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North-South Collaborations: Learning from a Decade of Intercultural Experiences for Teachers and Faculty in one Mexican and US University Partnership

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This paper focuses on an ongoing international collaboration between two large public universities, one in the US and one in Mexico, through projects in program development, faculty exchange, graduate student/teacher field experiences, student mentoring and joint research in the area of a foreign/second language teaching and teacher development. Insights from the literature on higher education collaboration and teacher exchange are presented, along with an analysis of the characteristics and conditions that have contributed to this particular network of collaborations over a ten-year period from 2004-2014 and still continues today. Consideration is given to ways in which collaborating across diverse cultures is complex and how networks can contribute to teacher learning. We conclude with implications for collaboration, especially in intercultural teacher education, among diverse higher education participants across geopolitical and cultural boundaries.

"International experience is one of the most important components of a 21st century resume." – Dr. Allan E. Goodman, President and CEO, IIE

"Teaching and especially research abroad for faculty is essential to US competence in international studies." -- *Barbara Burn*

Internationalization, a central movement in higher education in the new millennium, has promoted a significant number of policies and projects related to student and faculty mobility, and, increasingly, to university-to-university collaborations. Despite growth in mobility, there is much work to do to create academic exchange opportunities and accessibility. As Goodman of the Institute of International Education (2013) has noted:

> The careers of all of our students will be global ones, in which they will need to function effectively in multi-national teams. They will need to understand the cultural differences and historical experiences that divide us, as well as the common values and humanity that unite us. . .international experience. . .is so vital to career success and deepening mutual understanding.

Within the context of internationalization today, academic and professional exchanges for students, teachers, and other professionals in both the United States and Mexico may be especially critical. The two countries' geopolitical histories and imbalanced relationships have been complicated. Issues of educational opportunity in Mexico and the US are inextricably interrelated. Twenty years after the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement was signed by the United States, Mexico, and Canada, Mexico continues to struggle to enter the world economy, and the distribution of wealth and access to economic and educational opportunity remains uneven for Mexican youth and families and, increasingly, for many sectors of US society. Meanwhile, millions of Mexicans continue to cross the border into the United States, and US educators and schools struggle to meet the educational, linguistic, and cultural needs of the children from immigrant families. Against this backdrop, exchanges and collaborations involving students, teachers, faculty, and universities may be one of the most important strategies for moving things forward. While the level of academic exchanges and collaborations between the US and Mexico may have looked pathetic as recently as two years ago, in 2014 the number of Mexican students studying in the US rose to almost 27,000, doubling recent numbers. This trend and a number of recent developments underway in both Mexico and the US hold promise in terms of reversing this earlier state of affairs. For example, there has been an increase in funding for scholarships by Mexico's National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT, Mexico's equivalent of the US National Science Foundation). In 2013 President Peña Nieto, Mexican business leaders, and US Secretary of State John Kerry met to form a Bilateral Forum for Higher Education, Innovation, and Research. The two countries co-signed a letter of intent reaffirming their mutual commitments to increase exchange opportunities for their respective students during Peña Nieto's January 2015 visit to Washington. This latter initiative builds in turn on two promising complementary projects: *Proyecta 100,000*, whose aim is to send 100,000 students to study in US universities by 2018, and President Obama's *100,000 Strong in the Americas*, focused on sending 100,000 US students to study in Caribbean and Latin American countries by the year 2020, while, correspondingly, attracting an equal number of students *to* the US from these areas. Given

the current state of student exchange between the two countries, these goals, however long overdue, are being welcomed enthusiastically, not only by students and higher education institutions, but by all who see international exchanges as a key to furthering intercultural learning and global understanding.

Forging Priorities: Teacher Learning

There are numerous reasons to place teacher development high on the list of priority areas for investment in intercultural exchanges. For one, broad-based commitments to multicultural education that promote social justice and equity for *all* students make intercultural teacher development, research, and supervision areas of not only promise, but necessity. Second, as Burn (1980) and, more recently, Manathunga (2014); Escamilla, Franquiz, and Aragon (2012) and others have noted from their different perspectives, because today's educators need to serve students who are culturally and linguistically different from themselves, educators at all levels play the central role in enabling access to high quality educational experiences for all their students. For these and other reasons, teachers' own intercultural competence—supported by access to dialogue "spaces" for teaching professionals (Chan & Parr 2012; Aguaded, Ruiz & Castellon 2013)—may be especially crucial in our dynamic, diverse societies in the new millennium.

