

EFFECTS OF A TRANSNATIONAL TEACHING PROGRAM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
CULTURAL CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado at Boulder in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
School of Education

2011

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Effects of a Transnational Teaching Program in the Development of Cultural Critical
Consciousness
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find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
HRC protocol # 0510.41

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Effects of a Transnational Teaching Program in the Development of Cultural Critical
Consciousness

Thesis directed by Professor Dr. Kathy Escamilla

The United States has been experiencing an ever-growing increase in the last few decades of English Language Learner students (ELLs) whose primary language is Spanish and who are of Mexican descent. At the same time, the teaching force in the country remains strongly homogeneously White, English-speaking, and female. This creates an inequitable situation for teachers and students where teachers may not be qualified to understand and reach their students. To alleviate this situation, it is imperative that teachers understand the populations of students they serve, especially those that do not share the cultural and linguistic background the teachers share.

Transnational teaching programs have been proven to provide participants with knowledge and experiences that can help them connect with and understand their populations of Mexican Spanish-speaking ELL students. In particular, transnational experiences have been known to help participants learn about other cultures, gain an awareness of global issues, become more open-minded, engage in critical self-reflection, resist stereotyping, gain empathy, become better communicators, understand better the situation and needs of migrant students in the U.S., perceive and value cultural diversity, challenge old and consider new perspectives, and learn from other cultural and pedagogical practices.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program on participants' development of cultural critical consciousness and the findings from

this study reinforce the findings from previous research, especially in the areas of instructional practices and cultural awareness. This study also aimed at pointing out which components of the program were found and perceived by participants as most effective components and the findings revealed that those components related to instructional practices and cultural awareness were the ones identified by participants as most effective. A discussion and suggestions for future program implementations are also included.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the love of my life, my wife, Kelly.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would have not been possible without the constant support of the BUENO Center. I will forever be thankful and indebted to them, especially to Dr. Lorenzo Aragon, Dr. Leonard Baca, and Dr. Kathy Escamilla.

I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee (Dr. Arturo Aldama, Dr. Lorenzo Aragon, Dr. Leonard Baca, and Dr. Marki LeCompte) for their support, feedback, encouragement, vision, and guidance; and a special thanks to the Chair of my committee, Dr. Kathy Escamilla for all her support, patience, and encouragement. Without you, Kathy, this dissertation would have not been possible.

I would also like to thank my family, especially my parents, Manuel and Nena for having provided me with the strongest educational foundation that made my academic success possible.

A very special thanks to Pau, Fernando, Rafa, and La Roja, for teaching me that being a Spaniard is no longer an excuse but a responsibility, and modeling for me that hard work and perseverance always, always gets rewarded.

Last but definitively not least, this dissertation belongs to my wife Kelly, and my daughters Blue and Luna. As I have told you, I am glad we all share the same last name because I believe this dissertation belongs to us, our familia. I did it for you and with you, especially you, Kelly; none of this would have been possible without your constant love, support, encouragement, and devotion to us. For that, and for many other things, this belongs to you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Institutions of teacher education fulfill vital roles in the global educational community; they have the potential to bring changes within educational systems that will shape the knowledge and skills of future generations. Often, education is described as the great hope for creating a more sustainable future; teacher-education institutions serve as key change agents in transforming education and society, so such a future is possible. Not only do teacher-education institutions educate new teachers, they update the knowledge and skills of in-service teachers. (UNESCO, 2005, p. 11)

This statement from the UNESCO is a universal call to improve teacher education programs and a charge for them to become agencies for transforming the present and creating a better future. In a sense, teacher education programs can be, and perhaps should be, agents of personal and systemic transformations.

A problematic reality of the United States' (U.S.) educational system today is the underachieving performance and dropout rates of K-12 Hispanic students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). In the U.S. today, nearly 80% of K-12 public school students who are identified as English language learners (ELLs) speak Spanish as their first language (Kindler, 2002). Further, nearly two thirds of the population classified as Hispanic by the U.S. Census reported being of Mexican heritage (Ramirez & Cruz, 2002). In Colorado, the K-12 student population of Spanish-speakers in general, and of Mexican descent in particular, has experienced a growth of 160% since 1987 (Colorado Department of Education, 2007a). Research has shown

that understanding the realities, beliefs, cultures, and backgrounds of our students is a necessary step for meeting their educational needs (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Nieto, 1996). In addition, a modern cornerstone of teacher education programs in the U.S. today is a commitment to educational equity, social justice, and a promise to prepare teaching professionals who can reach the needs of all of our students, including the ever-increasing population of non-mainstream students. Yet, teacher education programs and the teaching force in the U.S. remain highly homogeneous, whereas the U.S. K-12 student body keeps morphing into a more heterogeneous and diverse group (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). Further, U.S. citizens are not necessarily known for being avid world travelers. In fact, it is estimated that only between 10-25% of U.S. citizens own a passport and travel overseas¹. These characteristics reveal a teaching population that is heavily insular and uniformed about the different realities that exist among our current K-12 student populations.

All these factors converge to create a culture of disconnect between teachers and non-mainstream students, and when there is disconnect, there may also exist an underlying asymmetrical power relationship between two groups. As it happens in other nations, in the U.S. there is an asymmetrical relationship between the mainstream culture and the minority cultures (Bourdieu, 1991). These asymmetries can be observed in many aspects of life, from popular culture, to economic power. In the U.S. today, this asymmetrical relationship is particularly obvious between mainstream culture and Hispanic (mainly Mexican) cultures (Acuña, 1995; Shannon & Escamilla, 1999) and unfortunately, sometimes, it carries over to the classroom when hegemonic mainstream beliefs and behaviors are expected, and demanded, from minority

¹ It is impossible to know exactly how many U.S. citizens hold a passport and travel internationally. http://www.gyford.com/phil/writing/2003/01/31/how_many_america.php has an in-depth discussion on the issue and provides a good estimate.

students who do not share the mainstream hegemonic values and beliefs (Halcón, 2001).

Anderson's (1984) understanding of schema helps exemplify how this culture of disconnects between hegemonic and non-hegemonic beliefs manifests and operates in the teaching and learning process. Anderson considered a person's schema as their "organized knowledge about the world" (p. 372) and it is informed and influenced by a person's sex, age, race, language, religion, and nationality. Teachers bring their schema with them to the classroom and it influences the teaching and learning process in a way that may be detrimental to students who do not have a "shared understanding" (p. 364) with the teacher. When there is cultural conflict between teachers and students, misunderstanding and misevaluations are destined to happen. Research has shown (King, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; Delpit, 1988, 1995) that the mainstream culture and beliefs brought into the classroom by teachers is a factor that needs to be considered when analyzing the lack of success among non-mainstream students. For example, some minority cultures are more communal and emotional than the U.S. mainstream culture and a lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher about these differences could result in misevaluations of students' participation and responses in the classroom, student behavior in schools, and the role of the community and families in the education of their children. As Delpit (1988) reveals, these asymmetries "create situations in which students ultimately find themselves held accountable for knowing a set of rules about which no one has ever directly informed them" (p. 286). Since, for Anderson, the role of the teacher is to "bridge the gap between what the learner already knows and what he needs to know before he can successfully learn the task at hand" (Anderson, p. 382), it is imperative that teachers become culturally competent about the realities and backgrounds of their students if they are to effectively engage with them in the teaching and learning process. More specifically related to language and instructional practices, Delpit (1995) also emphasized

the importance of acknowledging student's form of communication as a valid form of communication, not as an inferior one. Even though her discussion was centered on the role of African American English in mainstream classrooms, the principle should be applied to the language ELLS bring with them, in many cases Spanish. As Delpit suggests, educators must recognize, respect, and value the language of their students to facilitate acquisition of Standard English.

Saracho & Martinez (2007) argue that in order to meet the needs of all students in the U.S. today, teacher education programs must undergo a reformation, one that includes an opportunity for pre-service teachers to be able to critically self-reflect, to consider their own realities compared to those of their students, and to critically consider linguistic and cultural power struggles between majority and minority cultures (Bourdieu, 1991). In particular, it has been suggested that teacher education experiences should help shift the cultural perspectives of mainstream teachers towards a cultural and linguistic understanding of the realities of their students (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Banks, 1998; Finney & Orr, 1995; Florio-Ruane, 1994; Hill-Jackson, 2007). Further, the quote from UNESCO above also calls for teacher education programs not only to train new teachers, but to retrain in-service teachers as a way of affecting the present as much as the future. This is an important aspect for this study inasmuch as all the participants for this research are in-service teachers with different years of experience in the profession.

When the asymmetrical relationship of mainstream teacher (White) and non-mainstream students (minority) occurs, it is particularly important that teachers develop a capacity to critically self-reflect. Research suggests that teachers who examine their own cultural, linguistic, and economic situations, in isolation, and with respect to their students' own realities, are better

educators (Gay, 1995; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 2002). When teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students, teachers need to be more self-conscious, critical, and analytical of their own teaching, beliefs, and behaviors, and understand that knowing about themselves, their beliefs, and their ways of approaching multicultural education is as important as knowing about the cultures and experiences of their students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Smith, Moallem, and Sherrill (1997) believe that “one of the goals of having students examine their beliefs and values is to create a tension or disequilibrium in their thinking which may serve to stimulate change. Disequilibrium can lead to assimilation, the incorporation of new experiences into the existing schema or accommodation, the restructuring of ways of thinking to fit new experiences” (p. 42) and they suggest that “engagement in experiences designed to induce empathy for and identification with people who are culturally different from oneself, and exploration of one’s own cultural heritage are some of the strategies that can create disequilibrium” (p. 42). These two strategies are common denominators in many teacher education programs’ planned and structured transnational and cross-cultural teaching experience, a strategy that is becoming more and more prominent in teacher education programs today in the U.S. These are experiences designed to help pre-service and in-service teachers of CLD students to critically self-reflect (Willard-Holt, 2001). In addition to self-reflections, these types of experiences also help teachers examine different cultures, educational systems, and pedagogical approaches that could influence instructional practices back in the U.S. (Escamilla et al, 2007).

There is also a large body of research and evidence on the benefits and impact of transnational teaching programs on participants, and most of the research around transnational and cross-cultural teaching experiences has focused on the personal impact of such programs in the development of cultural critical consciousness on participants (Clark & Flores, 1997;

Escamilla et al, 2007; Mahan & Stachowski, 1992; McKay & Montgomery, 1995; Nava, 1990; Nguyen, Hopewell, Escamilla, Aragon, & Escamilla, 2008; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Willard-Holt, 2001). In particular, research has revealed a number of common outcomes that are direct consequences of participating in a transnational cross-cultural teaching experience, namely that returning participants are able to:

- learn about other cultures;
- gain an awareness of global issues ;
- become more open-minded;
- engage in critical self-reflection;
- resist stereotyping;
- gain empathy;
- become better communicators;
- understand better the situation and needs of migrant students in the U.S.;
- perceive and value cultural diversity;
- challenge old and consider new perspectives; and
- learn from other cultural and pedagogical practices.

The literature also reveals that there is a lack of homogeneity in the structure and implementation of the programs, such as the length of programs and types of pre and post program gatherings and activities. In addition, several programs do not seem to have U.S. minority student populations in mind inasmuch as they are programs that select other English-speaking countries as host nations (e.g. Australia, U.K., New Zealand). Nonetheless, all studies concluded that transnational teaching experiences have a positive effect on participants, particularly in the areas of self-reflection and critical thinking. The Study in Mexico Program is

one such program that is designed to challenge students' preconceptions and beliefs about Mexico and Mexican students.

Statement of the Problem

The information presented so far reveals that there is a body of research that examined the importance of teachers to develop critical consciousness to become better and more effective teachers of all students. Research has also studied the beneficial impact of transnational and cross-cultural teaching experiences on the development of cultural critical consciousness and the capacity of teachers to self-reflect upon their situation in isolation, and with respect to that of their students. However, more research is needed that explores the actual components of those transnational teaching experiences that yield a positive impact on participants and what other components are lacking that could be incorporated into these types of programs to make them more effective in transforming participants. As it has been suggested, many questions around transnational teaching experiences still remain to be answered (Sleeter, 2001): How long must a program be to have an impact? What structure must a program have? Is it necessary to hold pre-program and post-program meetings? What kind of activities must be planned to engage students in cultural critical thinking and self-reflection? Should participants fully immerse themselves in the culture while living in host families? What impact do transnational programs have on practices back in the U.S.? What impact do they have on the children who will receive instruction from returning participants? What is the sustainability of these effects and impact on teachers? These are some of the questions that research has not answered yet and that need to be answered if we are to have a robust body of evidence on the effectiveness and impact of transnational and cross-cultural teaching programs.

In order to improve the overall program experience, it was important to evaluate the extent of the impact of the Study in Mexico Program on participants. In addition, because the structure and components of a transnational experience aimed at challenging participants' preconceptions and beliefs to help them move forward in their development of cultural critical consciousness can affect the impact and outcome of such a program, it was important to analyze whether the program's impact on participants was influenced or due to the structure and/or any specific components of the program. These discoveries can help strengthen the Study in Mexico Program and other transnational experiences designed to help U.S. teacher-participants develop higher levels of cultural critical consciousness that will translate into better readiness to serve all populations of students they will encounter in their classrooms.

Importance

The importance of this study is dual-layered, specifically affecting the realms of cultural critical consciousness and the development of effective transnational experiences for U.S. teachers. On the one hand, researchers (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Banks, 1998; Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Bourdieu, 1991; Finney & Orr, 1995; Florio-Ruane, 1994; Gay, 1995; Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Nieto, 1996, 2002; Saracho & Martinez, 2007; Sleeter, 2001; Smith, Moallem, and Sherrill, 1997) have repeatedly pointed out the benefits and necessity of designing and implementing experiences for teachers that will push them to explore their realities, values, and beliefs in order to better accommodate and serve to the needs of all their students, particularly those who do not belong to the teachers' ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background. On the other hand, research has demonstrated (Clark & Flores, 1997; Escamilla et al, 2007; Mahan & Stachowski, 1992; McKay & Montgomery, 1995; Nava, 1990; Nguyen, Hopewell, Escamilla, Aragon, & Escamilla, 2008; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008;

Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Willard-Holt, 2001) that transnational teaching experiences are an effective tool that can be employed with pre-service and in-service teachers for that goal.

Embedded in this interest in the development and implementation of teacher education experiences aimed at helping candidates develop self-reflection and critical consciousness is the importance of this study. This study is important inasmuch as it provides an analysis of the effectiveness of the Study in Mexico Program in the development of cultural critical consciousness on participants. The findings reveal, not only participants' own perceptions about the effectiveness of the program and its components, but also possible ways in which the program can be strengthen and improved to have a more desired impact on the cultural beliefs, values, and perceptions of teacher-participants and their development of cultural critical consciousness.

Theoretical framework

The necessity of developing and having the critical capacity to look at one's own beliefs and practices to become effective teachers has been well documented in the educational research literature (Cobb, Wood, Yackel, Nicholls, Wheatley, Trigatti, & Perlwitz, 1991; Gay 1995; Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Nieto, 2002; Truscott, 2004; Beilke, 2005; Dantas, 2007; Joseph, 2007). For example, Gay and Kirkland (2003) describe how important it is that teachers "develop deeper knowledge and consciousness about what is to be taught, how, and to whom" (p. 181). They also posit that "teachers knowing who they are as people, understanding the context in which they teach, and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness" (p. 181).

