brein & David, 1971).

The forming of relationships helped the majority of the respondents interviewed for this study better adjust to their new environment. From their accounts, it was clear that the adjustment was both psychological and sociocultural (Selmer, 2002), in that their emotional well-being was dependent on support from others and their ability to fit in and become competent within the society. Psychologically, any emotions of uncertainty, anxiety and depression, which all participants claimed to experience at one point or another over the course of the year, were alleviated by interaction with others. Also, on the sociocultural level, the mastering of daily tasks like buying groceries or ordering food

at restaurants, helped the respondents deal with managing daily situations in their new host country, thereby resulting in feeling better and more confident about themselves.

Black's (1987) definition of adjustment in terms of subjectivity and objectivity can also be applied to the experiences described by this group of individuals. Similar to Selmer's (2002) psychological/sociocultural components, Black's (1987) subjective/objective view of the adjustment process also deals with internal and external factors. Subjectively, the better the expatriate feels about his/her being able to fit in, the better adjusted he/she is. Therefore, those who spoke well about their year overseas also seemed to have a positive outlook, speaking of the personal contacts they made, the things they saw and learned. The few who seemed to have taken a longer time to adjust recounted their feelings of uncertainty and unease about different aspects of the experience. For instance, Participant 7 spoke of her nervousness about teaching. She was overwhelmed by feelings of inaptitude and feared failing at her new job, and this had an impact on her level of adjustment. Objectively, those who mastered their role requirements, and were able to function well within their new environment, seemed to have adjusted with relative ease. In accordance with Haslberger's (2005) definition, once the participants deemed themselves able to function effectively within the host culture, they had adapted successfully to their new environment.

The adjustment of the 10 participants in South Korea can also be better understood using Mendenhall & Oddou's (1985) four dimensions of overseas adjustment: self-oriented, others-oriented, perceptual and cultural-toughness. In terms of the self-oriented dimension, it was clear from the interviews that those expatriates who were able to enjoy various activities within the new culture, were better able to manage their stress

levels and seemed for fare better emotionally. When considering the others-oriented dimension, those who showed a willingness to develop new relationships, seemed to have more positive outlooks on their experiences. As well, perceptually, those who were more willing to accept cultural differences were better able to adapt. Since South Korea is culturally much different from Canada, some participants found it more difficult to adapt. According to Hofstede's (1994) cultural dimensions theory, the differences in how cultures operate can lead to large gaps in intercultural communication and understanding. The greater the differences in culture, the harder it is to adapt to the new environment. However, it seemed from the participant's accounts, those who displayed an open mind to the cultural experience were able to overcome the cultural gap.

*Perceptions of the experience, the South Korean culture and its people upon return to Canada*

All of the people who participated in this study were reflecting on their experiences in South Korea after they had returned home and had re-established themselves back into Canadian society. While they had the time to distance themselves from the emotions they had felt during and immediately following their experience, they were eager to share their thoughts about living and teaching in South Korea. The following paragraphs explore their perceptions of the overall experience, and of the country and culture in which they had lived for a period of one year (or even longer for some).

*Experience*

When asked to describe their overall experience, nine out of the 10 participants said they were satisfied with having gone to live and work in South Korea. Their

experiences were predominantly positive and, in fact, some actually stayed longer than they had anticipated by extending their teaching contracts for another few months or year. Many said it was a unique time in their lives and they were glad they had taken the opportunity to experience it. Below are some excerpts describing how the majority felt about their year in South Korea:

*"Overall, I wouldn't trade it for anything...Getting to meet people from all over the world... I wouldn't change it for anything. And getting to live in a different culture was just amazing. I stayed over a year and a half."* (Participant 1)

*"The overall experience was to say - filling. It was satisfying, it was good. I'm happy that I made the choice to go there. I don't regret it in any way. I think I came back knowing that I did this on my own and that is something to be proud of and I'd want to do it again. It's just a great way to meet new people, experience a new culture. So overall, it was a great experience."* (Participant 3)