Yet another area of research points to the relevance of teachers' intercultural learning. We refer to the growing body of work on teacher and adult learning over recent decades (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2001; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Kegan, 1982; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Drago-Severson, 2009). Increasingly, the literature concurs that teachers' long held beliefs and conceptions, whether about immigrant students' abilities to excel or diverse parents' values towards education, guide but also *limit* teachers' openness and susceptibility to new perspectives and alternative practices. As long as traditional approaches to teacher education prevail, with teachers on the receiving end of "delivered" information and top-down instructional prescriptions, substantive, or "transformative," changes in teachers' thinking or practice cannot be assumed. Transformative teaching is associated, among other things, with an educator's participation in new learning communities and opportunities to engage in professional cooperation, discussion, and revision of their beliefs (Brancard & Quinnwilliams, 2012; Brenes Carvajal et al., 2010; Encinas & Thomas-Ruzic, 2007; Trujeque Moreno, Encinas Prudencio, & Thomas-Ruzic, 2015).

Lowenstein (2009) and Butvilofsky, Escamilla, Soltero-Gonzalez, and Aragon (2012) are among those who see the preparation of US teachers to meet the needs of bilingual Latino students as a "demographic imperative." Smith (2005, drawing from the work of Stromquist, 2002) argues that US and Mexico teachers working in issues of language and schooling should be "comparative educators." Noting the power differential underlying educational and other matters between the Mexico and the US, Smith has argued that a comparative educational approach can mitigate the power imbalance by ensuring that educators become familiar with educational reforms and processes going on in both the North and South. Smith used the notion *comparative educator* to discuss specifically two-way immersion programs based on data collected in public schools in the US Southwest; however, we find that the notion is also useful in the broader context of comparative practices, contexts, and responsibilities for educators and educational researchers, and perhaps in other areas with great potential to benefit communities on both sides of the border, e.g., sustainable agriculture and agronomy, ecology, health, and social welfare.

The specific context of this paper is international collaboration in support of teacher development. We report on one specific case: a relationship between two large public universities—one in the US and one in Mexico—which have worked together productively over ten years (2004–2014) and continuing—through projects in program development, faculty exchange, graduate student exchange, student mentoring, and joint research in the area of foreign/second language teaching and teacher development. We describe how the two universities' collaboration grew out of a prior network of university research collaborations and then expanded to include three additional universities—two in Mexico and one, a sister campus, in the US. We outline key processes and discuss insights from the literature on higher education collaboration and teacher exchange. Our analyses offer an account of the characteristics and conditions that have contributed to this particular network of collaborations and its viability over time, and we suggest ways in which networks in general may be keys to sustainable teacher learning. Our discussion would be incomplete without consideration of the very real challenges confronted; the reader will find a relatively in-depth discussion of these. Finally, we conclude with implications for collaboration across geopolitical and cultural boundaries and among diverse higher education participants, in language teacher education and in general.

Background Context of Internationalization Projects in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Mexico

As one might expect, the areas of language teaching and teacher development in Mexico have been characterized by a relatively high level of experience with internationalization projects. As elsewhere, educators in Mexico have sought projects to expand their resources through collaboration with other educational institutions and community partners. Such projects have generally focused on student and faculty exchange and mobility (Ramos, 2000) and on faculty professional development through distance or semi-distance programs. Until recently, most English language teaching (ELT) projects in Mexico were promoted by agencies linked to the governments of the UK, US, or Australia, i.e., *BANA* (Britain, Australia, North America), the native English-speaking areas that have tended to dominate the ELT scene.

Mexicans' English teaching and training collaborations in the 1990s were primarily with the U.K.; in the 2000s Mexico has had increased collaborations with Australia and the US. Traditionally Mexican universities have tended to host or administer transnational programs with these other countries rather than participate academically in their design and implementation. However, in the last decade, due mainly to faculty participation in graduate programs abroad and an interest in forging transnational, North-South conversations, more joint projects based on faculty participation among higher education institutions have begun to emerge (Didou, 2006).