This capacity of teachers to critically self-reflect is particularly important when the asymmetrical relationship of mainstream teacher (White) and non-mainstream students (CLD)

occurs; a relationship which, if unchecked, may have negative consequences on the education of the students as the result of the set of beliefs and expectations brought forth to the classroom by the teacher and the cultural and linguistic disconnect that exists between students and their teacher. In an effort to avoid these situations from happening, it is suggested that teachers examine their own cultural, linguistic, and economic situations, in isolation, and with respect to their students' own realities (Gay, 1995; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 2002). Further, when teaching CLD students, teachers need to be more self-conscious, critical, and analytical of their own teaching, beliefs, and behaviors. They also must understand that knowing about themselves, their beliefs, and their ways of approaching multicultural education is as important as knowing about the cultures and experiences of their students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). They also need to be able to engage in critical dialogue with themselves, with other teachers, and with their students to become more proficient educators (Cobb et al, 1991; Truscott & Truscott, 2004).

For Gay & Kirkland (2003), to develop a cultural critical consciousness means to unpack our personal beliefs and instructional behaviors about the value of cultural diversity and the best ways to teach non-mainstream students. For Beilke (2005), critical consciousness means to be able to analyze and question systemic structures and patterns and how they affect teaching and learning. For Dantas (2007), critical consciousness requires deep self-reflection and it allows teachers not to see schools and schooling as a single reality that is universally understood and applicable to all contexts and participants in the educational discourse (Joseph, 2007).

Somewhat related, Gay & Kirkland (2003) describe a number of obstacles that teachers will encounter when trying to engage in critical self-reflection. They also provide specific strategies and activities that can be employed to help teachers engage in the development of

cultural critical consciousness. First, they describe three sets of general obstacles that teachers will encounter:

- Some teachers do not understand the nature of self-reflection and they confuse it with stating personal philosophical beliefs.
- Teachers have had few or no experience or opportunities with guided self-reflection in their teacher education programs and if they did, often times, they do not include reflection on race, gender, and culture.
- Other obstacles are originated by the mythical belief that teaching is an objectifiable craft, as something that can be learned and applied universally, in any situation, with any audience, as with the best practice theories mentioned above.

They also describe a number of specific obstacles that are unique to trying to critically approach issues of race, gender, and culture:

- Teachers tend to impersonalize the topics, and instead of addressing individual tangible ways to deal with the issues (i.e. achievement gap), they rely on national data and general beliefs about the causes of these issues.
- Teachers engage in silence instead of discussing these issues. Sometimes they even silence the importance of these issues by suggesting there are cases within minority groups that match beliefs and behavior from the mainstream group. The authors challenge the validity of these types of statements based on the fact that they are individual statements made about group phenomena. They also point out the presumption involved in speaking from an outside privileged position.
- The White liberal guiltiness feeling makes teachers believe it is enough to feel guilty when in fact there are no tangible changes in their instruction.

To overcome these barriers in a teacher education program, it is beneficial to let student teachers know ahead of time that they will be required to think deeply, analytically, to carefully examine their experiences and ways to transform their new knowledge into classroom practices. Teachers also need to have an opportunity to talk to each other and have critical conversations about culturally diverse dilemmas in education. Some of the practices employed to engage student teachers in thinking critically about themselves and race/culture-related issues include:

- Examining the power of language in perpetuating racism and inequalities, role-playing, changing the narrative style (e.g. from essay to poetry) and jigsaw cooperative learning (students take on a specific aspect of the content and then present it to the class).
- Modeling multicultural education in their own teaching when they are teaching pre-service teachers. They posit that “instructors who demonstrate multicultural education principles in their instructional behaviors are more effective than those who simply talk about them” (p. 185).
- Stopping a discussion and actually reflecting on what happened: speech patterns, research-based statements, opinions, biases, etc.
- Creating assignments that allow students to analyze critically values that are embedded in our U.S. educational system and that are generally considered “normal” (re-looking at some of the icons of U.S. history, patriotic songs, traditions, mottos, etc.) and to transform their newly acquired knowledge into instructional practices.

This study also is informed by theories of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1978; Shor, 1993), which are at the core of the design and implementation of the particular transnational teaching program studied here.

Freire's work around the development of critical consciousness presents three stages of possible consciousness. These Freirean stages of consciousness are hierarchical, with the highest level being "critical consciousness", which Freire calls "critical transitive consciousness" (1973, p. 14).

The first level of consciousness or "semi-intransitive consciousness" is characterized by a consciousness preoccupied solely with issues of survival and immediate need, not challenging the world. It is semi-intransitive because the object of the consciousness is very limited and personal. It is not fully intransitive because if it were, consciousness would not have an object to act upon, in which case consciousness would cease to exist. Freire notes that when this consciousness gains the power to question and answer some issues surrounding its context, this consciousness becomes transitive and moves to a second stage.

The second stage of consciousness is "naïve transitivity" consciousness, characterized by an oversimplification of problems and a tendency to engage in polemics more than in dialogue. It is a stage of consciousness that is very limited inasmuch as it identifies and reacts to issues in isolation, unable to "connect the dots", that is, to gain a holistic understanding and make sense of systematic structures and forces at play in shaping reality and the world. It is transitive inasmuch as it identifies objects but it remains naïve due to its lack of holistic comprehension and analysis. Freire argues that many people never surpass this stage and it becomes a lifelong struggle.

The last stage of consciousness is critical transitivity, or critical consciousness, a stage characterized by a capacity to dialogue, to question preconceived notions and one's findings; a capacity to redefine one's self in a reconstructive manner. This is a level of consciousness that questions the *status quo* and it is progressive and active in nature. For Freire (1973):

“The critically transitive consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of casual principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one’s “findings” and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old – by accepting what is valid in both old and new” (p. 14).

Shor (1993) describes critical consciousness as having four qualities:

“1. Power Awareness: Knowing that society and history can be made and remade by human action and by organized groups; knowing who exercises dominant power in society for what ends and how power is currently organized and used in society.

2. Critical Literacy. Analytic habits of thinking, reading, writing, speaking, or discussing which go beneath surface impression, traditional myths, mere opinions, and routine clichés; understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text, technique, process, object, statement, image, or situation; applying that meaning to your own context.

3. Desocialization. Recognizing and challenging the myths, values, behaviors, and language learned in mass culture; critically examining the regressive values operating in society, which are internalized into consciousness – such as racism, sexism, class bias,

homophobia, a fascination with the rich and powerful, hero-worship, excess consumerism, runaway individualism, militarism, and national chauvinism.

4. Self-Organization/Self-Education. Taking the initiative to transform school and society away from authoritarian relations and the undemocratic, unequal distribution of power; taking part in and initiating social change projects; overcoming the induced anti-intellectualism of mass education” (pp. 32-33).

Critical consciousness is then a state of consciousness that is characterized by the capacity to question reality, and the self, holistically, capable of interconnecting elements of reality that may seem to operate in isolation. This is a consciousness that allows challenging the status quo and engaging in dialogue to find solutions to real problems of oppression and injustice. It is a consciousness that is dialectical, dialogical, emancipatory, liberating, and reactionary. Freire acknowledges that many individuals will spend a lifetime struggling to move from the second stage of consciousness to the highest state of consciousness, and perhaps never attain such a goal.

Educators manifest a level of critical consciousness in the context of a problem-posing education, which Freire contrasts to the “banking method” of education. In the latter, the teacher becomes the tool for the transferring of knowledge while students passively receive, or are deposited, pieces of information in their brains. In the former, the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning and becomes a learner, creating, together with the students, a learning community of equals in which the teacher must be willing to learn, and possibly challenge previously acquired or inherited knowledge, together with the students.

In the context of this study, the Study in Mexico Program is an example of problem-posing education, one in which participants are placed in an intentional disequilibrium that will

plant the “seed” for critical consciousness to happen--critical consciousness that will allow participants in return to question the existing educational inequalities between mainstream and minority groups in the U.S today. In particular, it will allow participants to self-explore and engage in critical dialogues with the self and each other about the beliefs and expectations they bring with them to their practices and the consequences they have on the children they instruct. These are all ingredients of Freire’s third stage of consciousness that leads participants to engage in what Freire calls Transformative Praxis.

Freire (1970) defines praxis as action directed by knowledge. A fundamental aspect of critical consciousness is the capacity to challenge the status quo and to be active, engaged in a form of liberating praxis, or “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). This is a fundamental notion for this study as it will allow me to understand and to provide examples about how transnational teaching experiences have an effect that transcends the personal sphere and can impact reality beyond personal consciousness. Freire (1970) describes eloquently the transformation that can occur as an individual moves from non-perception (intransitive consciousness) to action (critical consciousness):

That which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to “stand out,” assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their “background awareness” and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition” (p. 83).

For this study, this means that the teaching experience in Mexico may serve as a “wake up call” to participants who will begin to consider the deeper implications of things and events that “had existed objectively” before and perhaps had not even “perceived at all”. That is the seed for critical consciousness that will ignite the singling out elements from their “background awareness” and will allow participants to “reflect upon them”, transforming them from concepts to “objects of their action”. It is a program designed to help students move from the first Freirean stage of consciousness into the second and third stages.

Freirean liberating praxis can also be understood using Giroux’s notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals. The idea of considering teachers as intellectuals and agents of transformation is very useful for this study because it allows us to understand practice as something more complex and fundamentally different than just the administration of knowledge from an authoritative figure to a group of passive recipients (Freire’s banking model of education). It also allows us to understand the practice of educators as beyond the simple technical distribution of content knowledge. Thinking of teachers as transformative intellectuals implies that educators are intellectual agents in charge of transforming of a reality full of inequalities into a better future. McLaren (1998) and Giroux (1988) refer to this as the “utopian dream”, which they believe is the dream educational praxis needs to promote. Where Freire juxtaposed “banking education” to “problem-posing education”, Giroux juxtaposed “social-efficiency education” to “critical pedagogy”. In the former the schooling experience is mostly designed to train the necessary labor force that will sustain the vitality and future of the economic system and it is an educational experience based on acquisition of knowledge and technical skills; in the latter the main goal of the educational system is to provide a place for personal enrichment where students are taught to think critically and are provided the intellectual

tools for understanding and transformation of social inequalities and learning to become active participants in the democratic process. Freire's notion of liberating praxis and Giroux's idea of teachers as transformative intellectuals are critical features of the theoretical framework that informs this study.

Conceptual Framework

The overarching context for this study is the design and implementation of an effective transnational teaching program and its effects on participants' development of cultural critical consciousness. In a sense, the concept to be addressed in this study is whether teachers participating in a transnational teaching program arrive to the program in a certain stage of critical consciousness, and after completing the program, depart on the same or on a different stage of critical consciousness. The program and its components serve as the conceptual causal construct or independent variable that is hypothesized to facilitate development of cultural critical consciousness.

Included in the conceptual framework are three interconnected areas that are central to the inquiry of the design and implementation of transnational teaching programs: (1) participants' level of cultural critical consciousness upon entering the program; (2) the Study in Mexico Program and its components; and (3) participants' level of critical consciousness after completion of the program. Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the framework employed in this study.

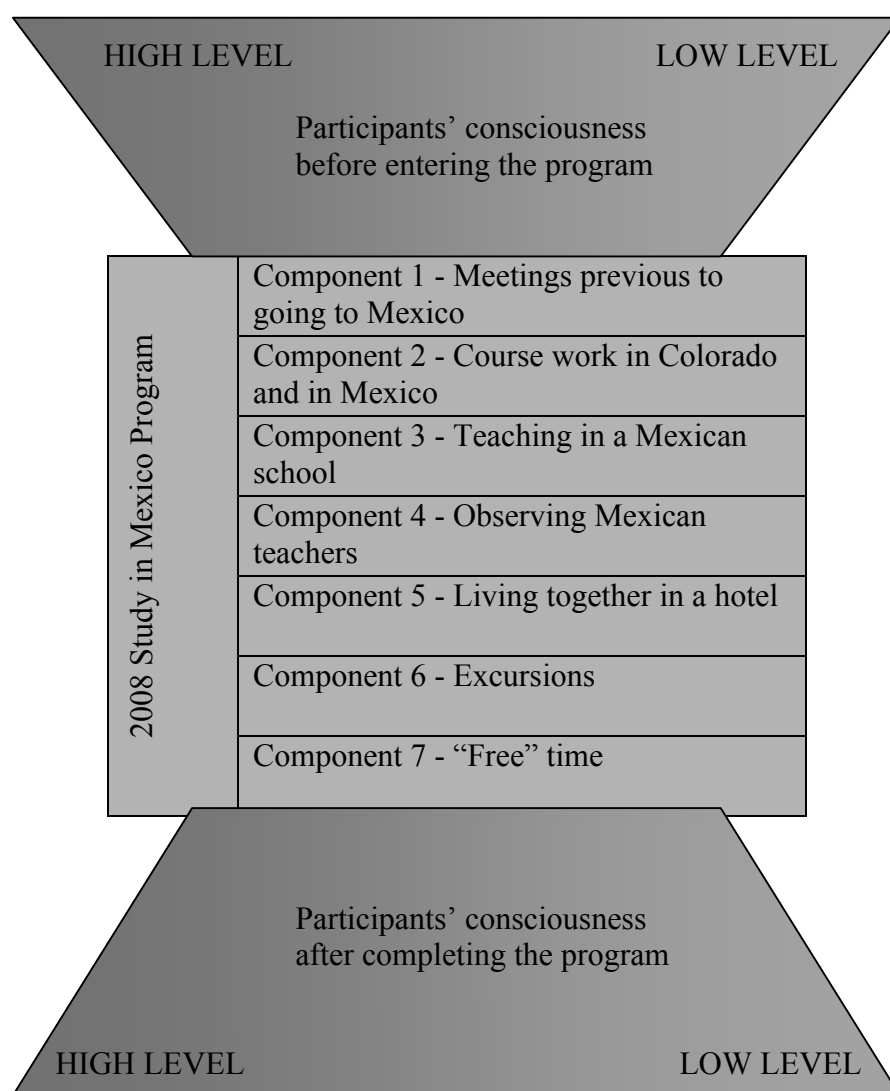


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Participants' level of cultural critical consciousness before and after the program.

As the model reveals, cultural critical consciousness is conceived as a fluid construct within a spectrum that moves from a "high level" of critical consciousness to a "low level" of critical consciousness on each extreme. At the "High level" end of the spectrum, we would find a cultural critical consciousness that mirrors Freire's third stage of consciousness and Shor's critical consciousness qualities. At the "Low level" end of the spectrum, we would find a level of consciousness closer to Freire's first stage of consciousness--a level of consciousness that lacks

the qualities identified by Shor. Somewhere between these poles we would find a level of consciousness that presents the characteristics of Freire's second stage of consciousness. The level of consciousness manifested by the participant upon entering the Program is identified in the model as a funnel that penetrates into the Study in Mexico Program. The program itself acts as a catalyst for influencing participants' consciousness and moving it towards the "high level" end of the critical consciousness spectrum. This appears again at the bottom of the model, identified as a funnel that emanates from the program, representing the participants' state of critical consciousness after completing the program as it was affected by the program and its components.