*"It was great. I had a great time. I made friends that I'll have for the rest of my life. It's just a great feeling."* (Participant 4)

*"I remember coming back and recommending it to a lot of people, specifically those finishing university because the amount of money you make, the experience that you gain...it's just a great experience."* (Participant 10)

Only one person described her experience as *"mediocre at best"* and was happy to be leaving after completing her year. As Participant 5 stated, *"It wasn't that much fun and after a year, I just couldn't take it anymore."* Interestingly, this individual was the only one of the respondents who did not establish (or make any effort to establish) any close relationships within the expatriate or the local South Korean community.

While most loved their experience and said they would do it again, they suggested they may do some things differently. When asked about what suggestions or advice they

would give to others who might be considering teaching in South Korea, most people stressed the importance of taking the time to learn about Korean culture, and the job awaiting them, before leaving Canada. This is interesting given the fact that most of the same people left Canada knowing very little if anything about South Korea and about their teaching positions for the next 12 months. However, they recommended the following:

> *"Definitely do your research. Both on what you want to get out of the experience and on what's going on at the other end. So decide whether or not you want a full cultural experience or if you want to be able to hang out with expats...Just make sure you have an open mind about the whole thing."* (Participant 1)

*"Learn a bit of the language. Get acquainted with the history and the culture before you go. Make sure you are prepared to work and know you are going there to work and you are going there to live."* (Participant 2)

"*Research the hell out of your city. Truly discover where you want to be. Learn to speak even a little bit of Korean. It's helpful."* (Participant 5)

*"Do it for yourself. Do it for personal growth. Don't just do it to pay off loans."* (Participant 9)

Despite the hindsight, the majority of the participants interviewed in this study said they would recommend this experience to others. They described it as a rich and rewarding experience that not only taught them about a different culture, but also about who they were themselves. This reflects Cerdin & Dubouloy's (2004) assertion that "expatriation brings about significant changes in the individual's perception of himself and his environment," (p. 979). The experience, which is one of independence and challenge, is one that can evoke personal growth and maturity.

*South Korea*

The positive perceptions of their experiences extended to positive perceptions of South Korea, its culture and its people. As Kohonen (2008) observes, spending an extended period abroad can have a positive impact on developing an intercultural understanding. Most of those interviewed said that in addition to them growing personally, the experience made them learn new things – especially about Asian culture. They gained a better appreciation of South Korea and of how it distinguishes itself from other Asian countries, noting many differences and similarities between other Asian countries that they may have otherwise taken for granted.

*"From that experience I now have a better appreciation of Asian culture in general and Korean culture specifically...."* (Participant 8)

*"The country itself is very beautiful. It's very polluted, but it's still gorgeous. The people themselves are for the most part friendly, but still very isolated and definitely need more exposure to the outside world."* (Participant 1)

> *"(Koreans) can be very generous with their time, with their money, I would say that the level of kindness that you find in Koreans is sometimes so extreme that you're not sure as a westerner that there isn't something behind it. But after a while, you realize it's just their nature."* (Participant 8)

> *"I now have a better appreciation of Asian culture in general and Korean culture specifically. I have a better appreciation just on a basic level of the food...The people are probably the most passionate people I've ever met in my entire life...I think they're a really nationalistic group as well. I think they're really proud of their heritage, where they come from, the triumphs that they've had as a people."* (Participant 4)

The participants expressed predominantly positive views of South Korea, its people and its culture. While many respondents also shared some things that irked them about the society they lived in, their accounts were predominantly positive. However, one

participant's view of South Korea stood out as the extreme on the opposite side of the views expressed by the majority. As the participant noted, *"It's very insular...They're not apologetic because they want to advance themselves and they want to advance their families. I think a lot of stupid little things...there were ridiculous metaphors for their way of life"* (Participant 5). From her narrative, it seemed that her general perceptions of her experience were directly related to her views of the country and people.