We believe that the collaboration that is the focus of this paper is distinct from most traditional partnerships in the recent past and up to the present, including most US study abroad programs, in terms of the partners' commitments to equity and reciprocity. That is, beyond making one another's university services, facilities, or sponsorship available primarily as a foreign "mooring" for carrying out one's own "exported" program designed with the benefit of one institution's participants in mind, the partnership described here has been characterized from the onset by a commitment to work jointly and reciprocally. Joint work means the partners *co-construct* bi-national tasks, activities, events, and projects that afford students and faculty opportunities to participate in their respective US and Mexico higher education institutions and also negotiate their understandings about learning, language, literacy, teaching, and teacher development. Such tasks and activities, discussed more fully below, have helped to create *transnational* classrooms and other dialogue spaces through, for example, shared classroom experiences in co-taught summer or vacation classes. In these, participating instructors have opened their classes to students from both universities to create bi-institutional and transnational class sessions exploring topics of shared concern, such as the impact of immigration and repatriation on schools and schooling, bilingualism and bi-literacy, oral language practices in each other's schools and countries, and the importance of north-south dialogue among parents, teachers, students, and school administrators. Within classroom contexts that embrace bi-national curricula, participants hone their own intercultural competencies and gain deeper understandings about participants and factors in the educational process, including the roles of the individual, the family, the community, and personal goals and life values.

Initial Collaboration: University of Colorado Denver (CU-Denver) and the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), Mexico

A range of projects beginning in 2004 and involving mostly graduate students and faculty of two institutions was made possible initially because of support from the two universities themselves (the University of Colorado and the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla), as well as from the Fulbright-Garcia Robles Program and PROMEP (*Programa de Mejoramiento del Profesorado*), Mexico's national program for professional development. Most recently, a project funded by the *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología* (Mexico's National Council of Science and Technology) abbreviated CONACYT, has allowed language researchers from the two universities as well as two additional Mexican universities to collaborate on an investigation of language teacher beliefs.

The initial 2004 project supported a University of Colorado faculty member in a consultative role in the BUAP's Foreign Languages Department to establish a new Master's program in English language teaching (*Maestría en la Ensenanza del Inglés*, or MEI). These efforts were preceded by prior collaborations in the mid-1990s through joint projects between the BUAP and the University of California at San Diego (Nocon, 2006). The BUAP's new Master's program (MEI) was launched with its first cohort of students in September 2005. Subsequently, in 2008, the respective international offices of the BUAP and CU-Denver forged a Memorandum of Understanding, thus helping to spark a series of internationalization projects, key activities and components of which are outlined below. We refer the reader to Escamilla et al. (2009) and Butvilofsky et al. (2012) for articles relevant to a separate partnership in Puebla, Mexico, involving the University of Colorado. This partnership involved at first one, then also a second, local public school in Puebla that hosted CU-Boulder graduate students in elementary classrooms to work with the classroom

teachers in planning instruction for, and teaching, English to the pupils.

2004-2014 Continuing International Projects by CU-Denver and BUAP Faculty Activities and Participation in Teaching and Research

Faculty activities and participation include the following:

- Six (6) University of Colorado (Denver and Boulder) faculty taught summer elective courses involving BUAP and CU students, including Sociolinguistics; Culture of the Classroom; Critical Perspectives on Language, Culture, and Teaching; Language Teaching Lab; Assessment for ESL/EFL; and Materials and Methods of Bilingual Education. These courses featured largely internationalized curricula developed by the instructors and including readings and topics relevant to the educational, pedagogical, sociocultural, historical, and sociolinguistic contexts of both the US and Mexico. On-line course environments were used as archives for course readings and for posting assignments, as well as for ancillary and follow-up communications, project submittals, and instructor feedback/assessments. The courses were credit-bearing and "counted" for the students—as either required or elective courses— towards the requirements in their respective programs, generally in cultural issues in language, literacy, and education. All but one of the courses taught thus far through the collaboration have been at the graduate level.
- A BUAP professor taught a course on children's bi-literacy practices attended by both BUAP and CU students.
- Three (3) funded projects have involved CU and BUAP faculty research teams. The most recent project, investigating teacher beliefs, has involved researchers from two additional universities: the *Universidad de Quintano Roo* and the *Universidad Autónoma de Baja California*. The principal investigator for the above multi-university project was also awarded by her university (Quintana Roo) a three-week research stay under the auspices of the University of Colorado.
- At least fourteen (14) professional conference sessions based on joint and complementary work in the areas of literacy development, professional development, bi-national identity negotiation, and teachers' intercultural learning have been presented by faculty and students from CU and the BUAP. The conferences have included TESOL (International Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), MexTESOL (Mexican affiliate of international TESOL), CoTESOL (Colorado affiliate), TESOL Spain, AILA (International Applied Linguistics Association Conference), FONAEL (*Foro Nacional de Estudios en Lenguas*), The Guanajuato Qualitative Research Conference, and ISCAR (International Society for Cultural and Activity Research). Initially, participation in these conferences was to report on research collaborations among faculty in both universities, with funding for individual participants coming from their respective universities. Over time, more graduate students from both sites have become active in proposing and presenting sessions as well as publishing.
- Collaborators have over 12 publications and one book in preparation.
- BUAP students have completed theses. The University of Colorado author has served on eight BUAP students' MA committees and on one doctoral dissertation committee, and she has co-published with one of these students. She has also served on relevant advisory boards and the Editorial Board of the BUAP Journal, *Lenguas en Contexto.*