Study in Mexico Program and its Components. Because this study also aimed at discussing which components of the Study in Mexico Program were perceived by participants as most and least effective, as well as my observation and analysis of their effectiveness, I identified seven specific components of the program: (1) Meetings previous to going to Mexico; (2) Course work in Colorado and in Mexico; (3) Teaching in a Mexican school; (4) Observing Mexican teachers; (5) Living together in a hotel; (6) Excursions; and (7) "Free" time. These seven variables will be described in depth in the Methods chapter, and they appear in the conceptual model as catalysts within the overall structure of the Study in Mexico Program that are aimed at having a positive effect on the development of participants' level of critical consciousness.

Purpose Statement

The broad purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of a transnational teaching program in Mexico (called "Study in Mexico Program") on the development of cultural critical consciousness (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1978) of U.S. in-service teachers from

Colorado. In particular, I examined participants' ability to critically discuss the program in general and in relation to which components of the program they perceived to be most and least effective. Briefly, this study examined participants' perceptions about the program, their practices, and which components of the program they believed were effective in development of participants' cultural critical consciousness.

Research Questions

This study addressed three broad general research questions:

1. How effective is a transnational teaching experience in the development of cultural critical consciousness of its participants?
2. Are there specific existent components of the program that had a positive effect on participants' capacity to culturally and critically self-reflect? How do they inform the design and implementation of the program?
3. Are components missing from the program that could have had a positive impact on participants' capacity to culturally and critically self-reflect, had they been present? In what way did the absence of these components affect the program?

In order to answer these questions, four specific research questions were investigated and qualitative methods of data collection provided the foundation for answering them:

- a) Do participants' responses to the questionnaires reveal any growth in their cultural critical consciousness development?
- b) What do participants think are the most effective parts of the Study in Mexico Program and why?
- c) What do participants think are the least effective parts of the Study in Mexico Program and why?

d) What would participants like to see changed in or added to the program?

Data collected included participants' answers to questionnaires completed before and after completing the Study in Mexico Program, and data from interviews.

Significance of Study

This study is significant in that it examined strategies to develop and implement transnational teaching experiences aimed at helping participants develop and grow in the area of cultural critical consciousness, an area of great importance when designing teacher-education experiences (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Banks, 1998; Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Bourdieu, 1991; Finney & Orr, 1995; Florio-Ruane, 1994; Gay, 1995; Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Nieto, 1996, 2002; Saracho & Martinez, 2007; Sleeter, 2001; Smith, Moallem, and Sherrill, 1997). In addition, this study is also important because it provides an in-depth discussion about the effectiveness of such experiences around the totality of the activities that make up the program. This adds valuable information to the design and implementation of similar transnational experiences, not only to help create new programs, but also to strengthen existing ones (Sleeter, 2001).

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Theories about best educational practices for mainstream pupils can constitute inappropriate and ineffective pedagogical and instructional practices for the teaching of CLD students. Escamilla, Aragon, and Fránquiz (2007) believe that “theories about ‘best practice’ in U.S. schools along with theories positing that best practice is universally applicable to all cultural, linguistic, and social groups has generated the overused and unexamined mantra that ‘good teaching is good teaching.’” (p.1). hooks (1993) agrees, in that there is a tendency in the U.S. educational system to believe that there exists a singular best practice that fits all students. Embedded, and sometimes hidden and unrecognized, in this one-size-fits-all educational model is a mainstream system that encompasses culture, language and beliefs. Halcón (2001) has pointed out that this mainstream ideology so dominant in our U.S. educational system today affects negatively the education of CLD students. Saracho & Martinez (2007) have suggested that teacher preparation programs should be modified and adapted to meet the needs of non-mainstream populations of students. In particular, it has been suggested that teacher education experiences should help shift the cultural perspectives of White teachers to gain a broader understanding of the cultural and linguistic realities of their students (Hill-Jackson, 2007). Further, research shows that teachers must be conscientious about their own beliefs to be effective teachers of CLD students (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Nieto, 1996). A strategy that is becoming more and more prominent in teacher education programs designed to help teachers of CLD students to critically self-reflect is the participation of pre-service teachers in cross-cultural and transnational experiences (Willard-Holt, 2001). In addition to self-reflections,

these types of programs also help teachers examine different cultures, educational systems, and pedagogical approaches that could influence instructional practices back in the U.S. (Escamilla et al, 2007).

This chapter is divided into three sections that present information relevant to the research questions posted in the previous chapter. The first section presents the research and work done on the effect of transnational and cross-cultural experiences and their impact on participants' (pre-service and in-service teachers) beliefs and perceptions. The second section presents research on transnational and cross-cultural experiences that was specifically conducted in Mexico, and it discusses the particular relevancy of teaching programs in Mexico for U.S. pre-service and in-service teachers. The third section discusses the cases found in the literature where transnational experiences had a negative (or non-desired) impact on participants.

Transnational and Cross-Cultural Experiences

The benefits, goals, and impact of transnational and cross-cultural experiences are also very well documented in the research literature with some common themes emerging from it, a list of which is presented toward the end of this chapter. However, there is not enough empirical evidence to support these claims and in fact, those that claim empirical findings do so solely based on participants' self-reports. Little to no attention is given to the structure, design, and implementation of the programs. Most studies focus on participants' perceptions during or upon their return from the experience. In addition, the existing literature on transnational experiences poses some questions for this study because many of the studies found, besides having serious issues with the methodology and the validity of their claims, do their research in other English-speaking or European-languages countries and with a very small number of participants. Given the focus of this study and the origin, language, and cultural heritage of the majority of ELLs that

Colorado educators will encounter, those studies do not offer enough evidence and knowledge that can be applied to this study beyond some fairly obvious conclusions obtained from returning participants perceptions. Notwithstanding these limitations, the research conducted on the effects of transnational teaching experiences reveals some common themes. In addition, this study differs from all the previous studies in that it analyzes the experiences of a large group of participants: 100 questionnaires and 23 interviews.

Wilson (1993) presented a “brief overview of research on the impact of international experience” (p. 21) and described some of the major benefits of international experiences from a dual perspective. On one hand, she found in the literature that international experiences help participants gain a global perspective via the acquisition of substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding; on the other hand, international experiences also help participants develop self and relationships via personal growth and interpersonal connections:

- Gaining a global perspective:
 - Substantive Knowledge: “including knowledge of other cultures and a general awareness of world issues, global dynamics, and human choices” (p. 22).
 - Perceptual understanding: including “open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, resistance to stereotyping, inclination to empathize, and non-chauvinism” (p. 22).
- Developing self and relationships:
 - Personal growth: including “growth in acceptance of self and others, general maturity, acceptance of responsibility, and especially independence” (p. 22).
 - Interpersonal connections: not limited to friendships, but also developing a capacity to “build bridges over which others walk” (p. 22) and to become mediators (p.23).

Merryfield (1995) investigated the purpose of engaging in what she calls global education

and posits that “Global education develops the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are the basis for decision making and participation in a world characterized by cultural pluralism, interconnectedness, and international economic competition. [...] the field of global education recognizes that students must understand the complexity of globalization and develop skills in cross-cultural interaction if they are to become effective citizens in a pluralistic and interdependent world. International education provides knowledge, skills, and experiences that come from in-depth study, work, and collaboration in education in other countries and with international students and scholars in American institutions” (p. 1).

For Willard-Holt (2001), “cross-cultural experiences may be subsumed under the broader category of global education” (p. 506), which can achieve a number of objectives for pre-service teachers:

- to build cross-cultural knowledge;
- to become motivated to teach from a global perspective;
- to perceive and value cultural diversity;
- to become knowledgeable about other cultures;
- to develop confidence and skills to communicate effectively with other cultural groups;
- to overcome the distortions of cultural stereotypes; and
- to consider themselves part of a global profession with global peers.

For Stachowski & Sparks (2007) the purpose of a transnational and cross-cultural teaching experience include: “(1) developing a broader understanding of the pluralistic world in which we live and of the mutual influence of nation upon nation; (2) providing intercultural teaching and community involvement experiences in overseas nations—experiences which offer realistic, in-depth exposure to other ways of life and schooling; and (3) facilitating professional

and personal growth through increased self-confidence and self-esteem, greater adaptability, and acquisition of new and different teaching methods, ideas, and philosophies” (p. 119).

Alsop, Dippo, & Zandvliet (2007), Olmedo (2004), and Sleeter (2001) have pointed out the importance of teacher education programs to include community-based, cross-cultural experiences to become better educators of all students. Sleeter (2001) defines these cross-cultural experiences as “those in which teacher education students actually live in communities that are culturally different from their own while they are learning to teach” (p. 96) and agrees with Smith et al (1997) that disequilibrium can precipitate learning when participating teachers are placed in a “cross-cultural contexts in which they have to grapple with being in the minority, do not necessarily know how to act, and are temporarily unable to retreat to the comfort of a culturally familiar setting” (p. 97).

Alsop et al (2007) found that relocation of student teachers to a different cultural setting has positive effects on the development of self and multicultural awareness and it helps participants challenge old and consider new perspectives. In particular, they point out a number of principles that help inform the participatory praxis that occurs in transnational and cross-cultural experiences, among them:

- Development of personal affinity through practical experience and an ethic of care.
- Induction of students into community experience: countering the press towards individualism.
- Introduction to occupational alternatives that contribute to the preservation of the local cultures visited by participants.
- Preparation for work as activists able to negotiate structures/policies supporting social justice.

- A critique of the cultural assumptions upon which modern industrial civilization has been built.

Mahan & Stachowski (1992) reported on the impact of an international teaching program on personal growth and change of pre-service and in-service educators. The program is the Overseas Student Teaching program sponsored by Indiana University at Bloomington, and at the time of the report, it had been implemented for fifteen years, having placed over 400 students in English-speaking international teaching settings.

Before leaving for the host country, participants attended a series of seminars and workshops about the program, completed a term paper about the educational system in the host nation, and created lesson plans. Near the conclusion of the program, participants received “a set of surveys that serve as tools for evaluation of, and reflection upon, the student teachers’ experiences and performance in the host school and community, insights and new learning gained, advantages and disadvantages of participating in the program, and other significant dimensions” (p. 331). This report looked at self-reported changes and adaptation from 190 student teachers who had responded to the surveys for the five years prior to the report. The study showed that 79% of the change/adaptations reported by the 190 participants were of social and/or personal nature, and only 27% were directly related to school and instruction. School-related changes/adaptations included: classroom discipline, relationships with parents, use of instructional materials, teaching methodology, knowledge of subject matter, concern about performance in the classroom, and working with lower class pupils. Social and personal changes/adaptations included: assertiveness, talkativeness, politeness, style of dressing, self-criticism, adapt to lifestyles of host nation, defensiveness about U.S.A., asking questions, self confidence, sense of humor, knowledge of U.S.A., need to always be right, and stereotyping

citizens of host nations.

With regard to the general effects of an international teaching program, these researchers agreed with literature that stated:

Student teaching experiences in foreign nations have the potential to arm U.S. educators with new teaching ideas, skills, strategies, and knowledge that conventional student teaching programs are less likely to provide. By immersing individuals for several weeks into schools, homes, and communities where “things are done differently” personal and professional changes and adaptations become inevitable processes, usually leading to insights that may never have surfaced, new learnings that no book could supply, and a professional self-portrait that “back home” experiences alone could not have revealed (p. 345).

McKay & Montgomery (1995) conducted a comparative study about changing perceptions student teachers had after a transnational experience. They studied two programs: (1) a program from an unidentified southwestern university that places student teachers in an international teaching program that allowed them to be fully immersed in a foreign culture; and (2) a program from a likewise unidentified Midwestern university in conjunction with the Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS) that places student teachers in U.S. schools inside U.S. Military bases overseas. For this study, using theoretical sampling and case-study design, researchers purposely selected four “student teachers who would provide representative profiles of international student teachers, and whose reflective essays would give teacher educators descriptive cases of the development of global awareness” (p. 5). Two students participated in the program from the southwestern university and the other two students participated in the program from the Midwestern university.

The two students from the southwestern university program were sent separately to two different international locations: New Zealand and Australia. Before starting the program, they enrolled in a two-credit course that explored some of the practical considerations of the host country. The two students from the Midwestern university were sent together to teach in a U.S. military base in Okinawa Japan: one taught in middle school and the other in high school.

Data for the study came from participants' journals, reflections, and pre and post interviews and they revealed that both kinds of international experiences are effective strategies to change teachers' perceptions. In particular, researchers noted that these changes of perception could be grouped according to (1) increased personal growth, (2) enhanced global awareness, and (3) substantive knowledge of teacher as learner.

The study also found that some of the same implications for pre-service teachers' education programs are present in all other similar studies, namely that "student teaching experiences in international settings have the potential to change the way beginning U.S. teachers think about themselves, curriculum design, and teaching strategies" (p. 28); that "student teachers need to develop cross-cultural dependency and view themselves from the perspective of different groups" (p. 29); and that "student teaching in an international setting gives future teachers an appreciation and knowledge of the world as well as a better understanding of themselves as individuals and as professionals" (p. 30).

Pence & Macgillivray (2008) analyzed the journal entries, focus groups notes, observation notes, final reflection papers, course evaluations, and answers to a questionnaire from fifteen U.S. pre-service teachers who completed a four-week practicum working with students and teachers in a private K-12 school in Italy. The questionnaire was completed one year after the conclusion of the practicum and it was intended to assess lasting effects of the

program on the future teachers. The study yielded similar results to all previous research done on transformational transnational experiences. In particular, the authors noted that “While there were a few negative experiences, the results indicate that overall the benefits included both professional and personal changes, such as increased confidence, a better appreciation and respect for differences of others and other cultures, and an awareness of the importance that feedback and reflection play in professional and personal growth” (p. 14). As with most of the other studies on transnational programs, this study also concluded with a description of implications for teacher education programs and recommendations for the inclusion of these types of cross-cultural and transnational experiences in the curriculum.

Transnational and Cross-Cultural Experiences in Mexico

As mentioned earlier, of particular importance and relevance to this study is the research conducted on transnational experiences in Mexico, particularly because the United States has experienced a significant growth in the last few decades of non-mainstream students participating in the educational system. Approximately 80% of English Language Learners (ELLs) in U.S. K-12 public school system speak Spanish as a first language (Kindler, 2002). Even though there is a substantial heterogeneity among Spanish-speakers residing in the U.S., the U.S. census reveals that approximately 67% of those who identify themselves as Hispanic/Latino are of Mexican heritage (Ramirez & Cruz, 2002). In Colorado, the Spanish-speaking population has grown by approximately 160% since 1987 and Hispanics now comprise 28% of the total K-12 student population (Colorado Department of Education, 2007b). In addition, not all the Spanish-speakers and Hispanics residing in the U.S. are foreign-born. The number of U.S. born Spanish-speaker and Hispanics of Mexican heritage adds to the total of non-mainstream students currently enrolled in the U.S. K-12 educational system. Most probably,

pre-service and in-service teachers at the University of Colorado will encounter students of Mexican heritage in their current and future classrooms. However, as is the case nationally, even though the U.S. student population has significantly grown, and continues to change into a more diverse population, the teaching profession remains mainly a White female profession. As mentioned earlier, this produces asymmetrical relationships between the language and culture of the teacher and those of the students.

Olmedo (2004) has pointed out the necessity of critically examining issues of power, cultural, and linguistic hegemony in teacher education programs with transnational and cross-cultural experiences as strategies that can be employed to engage in such critical dialogue. Framed in the context of social justice and cultural, linguistic, and power relationships, Bourdieu (1991) points out that generally these types of relationships are asymmetrical in nature. In the U.S. today, this can be easily noted in the relationship between the mainstream hegemony and the culture and language of Latino students, particularly those of Mexican heritage (Acuña, 1995; Shannon & Escamilla, 1999).