In the end, most participants' views of South Korea and its culture changed after living in the country for a year. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the majority of these participants had very limited views of the country and had little expectations before leaving Canada. As they themselves admitted, some could not identify Korea on a map nor could they distinguish it from other Asian countries.

## Section three: role of communication

### *How does communication in the form of social support influence the expatriate experience?*

The previous sections discussed factors related to the experience of teaching English in South Korea: the pre-departure aspects, the actual job of teaching, interactions with other expatriates and with the local population, culture shock, as well as their perceptions upon returning back to Canada. After a thorough analysis, it became apparent that for the 10 participants of the study, interpersonal communication during their year in South Korea had an impact on how they felt about their overall experience and of the country itself. Although one cannot generalize or reach any enduring conclusions, the observation is worth including in the results and discussion as it proved true for this particular sample of interviewees.

All of those who said they had enjoyed their time abroad and who had positive perceptions of South Korean society following their return to Canada developed extensive social networks with either the expatriate community or the local population. It was obvious from their accounts that not only did they make new friends, but these new contacts alleviated some of the pressures and anxieties that are associated with living abroad. According to some authors, the better the foreigner's social communication participation, the easier it is for him/her to adapt to the new environment (Johnson et al., 2003; Kraimer et al., Kim, 1988). There is a clear link between communication with the host culture or with the expatriate community and with successful adjustment. Below are some descriptions from discussions specifically about the social interactions with others:

*"If I hadn't been so comfortable with all the people there, I don't think I would have gone back for a second contract...it was a huge support network, especially at Thanksgiving and Christmas when you're away from your family."* (Participant 1)

*"I would have felt very isolated otherwise,"* (Participant 2) said one person of her contact with the Canadian branch of Jehovah's witnesses. *"It was kind of like having an instant family. I just had to show up at the Kingdom Hall and that was my social circle after that."*

*"Whenever you're speaking in a second language, it's more difficult to relate, especially emotionally... so even if I can develop a relationship with someone, I still can't necessarily express the same range of emotion that I could to someone speaking my own language,"* said Participant 6 about why it was easier for him to make contact with members of the foreign community. He explained that even though he had Korean friends

that he would see regularly, he still needed the support from his wife and other foreigners at times of high stress.

*"I met a very nice couple...we would rent movies, go to DVD rooms, play board games, so they were my anchor in having normal conversations, in having a pancake breakfast for Christmas and Thanksgiving."* (Participant 9)

*"The second year we were constantly surrounded by foreigners, so it made things a lot more homey I guess. A lot more familiar and that definitely, definitely helped."* (Participant 10)

Of the 10 participants who took part in this study, one was clearly unhappy with her experience. She described it as *"mediocre at best"* and said *"after a year, I just couldn't take it anymore."* Interestingly, she went to South Korea with a friend, but the two became very isolated in the city they were living in. It seemed that because they had each other, they made little effort to socialize with others and in the end, had very difficult negative experiences. In terms of socializing with other foreigners she revealed that it was too much of an effort to drive across town and that people already had established networks that were difficult to break into. As for contact with South Koreans, she said they also did not get involved. While there are many factors that come into play, such as a person's personality and previous travel experience, isolating oneself in a foreign country can definitely contribute to a negative experience.

This participant's experience mirrors the personal attitudes set out by Chen and Starosta (2008), who note that factors such as the level of self-concept, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental attitudes, and social relaxation can either help or hinder the adjustment process. While most of the respondents conveyed positive attitudes towards their