Student (Teacher-Learner) Focused Activities

Activities focused on the teacher/learner have included the following:

- Over 200 students from MA cohorts have participated in one of the above courses, as well as one or more bi-national "encounters" with visiting CU students at the BUAP *Facultad de lenguas* campus.
- From 2005 to 2014, fifty MEI graduate students from the BUAP have been hosted in the Denver-Boulder area in one or two-week homestays with local area teachers and families. The sponsoring of these visits constitutes a major component of the commitment on the part of the Colorado faculty. The visiting MEI students travel to Denver during their 10-day spring/Easter break with some funding from the BUAP, and they are housed in the homes of interested Denver local educators. They participate in graduate seminars and visit local bilingual and

other schools and programs. Building on our experience of what seems to be most meaningful and relevant for the students, as well as workable for hosts and university faculty and staff organizers, we have devised a basic schedule that includes an informal welcome reception by a university official, visits to at least two schools and two post-secondary programs, and time for cultural explorations, sight-seeing, and shopping. Approximately 20 of the visiting MEI students attended major conferences in the Denver area, including the American Association for Applied Linguistics and TESOL. Each year's itinerary is slightly different in order to take advantage of available local resources and events. What appears to be a critical element is for university and homestay hosts to serve as *cultural brokers* and for time to be allocated for visiting teachers to talk through their new experiences. Formal and informal debriefs that encourage comparing and reflecting on experiences and impressions help visitors develop finer understandings and interpret the new information and sensations they are encountering. We discuss these last issues further below under *Challenges*.

University of Colorado Students in Puebla

Approximately 20 students from the University of Colorado (Denver and Boulder) have participated in summer courses and seminars together with their BUAP counterparts, and up to 100 Denver/Boulder-area graduate students and teachers have hosted visiting BUAP students in their homes or by hosting excursions. Since 2010, restrictions on university-supported travel to Mexico for security reasons have unfortunately curtailed opportunities for most CU students to travel to Puebla.

A Growing Network of Collaboration

A recent project has expanded the network of collaboration to additional institutions. Funding from the CONACyT Commission (*Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología),* Mexico's equivalent of the National Science Foundation, provided support for the project, "*Problemáticas de la investigación en lenguas extranjeras en México*," ("Issues in Foreign Language Research in Mexico"), a grant project housed at the Universidad de Quintana Roo (UQR) in Chetumal. The project design brought together research teams from the (UQR), the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC, Tijuana), the BUAP, and the University of Colorado: large public universities representing the southern, central, and northern regions of Mexico and the western US respectively. The project has begun to yield a number of MA theses, research papers, and publications on language teacher beliefs and mentoring, areas now considered to be a key to providing relevant, meaningful professional development for teacher scholars (Reyes & Hernandez, 2014; Trujeque Moreno et al., 2015).

"Disturbing" Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Recent studies in the area of teacher beliefs show evidence of beliefs "getting in the way" of new learning. For example, studies about science education show that adequate attention needs to be paid to counter myths or mistaken beliefs about science. In the public health arena, Nyhan and his colleagues (Nyhan, Reifler, & Richey, 2014), studying the effects of social networks and public health warnings, reported that informational messages alone did not change adults' beliefs about (mistaken) medical practices, e.g., that inoculating children may put them at a higher risk for autism and may even be counterproductive. Instead, the researchers observed changes in opinion when the adults had contexts for dialogue in groups and especially with one's close family members and friends. Dialogue in these settings appears to allow individuals to re-negotiate their stances, commitments, and identities safely with trusted others, i.e., change their behavior and views.