As explained earlier, Anderson's (1984) understanding of schema helps exemplify how these asymmetries between hegemonic and non-hegemonic beliefs manifests and operates in the classroom. Anderson considered a person's schema as their "organized knowledge about the world" (p. 372) and it is informed and influenced by a person's sex, age, race, language, religion, and nationality. Teachers bring their schema with them to the classroom and it influences the teaching and learning process in a way that may be detrimental to students who do not have a "shared understanding" (p. 364) with the teacher. When there is cultural conflict between teachers and students, misunderstanding and misevaluations are destined to happen. Research has shown (King, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; Delpit, 1995) that the mainstream culture and beliefs

brought into the classroom by teachers affects the lack of success among non-mainstream students. For example, some minority cultures are more communal and emotional than the U.S. mainstream culture and a lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher about these differences could result in misevaluations of students' participation and responses in the classroom, student behavior in schools, and the role of the community and families in the education of their children. Since, for Anderson, the role of the teacher is to "bridge the gap between what the learner already knows and what he needs to know before he can successfully learn the task at hand" (Anderson, p. 382), it is imperative that teachers become culturally competent about the realities and backgrounds of their students if they are to effectively engage with them in the teaching and learning process. More specifically related to language and instructional practices, Delpit (1995) also emphasized the importance of acknowledging student's form of communication as a valid form of communication, not as an inferior one. Even though her discussion was centered on the role of African American English in mainstream classrooms, the principle should be applied to the language ELLS bring with them, in many cases Spanish. As Delpit suggests, educators must recognize, respect, and value the language of their students to facilitate acquisition of Standard English.

Freire (1970) points out that these asymmetries must be addressed for change to happen. Saracho and Martínez-Hancock (2007) believe that to meet the needs of Mexican-American students, teacher preparation programs ought to be reformed and need to include an opportunity for teachers and future teachers to critically analyze their own hegemonic status in relation to those of their students. Accordingly, Olmedo (2004) sees in transnational programs the possibility "to have teachers in schools with a large concentration of Mexican background students who understand these students as members of a broader transnational community and to

consider the educational implications of that sociopolitical reality” (p. 243).

Several researchers have looked specifically at the impact that transnational and cross-cultural programs in Mexico have had on participating teachers (Clark & Flores, 1997; Escamilla et al, 2007; Nava, 1990; Nguyen et al, 2008; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Willard-Holt, 2001).

Nava (1990) is one of the earliest works in research literature that describes the structure and, briefly, the goals and benefits of an international cross-cultural teaching experience in Mexico for in-service teachers. The program is part of the California State University at Northridge/Ensenada Teaching Institute and it involves placing U.S. student teachers in Ensenada, Mexico, with Mexican families for a semester. While in Mexico, students teach English to Mexican High School students and volunteer at the local orphanage, both of which are cross-cultural experiences the researcher posits to be “a major plus in the program” (p. 77).

Before leaving for Ensenada, students attend a three-hour seminar that discusses the itinerary, housing arrangements, lesson planning, and complete a pre-evaluation. Student teachers also took with them a post-evaluation that was due upon return.

The main goal of the program is “to give credential students a change to balance out the notions of theory and practice in their teaching training experience prior to working in diverse contexts within the U.S. public school system” (p. 79) and the main finding of the report is similar to all the other major findings from similar studies about changing perceptions and questioning stereotypes, namely that:

The immersion of American student teachers into a cross-cultural context made significant and lasting impressions on many of our participants with regard to their perceptions of how much diversity exists in Mexican society. Their stereotypical views quickly changed when dealing with Mexicans of Swedish,

Italian, French, Japanese, etc. descent who viewed themselves at Mexican nationals (p. 79).

Willard-Holt (2001) also studied the changes of pre-service teachers' perceptions before and after traveling to Mexico for a week, where they visited cultural and historical sites and taught Mexican students about Pennsylvania (one cohort of teachers) and the American Pioneers (another cohort of teachers). This study also discussed the importance of global education as defined by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In particular, Standard 3 of the NCATE 2008 Unit Standards (the Standards currently in effect) demand that "The unit and its school partners design, implement, and evaluate field experiences and clinical practice so that teacher candidates and other school professionals develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn." (NCATE, 2008, p. 12).

In this particular transnational program, a total of twenty-seven pre-service teachers traveled to Mexico for a week. Before leaving, they were given a questionnaire with open-ended questions about their experience traveling, interacting with people from a different culture, and about their expectations for the program in Mexico. Upon arrival back from the program, the teachers were given the questionnaires back and were allowed to amend them based on their experiences in México. Four months later, they were given another questionnaire to assess the impact of the trip in their student teaching. Upon conclusion of the program, teachers developed elementary-school lesson plans about Mexico and they gave presentations in groups about their experiences in the program to the community and to other schools. The data for this study included observations notes, informal interviews, and analysis of students' presentations and lesson plans upon arrival.

The results are presented in a series of categories classified into six major topics: (1) preconceptions, (2) observations of the Mexican students and the classrooms, (3) impact on student teaching and beyond, (4) teaching characteristics, (5) personal change, and (6) negative impacts. In general, the study revealed some of the same findings that other similar studies have revealed, namely that all teachers believed the program was beneficial to them and it allowed them to critically understand themselves better, which manifested in personal and professional changes, mostly reducing their prejudice against students, becoming more globally aware and being more willing to instill this attitude in their own students. Teachers also manifested personal growth in the areas of empathy, tolerance, flexibility, patience, and self-confidence. They also made inter-personal connections with teachers and children in Mexico and realized that there are many commonalities among teachers everywhere.

Quezada & Alfaro (2007) examined four U.S. biliteracy teachers' self-reflections after a nine-month program teaching and taking graduate-level courses in Mexico. The program is the California State University System (CSUS) International Teacher Education program (ITEP) in which U.S. teacher candidates have the opportunity to spend nine months living with a Mexican family in Mexico, taking courses on methodology and culture from Mexican professors, and teaching in three different settings: private, public, and indigenous schools. Data for this study came from post-program interviews the researchers had with the four participants, who were asked to answer four questions: "(1) As a result of participation in the ITEP how, if at all, did the biliteracy teacher's views change or remain the same with respect to teaching students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds? (2) Is the ITEP ideologically aligned with the pedagogical needs of elementary students in their current classrooms? (3) What significant experience created a space for developing ideological clarity as a result of

participation in the ITEP? (4) What are the key dimensions in developing a clear teaching ideology?” (p. 100).

Four major themes emerged from the data:

1. Perceived inequities: participants “observed daily inequities regarding how English language learners are viewed by some in the United States and what can happen if one is not “part of the norm or dominant group” (p. 111).
2. Teachers as change agents: This experienced allowed participants “to self-reflect both personally and professionally about their teaching practice as a process for self-empowerment and ideological clarity in both their pre-service and in-service teaching experiences” (p. 111).
3. Student intimacy: participants developed a sense of community learning.
4. Internal versus external relationships: “The biliteracy teachers in this study battled the tensions between what they learned from their rich cultural and language experiences in student teaching abroad to negotiating within themselves regarding their role in a standards-based curriculum.

Researchers concluded that in order to develop good biliteracy global educators, it is necessary to infuse teacher education programs with international teaching experiences, as they tend to positively influence their work with ELLs in the U.S. Two articles have specifically reported on the impact on participating teachers of the same transnational educational experience that is the focus of this research.

In the first article, Escamilla et al (2007) analyzed observations participants made about the classrooms and schools they attended in Mexico. The study also reported on the impact of the program on teaching practices back in U.S. schools. Escamilla et.al. looked at two years of data

from interviews, focus groups, and assignments that participants completed before, during, and after the program. Data revealed that participants experience transformational effects on five different areas: (1) stereotyping of Mexican culture; (2) instructional practices, particularly around literacy; (3) the material culture of the classroom environment; (4) the material resources of the school and the classroom; (5) Mexican teaching methods, again particularly around literacy. The researchers noticed that the rhetoric employed by participants about all these categories was initially oriented from a deficit perspective and that such rhetoric changed to a more positive perspective while in and at the conclusion of the program.

Researchers also reported on the transformational potential of the program inasmuch as teachers demonstrate “an awareness that maybe U.S. schools could benefit from some of the prevalent practices in Mexican schools [...] The acknowledgement that some of the teaching practices and instructional approaches observed could be positive additions to the pedagogy of U.S. bilingual and ESL classrooms represents a significant shift” (p. 35).

In the second article, Nguyen et al (2008) explored the impact of the program on the development of critical consciousness by analyzing the writing styles of thirty-five in-service teacher participants’ self-reported five memorable moments. The researchers compared written reflections between U.S.-educated teachers and foreign-educated teachers who participated in the program. Researchers posit that “reflective engagement is a necessary component of the journey to raising critical consciousness” (p. 23) and data revealed that some teachers provided descriptive accounts of their memorable moments while others provided reflective accounts of their memorable moments. Researchers argue that those who were able to provide reflective accounts of their memorable moments manifested a development of critical consciousness as they demonstrated “an ability to critically connect their experiences in Mexico to the teaching

of CLD students in the United States” (p. 23). They add that “the teachers in this study who wrote reflectively recognized how their own perspectives and knowledge of the world is rooted in a particular cultural experience and were striving to comprehend how their CLD students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence their processing and acquiring of knowledge, language, and understanding.” (p. 23)

This descriptive vs. reflective narrative is of importance for my study since it is one of the lenses I applied to the codification, interpretation, and analysis of the data from the questionnaires and the interviews. A descriptive narrative in the answers to the questions in the questionnaires or during the interviews would reveal a lack of critical consciousness in the answers; these are descriptive narratives that merely describe experiences and events during the 2008 Study in Mexico Program, without critically analyzing such events and experiences. A reflective narrative, on the contrary includes a more critical reflection of the events and experiences during the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. These reflective narratives analyze why things are the way they are, how they connect with each other, and the personal and professional experiences of the participants. A reflective narrative is critical and self-reflective in nature and it includes a more in-depth view and interpretation of the events and experiences participants had during the 2008 Study in Mexico Program.

For example, a descriptive narrative about what participants learned from Mexican schools will reveal tangible, observable descriptors like in the case of Participant 33, when he said that “The schools are very secure and the students are always in uniform”. A more reflective approach to the same question would include some level of reflection, like comparing them to their current schools in the U.S., and delineating similarities and differences, similar to what Participant 36 does when she said that the Mexican school “uses more direct instruction

and interactive learning than U.S. schools. They seem to not need so many resources”.

Although not incredible critical and reflective, Participant 36 shows a deeper level of analysis in her response than Participant 33 since she is able to compare her observation of the Mexican school to what she is used to having and observing in her U.S. classroom. Participant 33 however, does not include any level of reflection in his response and limits himself to describing two facts (security and uniforms) that he observed in the Mexican school.

Moreover, the study also revealed that participants engaged either in cognitive confidence or cognitive dissonance. Researchers argued that:

Teachers who demonstrated cognitive confidence used the experience in Mexico to affirm their previously held beliefs about Mexico and Mexicans. Teachers who demonstrated cognitive dissonance revealed the intellectual and emotional conflict they experienced when their experiences did not mirror their original thinking. Clinging to contradictory truths was impossible, so the teachers used the journal to grapple with their insights and to unload the burden of having to reject one of their contradictory ideas. The presence of these two cognitive stances serve as further evidence that a short-term Study in Mexico Program can contribute to teachers' process in developing critical consciousness (p. 24).

But what about those who don't change? The ones who are “cognitively confident?”

Participants in this study came from different cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds and it is important to notice that even though the teaching population in the U.S. is largely composed of White females (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2001), research has shown (Rios, Montecinos, and van Olphen, 2007) that transnational program also can be very effective and have positive effects on diverse educators.

In addition, a component of many transnational teaching experiences is the observation of pedagogical practices in the host nation (Escamilla et al, 2007; Nguyen et al, 2008). Clark & Flores (1997) conducted an observational study in Monterrey, México, where ten pre-service teachers observed instructional practices in elementary and junior high school settings for a week under the supervision of faculty and research assistants, employing an observation form. Data from the observation form as well as from daily discussion groups with the researcher revealed that overall, pre-service teachers felt the “experience had indeed been positive and enriching for everyone involved” (p. 111). In particular, pre-service teachers concluded that:

- recent immigrant children may need a period of transition to adjust to the teaching/learning environment in a U.S. classroom;
- bilingual teachers should be cognizant of this adjustment period and should accommodate the recent immigrant by planning appropriate lessons and evaluation activities;
- as bilingual teachers, it is simply not enough to have linguistic and sociocultural understanding of one’s own ethnic group; and
- as bilingual teachers, it is important to have an understanding of immigrant children’s schooling experience in their native country.

Also, the researcher reported on the overall effects of this experience on the pre-service teachers, which are similar to other effects and impacts reported by other research on transnational experiences. These effects were: “(a) a reaffirmation of their commitment to teach language minority students, (b) improvement in their understanding of and knowledge base of differing socio-cultural contexts, and (c) increased pride in their abilities and attributes as bilingual and bicultural prospective teachers” (p. 112).

Undesirable Effects

An important aspect of this study is to decipher any structural components of the Study in Mexico Program that have a negative effect or do not have an effect at all on participants' development of critical consciousness. The literature reveals that even though "there is little controversy surrounding the value of cross-cultural experiences for teachers" (Willard-Holt, 2001, p. 505), there are instances when the experience has a negative impact on participants.

Willard-Holt (2001) found that "despite all the positive effects" (p. 514), four out of the twenty-seven participants in one study experienced some negative effects that the author grouped in: (1) Overconfidence, where the researchers observed that the "level of self-confidence developed by one pre-service teacher was a bit too high, and somewhat unrealistic" (p. 514); (2) inflated estimate of understanding of Mexican culture, where two participants believed that "six days in Mexico made them "experts" on multicultural teaching and the Mexican culture" (p. 514); and (3) narrow view – where one participant failed to recognize that his experience could be beneficial to all children and believed that it was only good for children of diverse cultures. These negative impacts may seem miniscule when compared to the positive effects of international teaching experiences, but when considered in the contexts of classroom practices, they may have serious consequences on the education of ELLs.

Olmedo (2004) reported that some participants who developed a number of educational projects in Mexico "were disappointed with the difficulties of translating their projects into curricula" but "they nevertheless commented on the benefits gained from the experience of studying and living in the environment that provided the context for curriculum development" (p. 259). This negative impact, again, may not seem that serious at first sight, but its pedagogical implications are big when considering that the "lesson learned" was difficult, if not impossible,

for some participants to apply it to pedagogical practices.