experience and were open-minded to their changing environment, Participant 5 had a negative view of the entire year away. She seemed indifferent to accepting others' differences describing how she didn't make an effort to socialize with Koreans because they "in the traditional Korean style didn't go out at night" and that she experienced a lot of "stupid little things that were their ridiculous metaphors for their way of life." Clearly, her judgmental outlook prevented her from breaking any cultural communication barriers, and ultimately resulted in her having a difficult time adjusting.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the results from the interviews conducted with Canadians who taught English in South Korea between 2001 and 2006. The analysis of the respondents' answers showed that these participants chose to teach in this Asian country because there were many incentives. Having heard about the experience from friends or seen advertisements, they were familiar with the possibility of embarking on such a journey. Looking further into it, they discovered that the financial rewards, easy application process and real work experience meant this was something they could seriously consider. During their year abroad, they learned to cope not only with the job they were required to perform, but also with living within a foreign environment. Social interaction with others often helped to alleviate stress and provided reassurance. While most made connections with other expatriates within the foreign community, some specifically sought out friendships with South Koreans. Looking back on their experience, most said they were satisfied with the time spent abroad and had predominantly positive perceptions of the Korean culture. What became apparent from the narratives was that interpersonal communication in the form of social support

networks was integral to having a positive experience for these participants while living and working in South Korea.

The next chapter will incorporate the key findings from this section and will present conclusions reached in this thesis.

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusions reached in this thesis. First, the key findings are outlined by way of answering each research question. Second, the practical implications of these findings are discussed. Third, the limitations of the research are addressed and suggestions for possibilities of future research are made. Finally, personal thoughts conclude this thesis.

## Key Findings

The goal of this thesis was to shed light on the experiences of Canadian English teachers in South Korea. To do this, specific questions were designed at the start of this research to better understand those experiences. The first question, "Why do young Canadian university graduates go to teach English in South Korea?" sought to understand why people, specifically recent university graduates, choose to leave their own country to work abroad. After the interviews and analysis were completed, the findings showed that there are multiple reasons why the participants of this study chose to live and teach in South Korea: they heard about others doing it, it was an easy and convenient application process, they wanted to travel, and they were driven by financial incentives that the country offered. While they had not known much about the country itself, they were excited about the adventure ahead. These findings support previous research in expatriate management, which shows that the opportunities created by the increase in globalization have encouraged more people to consider working abroad (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). International work experience, competitive salaries and a chance for self-discovery all contribute to an increase in work mobility (Takeuchi et al., 2005).

As Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey (1999) suggest, globalization has resulted in English becoming one of the world's most taught languages and consequently the demand for English teachers has increased around the world. Therefore, more opportunities have arisen not only for working abroad, but for teaching the English language. It is easy to see that Canadian university graduates looking for meaningful work upon finishing school now have more opportunity to find employment, especially when they are not limited by borders. Their newfound freedom following university, the lack of binding ties and need for work experience suggests that leaving to work as English teachers in Korea is an appealing and realistic option for many.

As many of those interviewed expressed, their reasons for embarking on this year-long journey were both professional and personal. They saw teaching in South Korea as an opportunity to obtain credible work experience, while seizing the opportunity for new adventures and personal growth (Cerdin & Dubouloy, 2004; Osland, 1995).

The second research question dealt with the experience itself: "What is it like to experience living and working in South Korea?" This question encompassed three main aspects – teaching, interaction with other English-speaking foreigners, as well as interaction with the local South Korean population. While most participants in this study had little to no prior teaching experience and had for the most part not considered this aspect of their journey until their arrival in the classroom, they quickly adapted to what was expected of them. Most admitted to feeling unprepared and overwhelmed for the first few weeks of their new employment, but they eased into it relatively easily once they developed an understanding of their new teaching job.

The adjustment to work and to the new life in a foreign country was linked to the multidimensional factors set out by Mendenhall & Oddou (1991; 1985) and Haslberger (2005) who underlined that different aspects have an impact on the adjustment process. For instance, factors such as individual skills and previous international work experience, may have contributed to how the expatriates fared abroad. Intercultural contact was an important part of the experience. While many participants alluded to experiencing culture shock at some point during their sojourn, those who were able to overcome cultural challenges were more content with their experience (Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 1988).