Correspondingly, in teacher education and professional development, after decades of considerable investment at federal, state, and local levels in the US and Mexico and elsewhere, questions persist as to if and how the various efforts result in actual changes in what teachers think and do (Chan & Parr, 2012; Brancard & Quinnwilliams, 2012). A significant part of the challenge, it seems, is to create "a climate of receptiveness" (after Malcolm, 1989). For teachers as well as their learners, such a climate is one in which teacher developers strike the right balance between validation and respect for what the teachers already know and do on the one hand and their need to adapt and change and respond to new demands on the other. Do we want to help teachers effectively integrate technology with their middle school students? Is the objective to support teachers' efforts in improving the literacy outcomes for diverse students in multicultural settings? Regardless of the positive changes we want to effect, it is unlikely that we will be able to do so without confidence in teachers' adaptive potential or recognition of their need for critical discussion with understanding peers and mentors. Reporting on his work with teachers in the context of their diverse classrooms in Australia, for example, Malcolm (1989) cautioned against underestimating teachers' and

students' ability to adapt. An *assets-based* approach with teachers that respects and recognizes, but also ultimately "disturbs," teachers' beliefs, may be a necessary condition to real and realistic teacher learning. Meaningful intercultural experiences may be one of the most powerful strategies we can use.

The literature on simulations, international teaching practica, and other field-based experiences is growing (Chan & Parr, 2012; Escamilla, Franquiz, & Aragon, 2009; Mattson, Eilertsen & Rorisson, 2011). Student testimonials speak to key insights that their intercultural field experiences held for them. Below we draw from the Mexican teachers' reports about their 10-day field experiences in Colorado. The excerpts used in the sections below are from previously unpublished data from Hernandez-Sanchez (2009).

Situated Learning: Inside Classrooms and Homes

As discussed above, visits to a range of Denver area schools and other educational programs have been part of the BUAP visitors' activities while being hosted in the Denver-Boulder area. The schools visited tended to vary, depending on the host family's location and school affiliation, logistics, visitor preferences, the school's schedule, and a number of other circumstances. However, one general, agreed-upon priority of the project has been to make available—to each visiting teacher—opportunities to observe a range of types of classrooms and programs.

Teacher 1 visited classes in two middle schools, one with a heavy Latino population, as well as three high schools, an English language center linked to a public university, and an adult basic education class. She later noted,

"Observing different classroom settings make [sic] me notice that learning is not just a student matter. Learning depends on students, teachers, school authorities, parents, and society. . ." Teacher 2 commented on her observation that the economic resources of students and schools matter; this was an aspect of multicultural education both in Mexico and in the United States that she had not been aware of earlier. Similarly, Teacher 6 reflected, "[I benefited from] [s]eeing different classes, and understanding/appreciating ways in which curriculum, resources, other, played a role in the classroom."

The commitment to get teachers into a variety of different settings is informed by the authors' own experiences as well as those reported in the published literature. As much as possible, one wants to mitigate against a tendency for a visitor to go away from an exchange experience with overgeneralized or stereotyped perceptions, for example, having one idea about what *all* Colorado (or all US, or all Mexican) classrooms and schools are like! (See related discussion under "Challenges" below.) Also where possible, visitors' schedules integrated opportunities for them to talk through what they had experienced and what they were trying to process. Often they were able to do this "around the kitchen table," so to speak, with their host teacher and or another household member, and also with one another, as the visitors were housed in pairs and/or otherwise had contact with one another every few days. Additional forums for talk around educational, cultural, or other matters were through joint seminars with Colorado MA student counterparts. Teacher 5 wrote, "Seeing the various contexts (of primary school classes) and talking with MA student counterparts helped me not only learn about these different contexts, but gave me a clearer understanding of my own contexts." The loosely structured conversations involving the Master's students from the two programs—on topics ranging from graduate student issues such as writing academic papers to teacher concerns such as classroom management and parent involvement—proved to be very rich learning settings and opportunities to share and shift perspectives.

Teacher 9 also reflected on his impressions from classroom observations. This excerpt suggests that his observations helped him take into account important contextual considerations beyond the classroom, "Sometimes as teachers we are worried about our classroom and our students, but we forget what needs are beyond our classrooms, our students' needs, and our schools." Teacher 3 wrote that her direct experience of trying "to see, understand, and interpret" what is going on in a culture different from her own was invaluable. Her visit to a class of adult Nepalese and Vietnamese basic English students and the chance she had to witness language teaching and learning in this new setting gave her insights into her own professionalism as an English teacher in Mexico.