Stachowski & Sparks (2007) surveyed 66 participants who attended the 2004-2005 Overseas Student Teaching Project at Indiana University-Bloomington, a program that has been in existence for more than 30 years, and found that “When asked to balance the advantages with the disadvantages of participating in the Project, using a scale of 1 (most negative) to 7 (most positive), respondents averaged 6.3 overall, indicating that the “benefits/advantages far outweigh any problems” (p. 127); however, the authors failed to indicate what the disadvantages and problems were, making it difficult to reach any conclusions as to what caused negative impacts.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of negative impact was found by Rios et al. (2007), who found that international teaching programs must possess a clear and meaningful organization and structure if they are to be successful; without such components, the experience runs the risk of being ineffective and perhaps even having a negative impact on participants:

“These experiences abroad must be of a quality (authenticity) and quantity (length of time) such that they provide teacher education faculty with opportunities to construct and re/construct understandings of phenomena, including how “education” is conceived of and carried out differently, so that it approximates a better understanding of the perspective of the international “Other” regarding education. Without this quality and quantity of experiences, the teacher educator risks completing the international education experience within the framework of the culturally insular wherein the perspective they attain is negative (reinforcing negative cultural stereotypes and misunderstanding the aims of education in that country) or superficial (having a general idea of how things work, such as cultures or schooling systems, but at such a superficial level as to be of

little value upon return). In the latter case, those general learnings will not persist as the memories of the international experience fade” (p. 71).

Conclusion

In summary, research on educational transnational experiences and their impact on U.S. pre-service and in-service teachers reveals a number of common themes; in particular, research on the effects of transnational programs for pre-service and in-service teachers (Alsop et al., 2007; Clark & Flores, 2007; Escamilla et al., 2007; Mahan & Stachowski, 1992; McKay & Montgomery, 1995; Merryfield, 1995; Nava, 1990; Nguyen et al, 2008; Olmedo, 2004; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Rios, 2007; Sleeter, 2001; Smith et al., 1997; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007; Willard-Holt, 2001; and Wilson, 1993) has revealed positive outcomes in terms of personal transformations and/or development of critical awareness and self-reflection about issues related to ELLs, migrant education, and cultural awareness, and no example in the literature was found that did not recommend transnational teaching experiences as a good strategy to employ in teacher education programs. However, some undesirable effects of these types of experiences were also found in the literature. Particularly worrisome are those possible negative impacts that may arise as a consequence of faulty design and implementation of these experiences. A robust design and implementation of these experiences is needed if we are to have the best and most positive impact on participants. The literature offers a few solutions and recommends a number of components that need to exist in these programs, but many questions remain to be answered. For example, Sleeter (2001) reviewed 80 studies on the effects of different teacher education strategies, including cross-cultural immersion experiences, and found that “although there is a large quantity of research, very little of it actually examines which strategies prepare strong teachers. Most of the research focuses on addressing the attitudes and lack of knowledge of

White pre-service students” (p. 94), and she ponders the difficulties of organizing and including transnational teaching experiences in teacher education programs:

“Community-based immersion experiences require a good deal of work to organize and operate, however, and convincing others that such experiences should be a part of teacher education is difficult without a stronger research base” (p. 96). She then points out some of the questions that research still needs to answer. One which is particularly relevant to this project is: “What impact does an immersion experience have on a teacher when he or she enters the profession?” (p. 96).

This study aimed to increase the body of knowledge about the impact and effects of transnational and cross-cultural teaching programs in Mexico. We know that transnational teaching programs have, on average, a positive effect on participants who report to have gained a better understanding of their own beliefs in relation to those of their students. However, we do not have much knowledge about which elements of the teaching experience were particularly influential in making it a transformative experience. Research is also needed on the sustainability effects of transnational teaching programs. As Sleeter (2001) stated, there are still numerous questions about transnational teaching experiences that research needs to answer. This case study provided self-reported information and an in-depth interpretation and analysis about the components of the Study in Mexico Program that helped participants develop critical consciousness. In addition, due to the length of time that has passed between participants’ interviews (2010) and their participation in the program (2008), it was possible to observe and analyze possible sustainability effects of the program.

Chapter 3

Methods

Strategy of Inquiry

This study is a multi-method case study which employed qualitative descriptive methods as strategies for collecting and analyzing data. It took an in-depth look at a pool of participants in the Study in Mexico Program. A case study design was chosen because it is a research methodology that aims at studying a complex phenomenon as it actually occurs or has occurred in one or multiple locations (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). For this particular study, I followed guidelines for the design of case studies as described by Helen Simons (1980), Robert E. Stake (1995), and Robert K. Yin (2003). In particular, Yin (2003) states that case studies are “the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). Creswell (2003) suggests that case studies facilitate an in-depth exploration of events, activities, programs, or processes. In addition, case studies permitted me to provide close-up views of participants’ voices, beliefs, and perceptions about the Study in Mexico Program using different methods of data collection including documents and interviews.

I selected Case Study strategies to complete this study because my main goal was not to find quantifiable data or truth about the Study in Mexico Program. Instead, I wanted to provide a naturalistic description, analysis, and in-depth understanding of the Study in Mexico Program and to identify new variables and questions that could guide future research around the development and implementation of transnational teaching experiences aimed at helping participants develop higher levels of cultural critical consciousness.

By employing a case study, I was able to provide a realistic representation of participants' beliefs about their experiences in the Study in Mexico Program without needing to worry about finding universal truths that would have ignited major issues of reliability and generality of my findings.

Setting – The Study in Mexico Program

The setting for this study was the Study in Mexico Program sponsored and organized by the BUENO Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in partnership with Escuela Héroes de Nacozari, and Escuela Otilio Montañón in Puebla, Mexico. The Program has existed for 19 years and it has provided hundreds of pre-service and in-service teachers from the United States with an opportunity to teach and learn in a transnational program. The Program is embedded in the School of Education University of Colorado Master's degree in Educational Equity & Cultural Diversity (EECD). Completion of this program qualifies one for a Colorado endorsement in the area of Linguistically Diverse Education (K-12) or in the areas of Special Education Generalist and Linguistically Diverse Education (K-12). As a requirement for the completion of the MA program, participants need to complete 36-37 credit hours of graduate-level courses, pass the appropriate PLACE Exam, and complete 200 hours of in-school work as part of the Practicum experience. Students in these MA Programs and endorsements can complete the 200 in-school hours in different ways, and participating in the Study in Mexico Program facilitates the fulfillment of that requirement. Thus, participation in the Study in Mexico Program is voluntary.

The program occurs in the summer and it is two weeks in duration, with coursework beginning in Colorado prior to travelling to Mexico. Participants can earn up to six credits of graduate work for participating in the program. Prior to leaving for Mexico, participants attended

a 2-3 hour orientation about the program and received a Handbook with general and specific information about the program. Additionally, before leaving for Mexico, participants and faculty met twice on two full-days on Saturday where they discussed the logistics of the program, the traveling, and started their coursework. During this time, participants were given a pre-questionnaire that asked them questions about their prior experiences in Mexico, their understanding of multiculturalism, and their expectations for the experience (see Appendix A). Also during these meetings, participants were told that they would work in groups, what peers they would be working with, and in what school they would be working. Program administrators placed participants together in groups of two or three participants who were assigned a mentor and placed in one of the schools in Mexico. The groups were created by assigning participants randomly and they were then, randomly assigned to one of the schools. This was true for most participants, though it was not the case for bilingual participants who spoke Spanish; participants who reported being able to speak Spanish were strategically paired with participants who reported not being able to speak Spanish. The main goal of these groups was to design lesson plans for an English-language unit that each group implemented during the two weeks they spent teaching in the Mexican schools.

Once in Mexico, participants attended in their groups one of the two participating primary schools (grades 1-6), Escuela Héroes de Nacozari or Escuela Otilio Montaña, where they spent two hours daily. For one hour they observed Mexican teachers and the other hour they taught the English-language unit they designed to Mexican students. Faculty and graduate students from the University of Colorado served as mentors, guides, and observers of participants' daily work in the schools. The design of the program calls for an hour of observation and another hour of instruction, but both Mexican and U.S. teachers are asked to be

flexible and accommodate as they see appropriate. The schools are considered to be middle class by Mexico's standards; in the summer of 2008, Escuela Héroes de Nacozari had 304 students and Escuela Otilio Montaña had 530 students.

The two schools shared many similarities that would be shared by public schools in Mexico like overall sense of respect for the institution and the teachers that came from parents and families of students. They were both gated schools and students wore uniforms. However, there were some significant differences between both schools in part due to the Socio-Economic Status of the families they served. Otilio Montaña is a more affluent school that has parents who donate money and resources for the education of their children. The classrooms in Otilio Montaña were very well equipped technologically with computer and data projectors. They also enjoyed the easiness of using white dry-erase boards instead of chalkboards, a dance teacher, and a computer lab. On the other hand, Héroes de Nacozari serves a less privileged community and their classrooms lacked the technology many participants observed at Otilio Montaña. The school lacked a computer lab and even though they had received a grant and acquired a number of computers and projectors for their classrooms, they had been stolen.

After their daily observations and teaching in the schools, participants spent the remaining of their day taking University coursework. In the summer of 2008, four classes were offered: "Materials and Methods in Bilingual/Multicultural Education", "Proseminar: Parent and Community Involvement", "Practicum in Social, Multicultural, and Bilingual Foundations", and "Curriculum for Multicultural Education". All participants were enrolled in the "Materials and Methods in Bilingual/Multicultural Education" course, which was taught in the morning, after the visit to the schools and prior to lunch. After lunch, participants divided into three groups, one group attending the "Parent and Community Involvement" class, another group attending the

Practicum class, and the other group attending the “Curriculum for Multicultural Education” class. After class, participants meet with their mentors to work on their lesson plans and complete readings and assignments for their courses.

Participants and faculty lived together in a 400 year-old hotel located in downtown Puebla, Mexico, within walking distance of cultural and historic sites. Coexisting in a hotel together instead of placing participants with host families was done intentionally, as it allowed participants to prepare class work together, visit the city together, invite their host teachers for dinner, or relax together, thus creating a close-knit community of learners for two weeks. It also allows participants to have a real opportunity to develop critical consciousness as they engage with each other in late-night visits with themselves, faculty, and program administrators. In a sense, coexisting together in a hotel maximizes the opportunities for participants’ self-reflection.

Participants engaged in several projects related to their experiences in Mexico. First, as mentioned earlier, in their groups of two or three, they prepared a series of ESL lesson plans around a theme that they implemented in their two weeks teaching experience in their assigned schools. Preparation for the lesson plan began in the U.S during the two Saturday meetings prior to leaving for Mexico and plans were supported and guided by faculty and graduate students from the beginning. Also, as stated earlier, participants were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire in one of the Saturday meetings (see Appendix A).

While in Mexico, in addition to implementing the ESL lesson in the schools and the class work related to the two graduate-level courses they took, participants were required to keep a journal that included at least five “memorable moments”, and to participate in two cultural field

trips. One trip was to the Pyramid in Cholula, and the other trip was to the forts of Loreto and Guadalupe, where the Battle of Puebla was fought on May 5, 1862.

The selection of Mexico as the host nation for this transnational teaching program was not arbitrary and was informed by the nationality and ethnic origin of the majority of ELLs in Colorado and in the United States. The setting was selected for this study because I participated in the program and there was an institutional interest at the BUENO Center in further studying the effects of this program on participants. The researcher's role is discussed below.

In addition, the Study in Mexico Program is perfectly aligned with the NCATE (2008) standards and expectations on field experiences:

“Field experiences allow candidates to apply and reflect on their content, professional, and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions in a variety of settings with students and adults. Both field experiences and clinical practice extend the unit's conceptual framework into practice through modeling by clinical faculty and well-designed opportunities to learn through doing. During clinical practice, candidate learning is integrated into the school program and into teaching practice. Candidates observe and are observed by others. They interact with teachers, families of students, administrators, college or university supervisors, and other interns about their practice regularly and continually. They reflect on and can justify their own practice. Candidates are members of instructional teams in the school and are active participants in professional decisions. They are involved in a variety of school-based activities directed at the improvement of teaching and learning, such as collaborative projects with peers, using information technology, and engaging in service learning. Candidates in advanced programs for teachers participate in field experiences that require them to critique and

synthesize educational theory related to classroom practice based on their own applied research. Candidates in programs for other school professionals participate in field experiences and clinical practice that require them to design, implement, and evaluate projects related to the roles for which they are preparing. These projects are theoretically based, involve the use of research and technology, and have real-world application in the candidates' field placement setting." (pp. 29-30).

As mandated in the standards, the Study in Mexico Program allows participants to "reflect on their content, professional, and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions in a variety of settings"; by teaching in Mexican schools, the Program offers participants the opportunity "to learn through doing"; also in the Mexican schools, the Program requires that participants "observe and are observed by others"; the meetings before going to Mexico, the courses participants take while in Mexico, and coexisting together in a Hotel with other participants and the Program's Director and administrators allows them to interact "about their practice regularly and continually"; the courses they take and the assignments and activities they are asked to complete (journal entries) push them to "reflect on and can justify their own practice"; and the overall design and structure of the Program demands of participants "to critique and synthesize educational theory related to classroom practice based on their own applied research" (NCATE, 2008).

Participants

Most of the teachers who participated in the Study in Mexico Program, as explained above, were either enrolled in a Master's degree program in Education, Equity, and Cultural Diversity (EECD) at the University of Colorado, Boulder or working on obtaining a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education endorsement. In the summer of 2008, 51 teachers

participated in the Study in Mexico Program. A total of 51 participants completed and submitted the pre-questionnaire (see Appendix A), and a total of 50 participants (one teacher did not end up going to Mexico and dropped out of the program) completed and submitted the post-questionnaire (see Appendix B). Of the 50 participants, twelve teachers were male and 38 were females. Among other things, the questionnaires asked them about their previous years teaching and whether or not they had visited Mexico before. Table 1 includes the available descriptive statistics for the participants in the Study in Mexico Program in Puebla, México, in the summer of 2008:

N	Gender	Years teaching	Visited Mexico before	Bilingual (Spanish-English)
50	Female = 38 (76%) Male = 12 (24%)	Range = 0-18 years Average = 5.3	Yes = 42 (84%) No = 8 (16%)	Yes = 14 (28%) No = 36 (72%)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Demographics

Researcher's Role

As a researcher and teacher, my interests in critical consciousness, transformative pedagogy, and praxis have been made very obvious to my peers, colleagues, professors, and students. I consider myself a critical pedagogue, which is important for this study because it informs my understanding of praxis (Schwandt, 2001). In this context, I understand praxis to be an educationally liberating practice that is informed by and originates from a critical understanding of the complex relationships that operate in today's U.S. educational system and how they particularly affect underserved, underrepresented, and underprivileged populations of students, like our Spanish-speaking ELLs (mostly of Mexican origin) in Colorado. In that sense, I believe in the Study in Mexico Program and what it tries to accomplish.

Most of the participants in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program had been my students in different courses I had taught for the School of Education and the BUENO Center. During those courses, I befriended some of my students, especially those who expressed and manifested similar socio-political ideologies. In addition, I lived with them for two weeks in Puebla, Mexico, during the Study in Mexico Program in the summer of 2008, where I had the opportunity to befriend new participants and established a deeper connection with those whom I had already befriended in the past. In addition, I had also had been involved in conflicts with some of my former students who participated in the Study in Mexico Program before and during the program. These events took place during the courses I taught. At times, during instruction and outside the classroom, and given the political nature of some of the content in the courses, emotions were high and opinions and thoughts were expressed in a passionate manner. Since the questionnaires were not anonymous, these were all factors that could have biased my analysis of participants' responses to the questionnaires. To avoid that from happening, I followed a very specific protocol for the collection and analysis of answers to the questionnaires that will be explained in detailed in the Data Sources and Procedure section.