In terms of social interaction, most participants made a conscious effort to immerse themselves in either the English-speaking community or in the South Korean community. It was apparent that for many, contact with other foreigners was a natural and convenient part of the adjustment process. Established expatriate communities through organized sports or groups made it easy to meet others who were going through similar experiences. As outlined by many researchers, (Johnson et al. 2003; Kraimer et al., 2001; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Adelman, 1988) these membership groups served to provide acceptance and reassurance and alleviate the stress of the adjustment process. While some made efforts to immerse themselves more within the local Korean population rather than within the expatriate community, their relationships were also conducive to helping them to adjust to the new environment. It was clear that social support in the form of friends and acquaintances was an important part of the experience and through individual narratives, was often associated with positive associations to the overall experience.

Perceptions of these expatriates after being repatriated back to Canada were also examined. The results from the 10 interviews show that most considered their experience to be positive, looking back at it as a learning opportunity. They described it as a time of personal growth, a chance to meet people they would otherwise not have met and a great opportunity that they would recommend to others. They also stressed how their perceptions of South Korea changed after having lived in the country for a year. While most left to work there with little or no knowledge of the culture and its people, the year spent immersed in this foreign country gave them a better appreciation of this Asian country.

These perceptions upon their return to Canada are consistent with those observed by Cerdin & Dubouloy (2004), who noted that expatriation changes a person's observations about him/herself and the surrounding environment. The experience is a maturation opportunity, where a person can develop a greater sense of self. As well, as Kohonen & Flynn (2008) noted, the individual's understanding of the other culture is deepened, and they develop a greater sensitivity and tolerance to foreign cultures.

Finally, the third research question, "How does communication in the form of social support influence the expatriate experience?" sought to understand the role of communication in the overall expatriate experience. It was clear from the interviews that communicating with others through social networks within the expatriate community or with the local population had a significant impact on the overall experience. Ties with others were critical to alleviating the pressures of living in a foreign country and helped these expatriates perceive their experience in a positive light.

It was interesting to observe that the attitudes these Canadians had towards their year as expatriates were intricately linked to how they communicated with people they met during their time in Korea. It became obvious that communication, through relationships and social support networks, was critical in shaping the overall experience of living and teaching in this foreign country.

**Practical Implications of Findings**

The results of this thesis have important implications for Canadians considering teaching English in South Korea. As this study shows, many young university graduates know little about what to expect before they leave to teach English abroad. Their lack of awareness of the Korean culture, coupled with a lack of teaching experience, can result in feelings of being overwhelmed, stressed and experiencing a greater level of culture shock. While these are natural feelings associated with expatriate assignments, this thesis shows that they can be lessened by social support networks.

Relationships – either with other English-speaking foreigners or with the local population – are crucial to a successful experience. Therefore, young university graduates seeking to teach in South Korea need to be informed about the importance of building social networks abroad and should be encouraged to be proactive in being engaged in society. This could be addressed through information disseminated at TESOL courses, embassies and through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Future expatriates need to be made aware of how getting involved in community activities can be helpful to having a successful experience. Such information would not only help the individual in coping with his/her experience, but also could lead to higher success rates of expatriate adjustment and lower failures of international assignments. Canada as a nation

could benefit as well, considering that our reputation abroad is directly linked to the citizens who represent our country overseas.

## Limitations of Study

This thesis employed a qualitative approach to shed light on the experiences of Canadian English teachers in South Korea. Ten individuals were recruited using snowball sampling and an advertisement poster that was displayed at Korean restaurants in the Ottawa area. While a sample of this size provided rich data for the thesis, the results cannot be generalized to a broader range of Canadians who have undergone a similar experience. As well, because all of the individuals interviewed were from the Ottawa area and taught English in South Korea within a few years of each other, it is possible that their experiences do not reflect those of Canadians from different parts of the country or those who had done the same thing at different times.