A related prominent theme in the written reflections overall was that of feeling connected to a wider world. Visiting teachers wrote about ways in which their own personal and professional worlds had expanded. They noted a sense of validation—as proficient English speakers, as English teachers, and as Mexicans. For example, visitors who accompanied a bilingual early child educator to a parent meeting experienced firsthand Mexican parents' active participation at the school and community levels. They learned about the growing Latino community in the Colorado, which is widely viewed, and appreciated, as hardworking. They were delightfully surprised at being welcomed by US teachers and administrators in Spanish at several bilingual and other schools! With new eyes, they saw the value of students being able to use both the L1 and L2 in the classroom.

These experiences and others helped pull visitors, hosts, and all who became involved in the field

opportunities into a greater North-South bi-national education dialogue that they had not felt part of before. The discovery that Mexican and US teachers share challenges and goals, and also students, was often mentioned as revelatory. Commenting on the openness of the US teachers and institutions to them as visitors, several Mexican teachers noted that they would welcome the chance to reciprocate and offer the same spirit of openness to Colorado visitors in their own classrooms, schools, and homes. At the time of this writing, reciprocal hosting is already underway, with Colorado visitors being hosted in Puebla teachers' classrooms and homes and on field trips to local areas of interest.

Teachers had opportunities to identify with a larger professional community through classroom observations; these in turn appeared to be associated with perspective and identify shifts. Below we discuss findings from Mexican teachers' reflections on their experiences in another context: attending professional conferences.

Learning from Conference Attendance and Participation

While many of the visitors had attended professional conferences prior to their Colorado visit, the experience of being at an international conference in the US was new, and it allowed them to see themselves not only as English teachers from Puebla, Mexico, but also as part of the international ELT professional community. They wrote and spoke about the shared and overlapping challenges and rewards. While on her Denver visit in 2009, Teacher 5 had the opportunity to attend the International TESOL Conference; she noted:

> . . .there we met people from all over the world, English teachers who were from very different cultures and who faced similar problems to ours and who struggle every day [in] very similar situations. Interacting with so many different people makes you understand better intercultural situations and feel more respect for differences.

Teacher 4's sentiments echo those above. Seeing and hearing how researchers across different contexts connected over shared and overlapping methods and concerns was a "highlight" of her experience, one that made her feel more integrated with a larger research community.

In sum, the investments into field based learning experiences through exchange efforts have shown to have big pay-offs, not only in terms of participating teachers' own professional learning and growth, but also in their enhanced sense of professional commitments and responsibilities. Amidst challenges of budget priorities and questions about the value of professional development and the kinds of investments we should be making in higher education and teacher learning through international collaborations, we offer this excerpt from Teacher 10, "I strongly believe this kind of [international exchange] opportunities make teachers improve, grow, and in general appreciate our university but at the same time make us feel more committed to our teaching responsibility."

Projects on the Horizon

Individual and pairs of University of Colorado students have begun to engage in practicum experiences under the sponsorship of the BUAP and thanks to Colorado's Study Abroad structure. Practica in language classrooms in Mexico are a natural follow-up to other intercultural experiences, and in the near future we also hope that BUAP students can take advantage of similar opportunities in Colorado. As Manathunga (2014) discusses, international practica offer a great benefit for *all* participants—not only the practicum teachers themselves, but also their supervisors, host/cooperative teachers, students, and the cooperating institutions. A second aim is to involve BUAP students in practica and BUAP professors in University of Colorado seminars and courses, and both students and faculty in state conferences

Characteristics and Conditions of the Collaboration

We outline below the elements we feel have played the largest roles in helping to *sustain* the relationship over time.

Reciprocity, Equality, Negotiation, and Openness

When faculty members from the two institutions work with one another's students, a number of important things take place. Faculty members who read and assessed one another's students' papers and projects and served on students' thesis committees shared genuine concerns about, and responsibilities for, student learning. Assessments took on greater authenticity because the standards for assessing and evaluating students' were worked out together. Negotiations of this type required careful, respectful dialogue and explicitness that ultimately were seen as benefiting students' projects, including theses.