I believe that knowing the participants also made it easier for me to conduct the interviews because, as Spradley (1979) suggests, the ethnographic interview “shares many features with the friendly conversation” (p. 58), which I was able to do with the participants I interviewed. In addition, I agree with Ladson-Billings (1995) that being part of the community and events that I studied is not necessarily a negative thing, but on the contrary, knowing events from experience is better than knowing events just by reading and thinking about them. Research can be conducted appropriately as long as the researcher explicitly states and acknowledges his possible biases as a member of the community he is studying (Dyson and Genishi , 2005), which

I do throughout the study. I do not believe my biases hindered my research or my analysis in this study; on the contrary, I think that, if anything, my participation in the Study in Mexico Program facilitated and made it possible for me to conduct this research. My study, together with my analysis of the program's participants' perceptions on the effect of its components, can help strengthen the design and implementation of the Study in Mexico Program and other similar transnational teaching experiences.

Data Sources and Procedures

This study employed three instruments for the purpose of collecting data: two questionnaires and one interview protocol. Data collection happened during two different periods of time: (1) during the summer of 2008, when participants of the Study in Mexico Program completed the Pre and Post-Questionnaires that were used for analysis in this study, and (2) in the Fall semester of 2010, when interviews were conducted. This was not the original plan of the research study, but the time gap between questionnaires and interviews offered me an opportunity to include an extra layer of analysis that considered possible sustained effects of the Study in Mexico Program on participants.

Questionnaires. Participants in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program completed a Pre-Questionnaire and a Post-Questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered to participants before departing for Mexico and at the end of the two-week program. These are questionnaires that have been developed by Professor Phil Langer for the BUENO Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Similar questionnaires have been administered before to other participants in the program, and the one employed in this study is a composite of past questionnaires. The questionnaires were developed following the model described by Willard-Holt (2001) in his study of short-term international experiences in pre-service teachers. The procedures for that

study also included an open response questionnaire administered before departing for the host nation, and another questionnaire administered after the program was completed, in this case four months later. It is important to note here that some of the questions in both the pre and post questionnaires are identical. This allowed me to analyze answers to the same questions before and after participants completed the program. I was hoping to find, as the literature suggests, eye-opening moments, revelations, and epiphanies, all possible evidence of the presence of cognitive dissonance and, perhaps, of a higher level of consciousness. It also allowed me to recognize participants who answered the same questions with the same answers, perhaps revealing that the program, its components, and activities did not have the intended effect on them.

As mentioned earlier, I was very familiar with the participants in the program and when confronted with the task of reading and analyzing their responses to the questionnaires, I employed a very specific protocol with the hope of reducing and eliminating any possible bias in my analysis: (1) I collected hand-written questionnaires from the BUENO Center and did not read them; (2) I mailed questionnaires to a transcriber who transcribed the text in the Pre-Questionnaire and the Post-Questionnaire and returned four files to me: two files that included the transcription of both questionnaires and also identified participants by name, and the other two with the same transcription, but participants were not identified by name; instead, they were assigned a number from 1-50; (3) I read and analyzed answers in the questionnaires working with the file with no names; and (4) I identified participants after all data were analyzed by referring to the file with names.

The first step was to collect the hand-written questionnaires from the BUENO Center. In the second step, and in order to transcribe participants' responses to the questionnaires, I hired a

professional transcriber who transcribed all responses to the questionnaires into a word processor document. I received four files from the transcriber: two files (“Pre-Questionnaires_names” and “Post-Questionnaires_names”) contained all the answers to the questionnaires transcribed and organized by participant with participants’ names and also a number from 1-50 assigned to them. The other files (“Pre-Questionnaires_no_names” and “Post-Questionnaires_no_names”) contained the answers to the questionnaires organized by participant with no participants’ names. Instead, just the number representing them was included. The third step was to read and analyze the answers to the questionnaires. Finally, in the fourth step, after data analysis, participants’ names were identified and correlated to the answers in the questionnaires.

Interviews. The other instrument employed in this study was the interview protocol (See Appendix D) informed by Spradley, J. (1979). The interview questions were designed before data from the questionnaires was analyzed but to some extent, the interview was informed by the questionnaires inasmuch as I tried to ask questions in the interviews that were different from the questions and prompts asked in the questionnaires. For example, the interview questions asked participants to explicitly discuss specific program components, and what they did in their “free” time, information that was not asked of participants in the questionnaires. At the same time, the interview also asked participants to discuss their experience teaching in a Mexican classroom and what they felt they learned from observing Mexican teachers, information that was asked of them in the questionnaires. The reason for asking these two questions that are similar to some of the questions they were asked in the questionnaires was to allow for an extra level of analysis that included a comparison of their answers to the questionnaires in 2008 and their answers to the interviews in 2010, revealing possible lasting effects of the teaching experience in Mexico. The

interviews were conducted in an open-ended fashion and followed the elements in the ethnographic interview presented by Spradley (1979, p. 67). As suggested, I made every effort to create a relaxed atmosphere around these interviews, hoping for participants to feel more like they were in a friendly conversation with me than in a formal interview setting. I mostly asked general descriptive questions but left plenty of room to ask structural questions of informants as they answered the more general descriptive questions.

I interviewed 23 participants: participants 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 24, 25, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 45, 50. I sent a request for interview to all 50 participants of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program and 27 participants contacted me back with an interest to be interviewed. However, I was only able to interview 23 of them due to the impossibility to find a common day and time to get together with four of them. Table 2 shows a basic profile of the 23 participants interviewed.

N	Gender	Years teaching	Visited Mexico before	Bilingual (Spanish-English)
23	Female = 14 (61%) Male = 9 (39%)	Range = 1-18 years Average = 6.13	Yes = 21 (91%) No = 2 (9%)	Yes = 7 (30%) No = 16 (70%)

Table 2: Interviewees' Profiles

When compared to the entire population of participants, the 23 interviewees that participated in this study are a relatively accurate representation of the entire population of participants. Here are the demographics for the all participants again:

N	Gender	Years teaching	Visited Mexico before	Bilingual (Spanish-English)
50	Female = 38 (76%) Male = 12 (24%)	Range = 0-18 years Average = 5.3	Yes = 42 (84%) No = 8 (16%)	Yes = 14 (28%) No = 36 (72%)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Demographics

As we can see, the interviewees do share very similar characteristics to the entire population of participants, except perhaps for gender. My study interviewees included a larger percentage of male participants; in fact I interviewed all but three of the male participants that attended the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. This is a clear example of my effect as a participant in the program. The fact that I befriended many (if not all) the male participants in the program clearly affected whether they came forward and volunteered to be interviewed when I reached out to all of them. The remaining three categories in the demographics are very similar in both the group of interviewees and the entire population of participants with slightly different percentages for the "Visited Mexico before" and the "Bilingual" categories. This can be attributed to the fact that, as Table 3 shows, most of the male participants were bilingual and had visited Mexico before. That could explain the slightly higher percentage in those two categories since I interviewed almost all the male participants in the program.

N	Gender	Visited Mexico before	Bilingual (Spanish-English)
50	Female = 38 (76%)	Yes = 31 (81.5%) No = 7 (18.5%)	Yes = 7 (18.5%) No = 31 (81.5%)
	Male = 12 (24%)	Yes = 11 (91.5%) No = 1 (8.5%)	Yes = 7 (59%) No = 5 (41%)

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics by Gender

Besides this descriptive information, another aspect of the interviews that was important to keep in mind when conducting the analysis and interpreting results was the fact the interviews happened more than two years after the 2008 Study in Mexico Program happened. The Study in Mexico Program that is the object of this study happened in June 2008 and interviews were conducted between August and November 2010. This time difference was taken into consideration when analyzing and interpreting the data from the interviews because it allowed for an analysis of the lasting effects of the program as well as identification of possible differences between data from the questionnaires and data from the interviews per participant. I need also to clarify that the time lapse between the 2008 Program and the 2010 interviews was not intentional; it was a consequence of life-events (moving to different states, revisiting my dissertation proposal, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval), though fortunately, allowed for an extra level of analysis in my study.

The interviews lasted between 50 minutes (the shortest) and 120 minutes (the longest), with the average time being 70 minutes. The total amount of time invested interviewing individuals was 25.5 hours. I conducted the interviews at many different locations, all of them suggested by the participant being interviewed. I digitally audio-recorded all interviews for transcription and analysis purposes. I also informed interviewed participants about the purpose of the project and they signed standard participant consent forms approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Colorado, Boulder (see Appendix E). I am the only person in possession of and who has accessed the audio recordings. They are in my sole possession and I will discard all recordings (break them and put them in the trash) after I defend my dissertation. I emailed the digital audio files of the interviews to my transcriber who emailed me back the transcription of the files in 23 different files identified by interviewee.

The selection of open-ended, exploratory individual interviews was deliberate and appropriate for the nature of the inquiries delineated in this study. I always knew I wanted to hear from participants in their own voices about how they thought the Study in Mexico Program had affected their consciousness and professional practices. In that context I chose to use open-ended interviews “so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2005, p. 214). In addition, the descriptive questions provided an extra level of bias-check as they “are less likely to reflect the ethnographer’s culture” (Spradley, p. 85). Further, these in-depth, open-ended interviews will allow me to be “open to any and all relevant responses” (Schensul et al, 1999, p. 121) and to explore “a topic in detail to deepen the interviewer’s knowledge of the topic” (Schensul et al, 1999, p. 121). These individual ethnographic interviews will also allow me to gather in-depth information on the research questions put forward in this study, and to listen to “personal histories, cultural knowledge and beliefs, and description of practices” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p.128).

I had to modify the selection of the participants I interviewed as I moved along my research. Originally, the project was designed to analyze participants’ responses to the questionnaires and select a purposive, stratified sample of participants to interview based on the level of critical thinking reflected in their answers. Originally, a sample of 10-20 participants was going to be selected from the two ends of the spectrum: participants who reflected a high level of critical thinking in their responses as well as participants who reflected a low level of critical thinking in their responses. But as “Chapter 4: Findings: The questionnaires” reveals, the analysis of the questionnaires did not yield sufficient data to clearly distinguish students into clearly different categories of high levels and low levels of critical thinking. Instead, data

analysis showed that it was impossible for me to categorize students into those two categories.

Thus, I decided to use a convenience sample of participants. I emailed all 50 participants in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program (see Appendix F) and was able to interview 23 of them, all of whom volunteered to be interviewed. The consequences of having selected a convenience sample of participants are discussed in-depth in the Interpretation and Discussion chapter.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Upon receiving the transcription of the questionnaires, the first step in data analysis was to read and reread the transcriptions to identify patterns; the next step involved coding, categorizing by codes, and identifying themes that emerged from the data. The codes were intuitive in nature and I followed an open coding approach as informed by Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As delineated by Strauss & Corbin (1990) and described by LeCompte and Preissle (1993), the constant and careful analysis and comparison of data sources strategy is useful for the identification of initial patterns. I identified select social events and patterns that were present in the narratives of the interviews and coded them into themes (Creswell, 2005). The next step was to associate these themes with the components of the Study in Mexico Program to decipher their effectiveness on the development of cultural critical consciousness. Figure 2 shows the construct operationalization and operational definitions I used to code the data from the questionnaires and the interviews.



Figure 2: Construct operationalization

My goal was to create a clear representation of participants' beliefs, reactions, attitudes, and perceptions about the Study in Mexico Program and its components. I wanted further to identify and explore the effectiveness of the program components on participants' levels of cultural critical consciousness.

I reviewed the data in the questionnaires files. I read and coded all responses to the surveys by participant paying special attention to how participants responded to the same question in the Pre and Post-Questionnaires. By comparing the answers to the same questions before and after completing the Study in Mexico Program, I was able to identify how and if participants approached the question with a more critical lens after completing the program. In particular, my analysis of the answers to the questionnaires involved two factors I kept in mind while reading the data: (1) I looked for key terms that reflected an understanding of liberation praxis, that is, I looked for specific terms used in critical theory to address the inequalities of the system. These terms were: freedom, inequality, injustice, oppression, praxis, revolution, struggle, transformation, and unfair. More terms were added to the list as I read and coded the answers to the surveys; and (2) I also considered the overall tone of the answers, regardless of whether they contained key terms or not. For example, participants talked about inequalities in the system by discussing how "wrong it is that ELLs are treated badly". An answer like this one suggests that the participant revealed an understanding of inequalities in the system, even though they did not use the key terms critical theorists, or scholars, would use. Once all answers were coded, I moved to identifying students. In addition to this very specific level of analysis, I also considered the overall tone of the answers and the questionnaires looking for moments of cognitive dissonance, where participants may have demonstrated a level of discomfort that revealed some critical understanding of an event or occurrence. Answers like "I never thought that existed" or

“I didn’t think that could happen” demonstrated that participants had experienced something new and that they were engaged with the event at a critical level; regardless of its depth, participants who expressed themselves that way are demonstrating a level of cognitive dissonance which involves, at a minimum, some critical thinking. A third layer of analysis of the answers to the questionnaires involved a method of analysis employed by Nguyen et al. (2008) that helped me differentiate between descriptive and reflective narrative as evidence for the presence of cultural critical consciousness. Departing from Gay and Kirkland’s (2003) observation that teachers often confuse description with reflection, Nguyen et al (2008) posit that “Teachers who demonstrated critical consciousness were to able to go beyond descriptive accounts of their experiences during the two weeks in Puebla, Mexico. Memorable moments that exemplify critical consciousness provided reflective accounts of the teachers’ events and experiences” (p. 15-16).

My original goal was to place participants in one of two categories: (Category 1) demonstrated cultural critical consciousness vs. (Category 2) did not demonstrate cultural critical consciousness. In reality, I consider this dichotomy two ends of a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum are the participants whose responses revealed a strong evidence of cultural critical consciousness; on the other end are the participants whose responses did not reveal the presence of cultural critical consciousness at all. Soon I realized this distinction was arbitrary and contrary to my conceptual model, which conceptualized cultural critical consciousness as a spectrum with many different manifestations and levels. After coding the answers to the questionnaires, I realized it was impossible for me to label participants as critically conscientious or not. In reality, all of them demonstrated to some extent a level of critical consciousness in their responses;

however, though some responded more in-depth than others, I was far from being able to classify them according to a clear dichotomy.

My original intention was to select a sample of participants to interview from the two arbitrarily created categories: presence or absence of cultural critical consciousness in their answers to the questionnaires, but once I abandoned this idea, I decided to contact all 50 participants who had completed the questionnaires and offer them an opportunity to be interviewed. I received answers from 27 participants and was able to interview 23 of them.

My analysis of the data from the interviews followed the same structure and guidelines as the method I employed for analyzing the questionnaires; that is, I read and reread the transcriptions from the interviews looking for codes and themes that emerged. I applied a critical theory lens that looked at key terms, cognitive dissonance, and descriptive vs. reflective narrative.

Findings are presented for each instrument employed in this study. First, I present findings from the questionnaires and second, I present findings from the interviews. The final “Interpretation and Discussion” chapter brings it all together, provides an in-depth discussion on the findings of this project, and makes suggestions for future research and design of transnational teaching experiences.

Validity and Limitations

As I mentioned earlier, I was also a participant in the Study in Mexico Program, although, as I also expressed above, I do not think that is the source of any bias that may invalidate the data and/or results of my study. On the contrary, having been a part of the event I am studying provides me with an unique perspective to analyze it. Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate that in terms of my own bias with respect to the objectives and tenets put forth in this

study, I made every effort to guarantee that the data of this study favored the perspective of the participants and not my own, constantly checking on my own beliefs and expectations about this project and taking every step necessary to reduce my bias in the interpretation of the findings.