One of the central limitations of this thesis is the fact that all of the subjects who were interviewed taught English between 2001 and 2006. Prior to commencing the interview process, it was determined that the participants should have taught in South Korea within the last decade. Since they were speaking of their experiences years later, the participants had to rely on their memories when answering questions. Recollecting memories can imply bias and may not be fully representative of actual events and feelings at the time of the event. As Neuman (2004) observes, "Because memory is imperfect, recollections are often distorted in ways that primary sources are not" (p. 306). Anytime one is asked to recollect an event in the past, there is some subjectivity that occurs: what is selected and omitted, perspective of time, changing emotions, etc. It would be interesting to know how answers compared had the interviews been conducted

during the participants' year away, directly following his/her return, and two or three years after the experience. However a comparative study would have required much more time and resources than was possible for the scope of this thesis.

Another limitation of this thesis is that the interview questions did not include a section on the personality aspects of the participants. The literature review showed that individual skills such as self efficacy, the ability to form social networks, extroversion, and conscientiousness may have an impact on how the expatriate is able to adjust to his/her new environment (Haslberger, 2005; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). It would have been valuable to see how one's personality determined the level of satisfaction with the subject's experience.

Finally, while the information for this research was gathered through semi-structured interviews that relied on open-ended questions, it would have also been useful to incorporate a mixed-method, using follow-up questions or relying on surveys. This could have allowed for confirming linkages and following-up on results.

## Future Research

While this thesis sought to shed light on the experiences of Canadians who teach English in South Korea, much more work is necessary to better understand the different aspects of living and teaching English in this East Asian country. This thesis touched on the different elements of teaching in Korea, including why Canadians go, how they perceive the actual job, who they interact with and how they view their experience upon their return home. Future research could explore in greater detail, using qualitative as well as quantitative methods, each of these aspects individually.

As well, given the importance of social support to the adjustment process, it would be beneficial for future studies to explore this aspect in more detail. It was clear from this study that relationships, both with other foreigners and with the local population, had a critical impact on the overall experience. More work needs to be devoted to expatriate communities abroad, their nature and function, and how they have an impact on other aspects of the experience - especially cultural interactions. While this study looked at communication practices within the expatriate community and with the local population, further research could be devoted to the teaching aspect of the experience, particularly communication within the classroom. It would be interesting to see how interaction between native English speakers with little to no teaching background is helpful to learning the language and how the actual teaching job has an impact on the expatriate's overall experience.

Future studies, specifically on English teachers in South Korea, could also examine how different factors, including previous overseas experience and pre-departure training, impact the experience of living abroad.

Finally, while it was not within the scope of this thesis, a look at globalization of the English language through the lens of cultural colonization would add valuable insight and perspective. It cannot be overlooked that the dominance of English as the prevalent language today has deep consequences. As Tsuda (2008) argues, "Because it is dominant, English is also the 'hegemonic' and 'neocolonialist' language. It creates both a "structure of linguistic and communicative inequality and discrimination between speakers of English and speakers of other languages and a form of indirect rule over many aspects of life" (p. 167). Scholars have presented interesting theories on the rise of English as a

global language and its consequences (Merchers & Shaw, 2003; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Tollefson, 2000). In the case of native English language speakers in South Korea, it cannot be denied that along with propagating the spread of English as a "global" language, these teachers also bring with them Western cultural values into the classroom. Therefore, the spread of the English language, including Western culture, specifically by young native speakers who are recruited for this purpose, and its direct impact on intercultural communication, deserves further scholarly attention.

## Concluding Thoughts

When I set out to write this thesis, my goal was to better understand the experiences of Canadians who chose to teach English in South Korea. Having undergone a similar experience myself, I was curious to know why others chose the same path following the completion of university. I sought to understand what they underwent during their year abroad and how they perceived this time in their lives upon their return to Canada. What I discovered was that although each individual's experience was unique, most of those interviewed shared similar stories, feelings and perceptions of their time in Korea. Often times, I was surprised to see my own experiences reflected in some of the narratives that were recounted during the interview process.