True reciprocity remains elusive, however. To date, only two BUAP faculty members have joined their Colorado colleagues in the US for conference presentations; no BUAP faculty member has yet served as instructor or co-instructor in any University of Colorado courses or seminars. In contrast, the University of Colorado author and her colleagues have

made bi-annual visits to the BUAP that have involved conference presentations (4), mini-courses (5), and participation on MA and PhD thesis committees. The joint work involved has helped to renew relationships and provide fresh impetus to the ongoing partnership work and involve new players. Six University of Colorado colleagues made academic visits to the BUAP and led short courses and seminars. Elsewhere we have noted that the situation has been reversed as far as student exchanges go. That is, while more University of Colorado than BUAP faculty have taught courses or seminars in Puebla, more BUAP students have visited Colorado and taken part in sponsored activities than have CU students done in Puebla.

Meeting Regularly

Faculty from the two universities have tried to meet at least yearly, often in conjunction with a relevant conference or research meeting. Intermittently, meetings have taken place using distance communication platforms. Meetings compel us to continue to seek to understand and adapt to one another's discourse and conversational styles, especially with regard to communicating critique, expressing disagreement or disapproval, making suggestions, or stating alternatives or preferences. Additionally, distance formats help to ease transitions among different players, for example, when new directors come into play.

Schools Visits

As discussed elsewhere in this paper, visits to Denver area classrooms, schools, and other educational institutions by BUAP students and, correspondingly, visits to Puebla-area classrooms by CU students represent perhaps the most significant commitment to participants in our collaboration. While the numbers of visiting BUAP students in Denver have significantly outnumbered those of CU students in Puebla, an aim to is have roughly equal numbers of graduate students (teachers) from each institution doing visits to the other's campuses each year, as evidence points to robust learning outcomes for those involved (Escamilla et al., 2009; Encinas & Thomas-Ruzic, 2007).

Institutional Agreements

Though the importance of institutional Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between two Institutions is often dismissed, having an MOU in place has helped to make this partnership more visible and facilitative of funding for small projects including student support for exchange visits.

Getting final approvals and signatures on the MOU was not straightforward in the least in our experience; numerous drafts were reviewed and sent back and forth between the universities' respective international offices and involved a significant amount of "behind-the-scenes" negotiation. For example, the author from the University of Colorado had to communicate to her International Office the concerns from the Mexico side about the Spanish and English versions not being equivalent. Also, there was confusion to be resolved about the wording "student exchanges" being disallowed by the Colorado side. Low priorities placed on international initiatives by key administrators at CU at the time meant, correspondingly, a slow-moving MOU approval process. At the time of this writing, the renewal MOU document prepared in 2014 and sent by the University of Colorado's International Office to the BUAP has stalled in the BUAP's international office, but there is promise that in 2016, the renewal document will be signed by both universities' official signatories.

Challenges

Negotiating the complex and dynamic processes of higher education institutions involved in collaborative projects has, rightfully, become a subject of study in its own right. The complexities posed by reliance on increasingly distance communications across national and institutional borders cannot be underestimated. More than once through the BUAP and University of Colorado experiences, miscommunications have threatened the sustainability of projects. We capture several of these below.

- One year, the Colorado colleague organized home stays for six to eight visiting teachers from the BUAP to the Denver area, similarly to the prior year. She was then surprised to receive—ten days before the teachers' arrival—travel itineraries for *19* BUAP students. There was a major scramble to arrange the additional the homestays during a period that included Easter Sunday by drawing heavily on the goodwill of friends and close associates.
- A University of Colorado professor and close colleague of one of the authors visited the BUAP and carried out a workshop for their MA student cohort in which he introduced a theoretical framework and concepts from a book he had authored about teacher learning. This professor's work resonated strongly with one of the students ("Josue"), who used it to provide conceptual grounding in his Master's thesis. Josue and his advisor made multiple

attempts to communicate with the Colorado professor, asking him if he would be willing serve on Josue's thesis committee. They received no reply from the professor.

- Some BUAP faculty members maligned the partnership as an "uneven playing field" with unequal footing between the Institutions and among participants. It is true that while the BUAP hosted Colorado Ph.D. faculty and experts, BUAP faculty were not involved in similar activities in Colorado. We note that early on in the collaboration, many BUAP colleagues had their Master's degrees and were working on, but had not yet attained, their Ph.D.