In addition, the study has very clear limitations associated with any case study. First, the findings may not be generalized to other programs. They inform the reader about the 2008 Study in Mexico Program from the BUENO Center at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Findings should not be generalized because other programs have different structures and serve different participants (pre-service vs. in-service teachers) and because that is not one of the goals of this study. Again, this study was not conducted with the idea of finding universal truths or generalizable truths that can be applied to other transnational programs. In the context of the most “traditional” approach to research, the events described and analyzed in this study are the perceptions of the participants of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program and any findings should be applied to that particular event. However, I do not believe the validity of this study is limited by such traditional perception. As LeCompte and Goetz (1982) posit “attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research model” (p. 55). I also agree with LeCompte and Aguilera-Black Bear (2012) in that “in this increasingly diverse universe, good research and evaluation requires re-examination of how validity and reliability are defined and applied [...] In 21st century institutions, multiple realities are a way, and a fact, of life; researchers and evaluators can only document and try to explain them in all their complexities and contradictions. Trying to reconcile the differences, as we have argued above, serves only to silence someone’s story or to erase someone’s reality” (no page). In this context, I believe my study aimed at describing a valid representation of the experiences of the participants in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program.

Second, as with all self-reports, there is a possibility that I may have misread participants' responses to the surveys as well as information obtained from the interviews. This may have occurred because it is possible some participants wrote and said what the program administrators and I wanted to read and hear instead of what they really meant and felt about the program. As noted earlier, the questionnaires were not anonymous, which also presents issues of validity, as students intentionally may not have been honest in all their responses. I tried to compensate for that by establishing a very relaxed atmosphere for our interviews, being sure the participant wanted to be interviewed, and analyzing body language and facial expressions during the interviews.

Chapter 4

Findings: Pre and Post-Questionnaires

Introduction

The answers to the Pre and Post-Questionnaires helped answer the research questions for this study inasmuch as they provide examples of transformations in the ways participants referred to some of the events that took place in the Study in Mexico Program. The Questionnaires (Appendices A and B) also asked participants to consider questions about curriculum, instruction, diversity populations of students, and multicultural education. Answers to these questions, before and after the Study in Mexico Program, could reveal possible shifts in cultural consciousness from participants.

The analysis of the answers to the Pre and Post-Questionnaires revealed the following categories:

1. Perceptions about Mexican schools' infrastructure and materials
2. Perceptions about Mexican education
3. Beliefs about multiculturalism and multicultural education
4. Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life
5. Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on personal life

Perceptions about Mexican schools' infrastructure and materials

The answers to the Pre-Questionnaires revealed two main themes within this category: (1) participants claimed not to know much about Mexican schools and their educational infrastructures before going to Mexico, and (2) they speculated that the infrastructures would be considerably inferior to the ones participants knew back in the United States. Specifically, when

the Pre-questionnaire asked them “What do you know about Mexican schools?”, 24 of the 50 participants (48%) responded that they did not know much or anything about Mexican schools:

- “Not much” (participants 3, 15, and 50)
- “Very little” (participants 9, 19, 38, 41)
- “Nothing” (participants 29, 40)
- “Nothing beyond what I have been told in preparation for these classes” (Participant 6)
- “Only what I have learned here” (Participant 8)

Of the remaining 52% of participants (26 participants) who claimed to have some knowledge of Mexican schools, only four participants claimed to have worked as teachers or attended school in Mexico. The remaining participants expressed a very superficial and stereotypical preconception of Mexican schools, namely, crowded classrooms, poor schools, and no support from families as these quotes demonstrate:

- “More kids, fewer supplies/resources, bigger classes, less variety in what is taught from school-to-school, safer, kids might have uniforms, buildings probably look less like malls than they do here: (Participant 2)
- “I know that Mexican schools are more traditional and operate with fewer resources than schools in U.S.A.” (Participant 7)
- “The teachers don’t get paid a lot” (Participant 11)
- “Not a lot of extra support” (Participant 14)
- “Less funding than U.S. schools” (Participant 27)
- “They don’t have as many tools as U.S. schools” (Participant 33)
- “I know that many schools in Mexico are deficient of supplies and curricular materials (Participant 47)

- “Big group/classes. 30 or more students” (Participant 46).

In addition, when the Pre-Questionnaire asked them to discuss their knowledge or expectations about materials in Mexican schools, “limited, “few”, “less”, and “minimal” was the response of 66% (33 participants) of the participants. Two participants believed that Mexican schools would have similar materials to the schools in the US, and the remaining participants (15) believed that Mexican schools would have very basic materials and less technology than in the US:

- “Desks, chalkboards/dry erase, paper pencil” (Participant 1)
- “Not as many books, probably no stations, not as many copies” (Participant 3)
- “Government textbooks, no more” (participants 16)
- “Textbooks and notebooks” (Participant 23)
- “Having basic items” (Participant 28)
- “Students will have notebooks, pencils, crayons” (Participant 46).

The Post-Questionnaires revealed that, as expected, some participants used their Study in Mexico Program experience as an opportunity to challenge their preconceptions about Mexico and its schools while others used the same experience to validate and reassure themselves about their beliefs about Mexican schools. For example, when asked in the Post-Questionnaire “What did you learn about Mexican schools?”, some participants answered the question almost with the same answer they used when the Pre-Questionnaire asked them “What do you know about Mexican schools?”:

- Participant 7 – Pre-Questionnaire – “I know that Mexican schools are more traditional and operate with fewer resources than schools in U.S.A.”

- Participant 7 – Post-Questionnaire – “They do a lot with very little. Much more traditional”
- Participant 9 – Pre-Questionnaire – “I know that class sizes can be quite large, that materials may be limited and that there is a good deal (if not exclusive use of) direct instruction.”
- Participant 9 – Post-Questionnaire – “There is an enormous burden on the classroom teacher as classes are quite large (40+ students) and resources are limited.”
- Participant 18 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Follow a national curriculum. Tend to be large classes. Minimal materials as compared to U.S. schools.”
- Participant 18 – Post-Questionnaire – “Very crowded, #’s and space, minimal materials; Basic curriculum provided by the govt.”
- Participant 20 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Structured curriculum that all teachers follow (standardized)”
- Participant 20 – Post-Questionnaire – “His or her curriculum is standardized (nationalized) so everyone is doing the same thing at the same time.”
- Participant 28 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Children work as a class together with great respect to their teachers.”
- Participant 28 – Post-Questionnaire – “I learned that students do most of the work as an entire class.”
- Participant 40 – Pre-Questionnaire – “If teacher doesn’t show, no sub. Pay for it out of pocket.”
- Participant 40 – Post-Questionnaire – “If teacher isn’t there kids go home if teacher didn’t pay for a sub.”

Considering that participants submitted the Pre-Questionnaire to program administrators over two weeks before they completed the Post-Questionnaire, it is quite interesting that some participants employed the same answers when answering the Pre and Post-Questionnaires, revealing that not a lot of critical thinking went into answering the questions and that if anything, their experience in Mexico served to solidify their preconceptions about Mexican schools, not to challenge them, as intended by the program. In some instances, the repetition was very surprising since it dealt with topics that are not necessarily very common, like teachers paying for a substitute, a clear example that some participants used the Study in Mexico Program to justify their preconceptions.

On occasions, even if the preconception was a positive one (like believing that teachers were respected), the Study in Mexico Program served to reassure some participants of their positive beliefs about Mexican schools, like the case of Participant 14:

Participant 14 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Not a lot of extra support. Respect colleagues.”

Participant 14 – Post-Questionnaire – “Mexican schools have an atmosphere of caring more about each other and learning they “respect” their teachers!”

There were also instances of participants who discovered that their preconceptions were wrong and they reflected this in their answers to the Pre and Post-Questionnaires. That was the case of Participant 12, an example of a new perception about Mexican schools gained from the experience in Mexico, one that directly contradicts a preconception the participant had before engaging in the program:

Participant 12 – Pre-Questionnaire – “The days are shorter, class sizes can be larger, and teachers get their own subs. Students mostly work independently.”

Participant 12 – Post-Questionnaire – “The classroom I was in was much less cluttered than U.S. schools! ☺ Ha. These teachers are great. They hold high expectations with respect.”

This participant demonstrates a level of critical thinking inasmuch as she is able to engage with herself in a form of cognitive dissonance, and she copes with it but humoring the event with a smiley face, signifying the sarcastic nature of the statement: before going to Mexico she acknowledged in the Pre-Questionnaire she expected Mexican classrooms to be more crowded than in the U.S. but after the Study in Mexico Program, she acknowledges to herself that the classroom she was in in Mexico was less crowded than the ones she knew in the US, and she finds it funny, sarcastic, and ironic.

Nonetheless, the majority of participants’ responses to the Post-Questionnaire reflected similar, and sometimes identical, beliefs to the ones they had before going to Mexico, namely crowded classrooms, little support, and fewer materials. In the area of materials available to teachers and students, two main themes emerged from the data in the Post-Questionnaires: (1) participants seemed very surprised not to find books or a library in the classroom, and (2) participants were surprised at the level of technology available in the classrooms. 26% of the participants (13 participants) mentioned the classroom or school lacked a library and that they did not see books available to students in the classroom beyond the textbooks. At the same time, 28% of participants (14 participants) commented on how impressed they were to see classrooms facilitated with computers, overhead projectors, and even smart boards, in some instances, more and better than what participants had access to in the United States, as these quotes exemplify:

- “My teacher has a smart white board, document project connected to her computer. I was amazed at her use of technology and how the government aligned on-line Encarta 5 years

ago to the 5th grade curriculum. I just got a document camera and projector this year and have to search the web myself for lessons to use!!!” (Participant 13)

- “Teachers are given a projector, smart board and computer program to assist with teaching” (Participant 21)

However, the perception of access and use of technology differed greatly across participants; this was due to the fact that, as explained in the “Setting” section of “Chapter 3: Methods” the two schools they attended and the classrooms they worked in had different technology components due to the different SES of the families and communities they served. For example, for several participants, technology was nonexistent and they commented on it in their answers to the Post-Questionnaire:

- “They don’t have all the technology we have” (Participant 27);
- “No technology” (Participant 12),
- “No computers” (Participant 9).

Nonetheless, many participants commented on how impressed they were at the level of technology available in the classrooms and the usage and implementation of such technology by the teachers:

- “The amount and use of technology (effective use) I saw” (Participant 13),
- “They are putting more advanced technology (smart boards) into their classrooms than many schools in the U.S. 6th and 5th currently have them and they are working through the grades” (Participant 6),
- “I like how having the lessons on the computer and project onto white board” (Participant 35).

As exemplified previously in the area of schools infrastructure, some participants also employed the same answers in the Pre and Post-Questionnaires when discussing materials available to teachers and students:

- Participant 1 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Desks, chalkboards/dry erase, paper pencil”
- Participant 1 – Post-Questionnaire – “Workbooks *Pencils *Whiteboard *Colored-Pencils”
- Participant 9 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Limited”
- Participant 9 – Post-Questionnaire – “Seemed to be limited compared to U.S. schools.”
- Participant 11 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Not a lot will be around”
- Participant 11 – Post-Questionnaire – “Not a lot. Tons of used cardboard boxes.”
- Participant 24 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Very few”
- Participant 24 – Post-Questionnaire – “There are a lot less materials offered to the school.”
- Participant 27 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Less available than in US”
- Participant 27 – Post-Questionnaire – “They have less”
- Participant 29 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Limited”
- Participant 29 – Post-Questionnaire – “Very limited”
- Participant 43 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Less supplies than kids have in Boulder Valley School District”
- Participant 43 – Post-Questionnaire – “Puebla school had significantly less materials for students. Each student had a pencil box and backpack.”

However, and also as exemplified earlier, many participants discovered that their preconceptions about materials available in Mexican schools were mistaken and they were able

to critically engaged with themselves responding to the Post-Questionnaires questions differently than they had done in the Pre-Questionnaires:

- Participant 5 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Differ school to school”
- Participant 5 – Post-Questionnaire – “Students and classroom was full of supplies for a fully functioning U.S. class room standard -> texts from school in good condition @ end of year.”
- Participant 25 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Less abundant than here.”
- Participant 25 – Post-Questionnaire – “We had a smart board in the room! Otilio [Mexican school] seemed well equipped.”
- Participant 26 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Limited.”
- Participant 26 – Post-Questionnaire – “The classroom I observed had same materials I do in my class. There were no notable differences.”
- Participant 33 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Very limited”
- Participant 33 – Post-Questionnaire – “They had more materials that I expected. They have a whiteboard with many markers. It seemed all students had colored pencils, and the students all had their own sharpeners.”
- Participant 36 – Pre-Questionnaire – “I think they may not have as many materials as we do. Not much access to classroom technology such as computers.”
- Participant 36 – Post-Questionnaire – “They provided the kids with books. They even had a smart board. Something I don’t even have!”
- Participant 37 – Pre-Questionnaire – “It sounds like they don’t have as easy access to materials.”

- Participant 37 – Post-Questionnaire – “The teachers and students seemed to have all the necessary supplies. Each group of two students had a box full of pencils, crayons, scissors, etc.”

These are examples of participants who saw their preconceptions challenged by the experiences they had while in Mexico, and again, they reflected in their answers to the Post-Questionnaire a capacity to question their own preconceptions and acknowledge that the reality they experienced was different from what they had expected; in some instances, like in the case of Participant 36, underlining the word “I” and using the exclamation mark “!” also manifested a level of surprised, irony, and sarcasm when discovering the “new” truth.

However, overall, the responses to the Post-Questionnaire about materials revealed much of the same information the Pre-Questionnaire revealed, namely that participants believed that Mexican schools had fewer materials available to teachers and students than U.S. schools. Short of a few incidences of participants who were impressed with the Mexican schools’ infrastructure and materials, most participants (52% - 26 participants) commented on the Mexican schools possessing “less”, “minimal”, “fewer”, or “not much” materials, especially compared to their classrooms and schools in the United States.

Perceptions about Mexican education

The second category that emerged from the data in the Pre and Post-Questionnaires was participants’ perceptions about Mexican education. This category emerged from the analysis of several of the questions in the questionnaires, and as it happened in the previous categories, the findings revealed a number of themes within this category. First, I list them, and then below, I describe the details. The themes were: (1) participants recognized the value of nationalized, standardized curriculum; (2) participants gained an appreciation for direct instruction; (3)

participants' perceptions about classroom management and discipline in Mexico were positively altered; (4) participants' perceptions about Mexican teachers were confirmed, and (5) participants' perceptions about Mexican students were also confirmed.