The one thing I learned that surprised me the most is the importance of communication to the overall expatriate experience. Social support networks – whether it is friendships with other foreigners or with host nationals or simple daily interactions with those around you – are integral to the adjustment process of living and working in a foreign country.

As a final thought, writing this thesis allowed me to better understand how the experiences of these individuals fit into existing scholarly work on expatriate adjustment. Perhaps equally important, this thesis also contributed to a better understanding of my own personal experience of teaching English in South Korea.

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## APPENDIX A – RECRUITMENT POSTER

# Taught English in South Korea?

## Join this Study!

Teaching English in South Korea is a popular choice for many Canadian university graduates. However, little information exists today about the experiences of this particular group in South Korea, as well as about the perceptions these Canadian teachers have of this Asian country and culture upon their return.

This research proposes to examine how young, educated Canadians view their experiences of living in South Korea and how they view the South Korean culture following their year abroad.

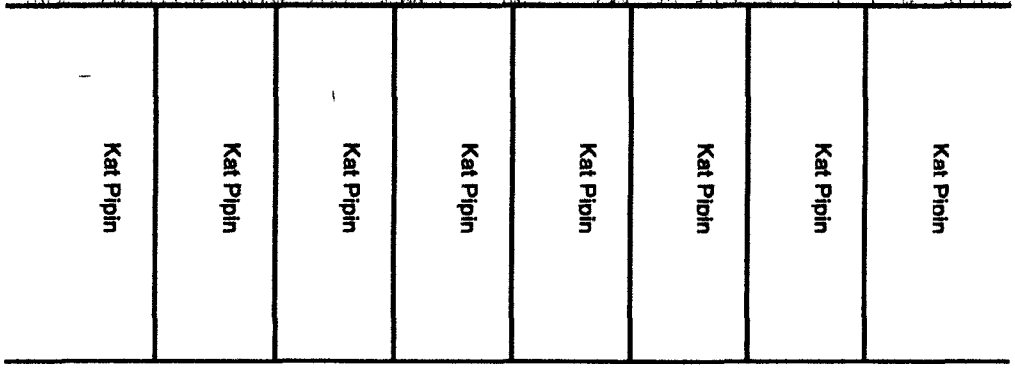
As part of this research, Kat Pipin, a graduate student at the University of Ottawa, is recruiting individuals who have taught English in South Korea within the last five years for a minimum of one year, to take part in a one hour in-person interview. The semi-structured interview will be conducted in English and will take place in a public place.

Each interview will be tape-recorded and used solely for the purpose of this study. Notes and audio gathered will be stored safely by the supervisor of this study at the University of Ottawa. Anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudonyms. Participants who wish to withdraw can do so at any time.

If you wish to participate in this study, please contact
Kat Pipin: KPIPI100@uottawa.ca

The supervisor for this study is Dr. Peruvemba Jaya
(613-562-5800, ext. 2538 jperuvem@uOttawa.ca)

This proposal for the research has been approved by the University of Ottawa Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the research, you may contact the Ethics Department at ethics@uottawa.ca or by telephone at (613) 562-5841.



## APPENDIX B – PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**The Experiences of Canadian English Teachers in South Korea**

Researcher: Katarzyna Pipin

Supervisor: Dr. Peruvemba Jaya

Department of Communication
Graduate Studies
University of Ottawa

I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Katarzyna Pipin and Dr. Peruvemba Jaya.

The purpose of this study is to examine how young, educated Canadians view their experience of living in South Korea and how they perceive South Korean culture following their year abroad.

My contribution will consist essentially of participating in an hour-long interview, during which I will answer questions regarding my experience of teaching English in South Korea. The session will be scheduled on a date mutually agreed on by the researcher and myself and will take place in a public place, such as a coffee shop. I will also be asked to fill out an "Introductory Information Questions" sheet.

This study will be conducted in English through a semi-structured interview, which will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The notes and audio collected will be used solely for the purpose of this study and will be stored safely by the principal researcher.