Different and dynamic schedules and policies drive the two institutions and have necessitated careful planning. As institutional and staff changes have occurred, for example, with the turnover of colleagues and supervisors (directors, chairs, and deans) in the two institutions, individuals involved in the collaboration have needed to take care to make the collaboration visible and transparent, as well as to brief these new colleagues on the activities, history, and goals of the collaboration. At the same time, efforts needed to be made to secure their support and input. To sustain relationships over the course of time and through institutional changes, the constraints, needs, and concerns of each need to be communicated (John-Steiner, 2000), and the geo-political dynamics of north-south (Pennycook, 1994; Smith, 2005) recognized. Having shared goals generally means that the participants will need to talk and work through different values and perspectives. Despite these and other challenges in working in diverse partnerships, the work of Manathunga (2014) in Australia on intercultural postgraduate supervision also shows us that as we grapple with one another's assumptions and theories about knowledge and learning, there is the promise not only of teachers' further development, but of a "recovery and further development" of what she has referred to as "Southern, Eastern and Indigenous knowledges…"

Another more practical but not trivial area that will need to be addressed if exchanges are to be facilitated on a larger scale is with tuition fee structures and credit recognition in cooperating institutions. Present structures do not include tuition parity. In the near future, however, we hope that students at both undergraduate and graduate levels and teachers and in pre-service or in-service MA programs working with partner institutions in the US and Mexico will be able to earn transferable/exchangeable credits and meet some program requirements in either partner institution, perhaps along the lines of the Erasmus programs in Europe and drawing from the work of the Bologna Accords.

A final challenge we emphasize is that of mitigating against (especially novice) visitors' inclinations to overgeneralize from their field experiences. As noted above, ensuring that visitors spend time in more than one institution and having time for critical dialogue to "debrief" their experiences are critical. For example, if Puebla MEI visitors' one school visit is to one exceptionally well-resourced, elite Denver high school, they might generalize that context to all Denver, or all US, schools. The same could easily be true if the visitors were to see, for example, just one under-resourced and historically troubled Denver middle school. There is a risk of these visitors' coming away with distorted misunderstandings about US or middle schools in general. Correspondingly, in Puebla, US students might make inaccurate generalizations based on a visit to one exceptionally well-equipped and managed elite private school or to one particularly poor federal school. Our experiences suggest strong support for visitors not only to experience diverse types of schools and school settings, but also to have *opportunities for critical reflection and debrief*. Pre-K-12 schools that BUAP students in Denver have visited include urban and suburban elementary schools, including schools with early childhood centers and bilingual programs, charter schools, and middle and high schools. Additionally, student visits have been to programs such as parent programs offered through a school or district, high-school equivalency programs, intensive English programs, community college ESL labs or classes, university classes, adult basic education/literacy programs, library-based literacy programs, some church-based educational programs, and programs serving migrants. In Puebla, Colorado visiting students have visited corresponding types of institutions and programs.

Conclusions

There are many reasons to be encouraged by, and supportive of, intercultural education opportunities for Mexican and US educators. The collaborations described here grew from few individuals and a succession of directors in two institutions to several hundred student teachers and faculty from programs in five different institutions, as well as the involvement of local teachers, students, and community members. The likelihood appears strong that continued growth and wider participation of the two institutions will ensue. Second, the literature together with specific experiences discussed in the present paper provide strong support for ways to expand participants' intercultural opportunities to gain global as well as local and personal understandings of their roles and

responsibilities. Third, increased attention and funding on the part of the US and Mexican governments' respective strategies, especially since 2013, are an indication of a stronger commitment on national and multinational levels to the promise of internationalization and an awareness that we will be better at facing our shared challenges together rather than alone. The number of Mexican students enrolled in higher education institutions in the US has seen gradual but slow growth over the past 16 years, from 9,000 in 1997 to 14,000 in 2013, but then almost doubling to 27,000 in 2014. Still, this figure represents less than two percent of the more than 800,000 foreign students in the United States at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015. Finally, there appears to be growing awareness that higher education needs administrators who are themselves culturally competent and aware and thus can help to create systemic supports for faculty and students to collaborate and navigate differences across borders.

As transnational, North-South conversations continue to be forged within the Americas and elsewhere, we anticipate that more joint projects will emerge from wider faculty and student co-participation. We also anticipate seeing the benefits of greater understanding among more participants through their transformative learning in bi-national dialogue "spaces" in which diverse beliefs and practices can be (re)negotiated. We trust that sustained commitments to comparative education and intercultural learning through collaborations across regional and national borders will become more widely recognized as one of the best strategies we have to promote mutual understanding and positive action.

Productive and creative partnerships that foster joint research and student, teacher, and faculty exchanges among diverse higher education institutions, no matter the obstacles and adversity, hold hope and promise, along with challenges, for us all.

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