My participation in this study will entail that I share my personal experience. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. For instance, if I do not feel comfortable with a certain question, I will opt not to answer it.

My participation in this study will allow me to share my individual experience and reflect on how teaching in South Korea has impacted on my life. It may also be used as an information tool for those considering teaching abroad and as an indicator of what can be expected.

I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the researcher's thesis and that my confidentiality will be protected though the use of pseudonyms.

The data collected (audio tapes, notes and any other records) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, in the supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa. The researcher will also retain copies in a locked filing cabinet in her office at home.

I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

I (NAME)_____agree to participate in this research under the conditions outlined above and conducted by Katarzyna Pipin of the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa and under the guidance of the supervisor Dr. Peruvemba Jaya under the conditions outlined above.

If I have any questions about this study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I man contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, ON K1N 6N5. Tel.: 613-562-5841
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participants' signature:

Date:

## APPENDIX C – INTRODUCTORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**The Experiences of Canadian English Teachers in South Korea**

1. What is your name?

Surname:

First name:

Middle name:

Pseudonym:

2. What is your contact information?

Telephone #:

Email:

3. How old are you?

4. What is your level of education?

Degree:

Name of university:

Year of graduation:

5. Are you a Canadian citizen?

6. When did you teach in South Korea? Which city?

7. How long were you living there for this purpose?

8. How did you hear about the chance to teach in South Korea?

## APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me how you heard about the possibility of teaching English in South Korea.
2. What was the length of time between your initial interest in teaching in South Korea and when you left Canada to do so?
3. Please describe the first few weeks of your arrival.
4. Please tell me about the teaching aspect of your year in South Korea.
5. Tell me about the foreign/English-speaking community in the city where you were living.
6. Tell me how you became involved in this community.
7. Tell me how your involvement with the expatriate/English-speaking community influenced your overall experience of living and working in South Korea.
8. Tell me about your involvement with the local South Korean community.
9. How would you describe your overall experience?
10. Having lived in South Korea, what are your perceptions of this country?
11. What are some suggestions you would give to someone considering teaching English in South Korea?

# APPENDIX E - ANALYSIS

| **Factors leading up to departure** | |
|---|---|
| Why do Canadians go to teach in South Korea? | • Heard about it from friends<br>• Money was appealing/pay off student loans<br>• Recent graduates<br>• Poster/advertisement<br>• Quick process<br>• Gateway to travel |
| Knowledge of South Korea prior to departure | • No knowledge/very limited<br>• Basic to intermediate knowledge |
| Considered other countries | • Thought about/applied to teach in a different country (mostly Japan)<br>• South Korea was the first choice |
| **Arrival** | |
| Observations on first few weeks of arrival | • Surprised that they had to start teaching automatically<br>• Initial experience less shocking than expected |
| Culture shock | • At first (within first few weeks)<br>• Later into stay (3-4 months)<br>• Limited to not at all (6 months – 1 year) |
| **Work** | |
| Teaching: prior experience | • No teaching experience<br>• Limited experience<br>• Professional experience |
| Teaching: level of comfort | • Difficult at first<br>• Easy over time |
| **Social support** | |
| Social support: foreign/English-speaking community | • Immersed him/herself in this community<br>• Made an effort to avoid this community<br>• Limited interaction |
| Social gatherings | • Bars<br>• Sports<br>• Groups<br>• Church<br>• School<br>• Living in close proximity |
| Social support: Korean/local community | • Extensive involvement |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Limited (mainly through contact at school) |
| Social gatherings | • School<br>• Sightseeing/hiking<br>• Language-learning |
| **Perceptions upon return to Canada** | |
| Perceptions of South Korea | • Hard-working<br>• Educated<br>• Family-centric<br>• Community minded<br>• Beautiful country<br>• Passionate<br>• Food<br>• Polite |
| Looking back on experience | • Mostly positive experience<br>• Negative<br>• Gained better appreciation/understanding of self/Asian culture |