(1) Participants recognized the value of nationalized, standardized curriculum. With respect to the first theme, 48% of participants mentioned "standardized curriculum" or "nationalized curriculum" in their answers to the pre-questionnaire when reflecting on their expectations of Mexican education. In the Post-Questionnaire, a similar 54% mentioned "standardized" or "nationalized" when discussing what they had learned in Mexico about the curriculum. However, an important difference in the answers is a level of critical approach to the terms "standardized" and "nationalized" used in the Post-Questionnaires that was not present in the Pre-Questionnaire. Participants reflected more critically (and positively) about standardized and nationalized curriculum in their answers to the Post-Questionnaires than in their answers to the Pre-Questionnaires. For example, many of the answers to the Pre-Questionnaire simply stated that they expected the Mexican curriculum to be "Mexico's curriculum – all subjects" (Participant 1); "All of Mexico has the same curriculum" (Participant 5); "National curriculum" (Participant 19); and "Standardized – set for all grades throughout the country" (Participant 34). However, the answers to the post-questionnaire revealed a deeper level of critical reflection on what it means to have and use a nationalized curriculum, and many participants commented on how that was a good choice that made sense for Mexican education. However, others also observed that the use of a nationalized/standardized curriculum was not that different from what is used in the United States; in some other instances, participants demonstrated a willingness to learn more about nationalized curricula:

- “Neat because of the national curriculum students can move from school to school and be learning the same thing everywhere” (Participant 4)
- “Very similar to the U.S. curriculum I use and see in 5th grade. National: not local control of curriculum. I think that’s a better way to align to standards” (Participant 13)
- “I liked the integration of the different disciplines that is possible when one curriculum is used” (Participant 19)
- “They have a National curriculum. They have similar concepts than we teach in the U.S. National Curriculum seems like a beneficial idea for students. I’d like to read more about national vs. district curriculum” (Participant 25)
- “In 1st grade there is a curriculum aligned to the Mexico 1st grade standards. Many of the standards were the same as in the U.S.; there seems to be more of them in Mexico” (Participant 44)

(2) Participants gained an appreciation for direct instruction. With respect to the second theme, direct instruction, the surveys also revealed that many participants gained a new perspective in the usefulness of direct instruction. The answers to the pre-questionnaire revealed a very superficial analysis of the participants’ expectations about instructional methods employed in Mexican classroom. Almost every participant (85%) expected Mexican teaching to be “direct”, “instructor-centered”, “whole group/whole class”, “traditional”, “not hands-on”, and “more didactic or less creative”. The answers to the post-questionnaire confirmed the majority of the participants’ expectations about teaching methodologies, but the level of analysis was more critical and positive about the use of direct instruction and traditional teaching methods. Many participants critical reflected on the appropriateness and effectiveness of traditional teaching methods:

- “Lots of mass repetition, which seemed appropriate in its use (multiplication tables, specific adjectives), but kids were also called on individually. Creativity was not encouraged during these times, but not quashed either” (Participant 3)
- “I saw competition used strategically by the Maestra. She was very direct with students even when they were wrong. Asked “Why do we study this” for each lesson” (Participant 5)
- “Much more whole group discussion teaching. The kids don’t raise their hands to answer, they all just say them out loud” (Participant 13)
- “My teacher did a great job of giving an anticipatory set through an activity that was interactive and engaging. She used this to access their background knowledge before doing a chorale reading of random comprehension questions” (Participant 20)
- “Our Maestra Maria mostly taught from the workbooks, but I also observed that she let the students teach a lesson and called them up to the board frequently. They are used to lecture style, teacher in front teaching” (Participant 25)
- “I liked that the teacher modeled, students performed what she did; and then they used TPR and chants. Students did a lot of independent work (in work books)” (Participant 34)
- “Informal yet focused, felt family-like, joking, asked the students to be critical and to focus on detail” (Participant 35)
- “There is a lot of repetition of information. We know that this is “best practice” but do not always take the time because we have to get through everything. It seems to be more of a “less is more” attitude” (Participant 48)

(3) Participants’ perceptions about classroom management and discipline in Mexico were positively altered. One of the major themes that emerged from this category was how

participants' perceptions and preconceptions about discipline and classroom-management in Mexican schools were altered. When asked to consider their expectations about discipline in Mexican classrooms, the participants' answers to the pre-questionnaire were stereotypical and expected: "strict", "well-behaved", "respect", and "well-disciplined" were the most common answers used by 82% of participants. More stereotypical was that 16% of participants mentioned they expected to witness "corporal punishment" in Mexican schools. The answers to the post-questionnaire revealed that such preconceptions were false and fundamentally inherited by participants from a perception that Mexican schools were generations behind their equivalent schools in the United States. After two weeks working in Mexican schools, participants were able to critically reflect on classroom-management and discipline issues and many realized their preconceptions were significantly off reality. For example, Participant 11 is a clear example of this simple transformation. In their answer to the pre-questionnaire, she reflected that she expected Mexican schools to employ "Maybe more harsh punishments – I haven't thought a lot about it, but I am excited. I think it will at first seem like a shock to me". It is interesting to observe how they were expecting to see harsh punishments in the classroom and considered it to be something to be "excited" about or something that would "shock" them. It almost makes it sound like an "attraction" in an amusement park or a typical reaction to a scary movie. However, their responses to the post-questionnaire were simple, direct, and objective: "I didn't see any. They understood things very quickly", even though they did not critically reflect on the lack of punishment or about how mistaken they were about their expectations. It is true that having had the expectations that Participant 11 had about the existence of punishment in Mexican classrooms, I would have liked to have seen a more in-depth critical reflection on how mistaken

they were. However, at a minimum, they expressed a capacity to observe reality and describe it objectively even though it contradicted their previously stated expectations.

Another example of this type of superficial, yet real, change of expectation is reflected by the answers from Participant 22. In the pre-questionnaire, Participant 22 asserted that “I am familiar with the fact that corporal punishment still exists”; yet, after two weeks in Mexico and having not observed any incidences of corporal punishment, his answer to the post-questionnaire reflected that “the students were well behaved and polite”. Again, a deeper level of self-criticism would have been desirable, especially considering that this participant “was familiar with the fact that corporal punishment still exists” in Mexican classroom, but at least these participants were able to reflect on the fact that classrooms were well managed and students were well behaved.

A third example that demonstrates this kind of attitude comes from Participant 21, who in the Pre-Questionnaire responded that she had been to Mexico once in a vacation with her family and yet she claimed “Knowing that corporal punishment is still allowed” in Mexican schools. The questionnaire does not reveal how she “knew” it to be true, but she certainly expressed certainty in their answer. As with the other participants, after two weeks in Mexican schools and not having observed any situations where corporal punishment was used, her answer to the post-questionnaire was limited to observing that “Our teacher would use a firmer voice and explain her expectations and explain what they were not doing”.

Nonetheless, most participants reflected very positively about discipline and classroom management in Mexican schools. Most noticeably is the fact that most participants believed the Mexican classroom would be very strict and traditional, but they found out that they did not witness any adverse, negative, or difficult classroom management events, but on the contrary,

they witnessed how Mexican teachers were able to maintain a friendly and loving atmosphere in the classroom that engaged students in the teaching and learning process:

- “Loose---built respect it would seem and at this point in the year, little discipline is needed.” (Participant 5)
- “The teacher I observed was very laid back, and I did not observe any discipline issues being dealt with” (Participant 6)
- “Very relaxed. Things that would have created problems in the U.S. are non-issues here” (Participant 8)
- “Maestra Maria would count up to three, and I’m not sure what the consequence would be. I didn’t see much discipline. The students were engaged most of the time” (Participant 12)
- “She allowed “table talking” during work. I was surprised the day they were taking a math test. They were quietly talking and helping each other. She could get instant attention: Good management” (Participant 13)
- “Public with love” (Participant 17)
- “Firm and loving” (Participant 19)
- “Common sense knowledge of what is appropriate behavior” (Participant 22)
- “Students are very respectful. I did not see issues of discipline. The teacher just had to give “the look and say the child’s name, and behavior was changed” (Participant 26)
- “The teacher and students really seemed to understand classroom policies and expectations. Sometimes we got the students wound up, but they always came back for the teacher” (Participant 37)

(4) Participants' perceptions about Mexican teachers were confirmed. The fourth theme that emerged from this category revealed that the Study in Mexico Program confirmed participant's perceptions about Mexican teachers as revealed by their answers to the questionnaires. The pre-questionnaire revealed that participants believed Mexican teachers would be as well prepared as U.S. teachers, that "lesson plans would be ready" and well implemented, that they would be "organized", and that the profession would be "respected". In fact, 62% of participants mentioned that they expected Mexican teachers' preparation to be "similar", "the same" or "about the same" as U.S. teachers' preparation. In addition, almost every participant (88%) expected Mexican teachers to be "ready", "prepared", or "well prepared". At the completion of the program, the answers to the post-questionnaire revealed that most participants felt that their expectations of Mexican teachers had been correct. Again, as with the answers to other questions, the answers to the post-questionnaire showed a higher-level of critical thinking with more in-depth responses than the answers to the pre-questionnaire. For example, for Participant 5 what in the Pre-questionnaire was "Very prepared! Well run classroom", in the post-questionnaire became "Maestra was always prepared! She had homemade materials that were very hands on and relevant to use in "real world."". These are some other examples of answers to the pre and post-questionnaire that confirm participants' expectations but that also reveal a higher level of description and reflection after the Study in Mexico Program:

- Participant 7 – Pre-Questionnaire – "About the same as what is required of teachers in the U.S.A."
- Participant 7 – Post-Questionnaire – "I saw a very organized lesson that appeared to have thoughtful preparation, but I did not ask her what she did"

- Participant 26 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Expect to be very planned and prepared”
- Participant 26 – Post-Questionnaire – “Teacher was definitely prepared everyday. She presented lessons in a logical way and used what would be termed “best practices” in U.S.”
- Participant 31 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Very well prepared”
- Participant 31 – Post-Questionnaire – “The teacher has been teaching for over 30 years. She was very prepared as evidenced by the students understanding, attentiveness and participation”
- Participant 42 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Highly organized”
- Participant 42 – Post-Questionnaire – “Absolutely! Not very many materials that we saw, but very well prepared with smooth delivery”

(5) Participants’ perceptions about Mexican students were also confirmed. The last theme that emerged from the data in the questionnaires was participants’ perceptions about Mexican students and how their experience in Mexico confirmed what most of them expected of Mexican students. The pre-questionnaire revealed that with regard to student readiness, most participants, expected Mexican students to be “Prepared. Focused. Motivated. Hard working” (Participant 1), “always willing to learn” (Participant 4), “prepared”, “ready”, “respectful”, and “engaged” (participants 12, 15, 24, and 48). Interestingly, several participants expected Mexican students to be more advanced, respectful, and eager to learn than their U.S. counterparts, which, given the fact that these are answers to the pre-questionnaire (before teaching in a Mexican school), may actually reveal more discontent felt by the participant towards U.S. students than actual fact: “They will be further along at lower levels because of the rigor” (Participant 8), “I’ll say that students from Mexico are more open to learning” (Participant 12), “Students are more

responsible in their learning” (Participant 24), “More than U.S.” (Participant 40), and “Better than students here based on skill & drill” (Participant 49).

Once again, as it happened with the Teacher Preparation theme, the answers to the post-questionnaire revealed that participants’ expectations of Mexican students were met once they completed the program, and also once again, the answers to the post-questionnaire questions, although revealing in many instances the same information expressed in the pre-questionnaire, contained a higher-level of analysis and more critical reflection on Mexican students’ readiness. In fact, 100% of answers to the post-questionnaire reflected on how well prepared and eager to learn all students were. Overall, participants seemed to be very impressed with the level of preparation and readiness to learn that Mexican students demonstrated in the classroom, as reflected by the following answers to the questionnaires:

- Participant 1 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Prepared. Focused. Motivated. Hard working”
- Participant 1 – Post-Questionnaire – “Wonderful and impressive! Students were very knowledgeable on all subjects”
- Participant 3 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Students are always willing to learn”
- Participant 3 – Post-Questionnaire – “Students were enthusiastic almost all of the time. They seemed to be in a place academically similar to second graders at my school, if not more advanced”
- Participant 16 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Prepared with reading skills by the end of elementary school”
- Participant 16 – Post-Questionnaire – “Students were ready to start the moment we walked into the room. We even had kids that would be looking for us and run in letting the class know we were there”

- Participant 22 – Pre-Questionnaire – “I feel that students will be very prepared for their grade level expectations”
- Participant 22 – Post-Questionnaire – “Most students were very attentive, participatory and sincere in their efforts. The one or two students that struggled academically in this class also had spotty attendance while we were there”
- Participant 23 – Pre-Questionnaire – “I expect them to be at grade level in terms of reading, writing, and oral language skills”
- Participant 23 – Post-Questionnaire – “Impressive. Most students seemed “preparados” in terms of their listening, reading, writing and language skills”
- Participant 27 – Pre-Questionnaire – “To learn English, they will be excited, but at a very beginning level of language”
- Participant 27 – Post-Questionnaire – “Students had all materials in their backpacks or in a pencil box on their table. They always seemed to be prepared for the day”
- Participant 29 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Eager to learn”
- Participant 29 – Post-Questionnaire – “They were more advanced than the same grade of the students in the U.S.”
- Participant 38 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Students will be ready and prepared on a daily basis”
- Participant 38 – Post-Questionnaire – “It appeared to me that students were ready every day and also supported from home to be ready for school”
- Participant 42 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Students will be on task and ready to learn”
- Participant 42 – Post-Questionnaire – “Students arrived ready to learn. They seemed to understand their part in their learning. They seemed happy to be in school”

Overall, it is possible to say that the answers to the questionnaires reveal a general positive attitude among participants with respect to Mexican education, including pedagogy, classroom-management, discipline, teacher preparation, and student preparation. In many instances participants' expectations and preconceptions were positively reinforced and confirmed, as in the case of teacher and student preparation; and in many other instances, participants' beliefs were altered by their experiences in Mexico, as in the case of the use of direct instruction and discipline in the classroom. It can also be said that these alterations or changes in participants' expectations or preconceptions provided them with an opportunity to self-reflect and critically analyze their own beliefs. The surveys provide examples that demonstrated that participants were able to engage critically with themselves, though in many instances, the level of critical engagement was superficial and at times almost unnoticed. Nonetheless, overall, participants demonstrated a capacity to alter their perceptions, or at a minimum, respond differently to the same question before and after completing the program.

Beliefs about multiculturalism and multicultural education

A third category that emerged from the data in the questionnaires was participants' beliefs about multiculturalism and multicultural education. In particular, the questionnaires asked students to reflect on their beliefs about multiculturalism before and after the program. The area of multiculturalism is especially important for this study because it is an area of critical pedagogy that allows for some real self-reflection and critical analysis of one's own beliefs about education, multiculturalism, the intersectionality of both, and their application to real educational settings. As described in the introduction chapter, all the participants in the Study in Mexico Program were in-service teachers in the United States and all of them taught or were teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classrooms. A critical understanding of

multiculturalism and how it applies to their practices could have very positive consequences for the educational experiences of all their students, and that is why I assert that this category is particularly important for this study.

Participants were implicitly asked about multiculturalism in two questions in the Pre-Questionnaire. The first question asked participants “What experiences have you had with people of diverse cultures?”; the second question asked them more specifically “What is your position on multicultural education?”. The answers to these questions revealed a diversity of positions with respect to multiculturalism; it also revealed that participants arrived to the program with many different experiences with people of diverse cultures.

With respect to experiences with people of diverse cultures, participants can be divided into three categories:

(1) Participants who claimed not having had any or much experience with diverse populations beyond exposure to their ELLs in their classrooms. The majority of participants (56%) reported not having much experience with diverse populations or experiences limited to those with the ELLs in their classroom, mostly of Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican ancestry:

- “Mostly Latinos at my current school and when I student taught” (Participant 2);
- “I work currently in a district with a large Hispanic population” (Participant 6);
- “Taught second language learners for 3 years” (Participant 7);
- “I worked with Hispanic students for 2 years and their families when I taught 3rd grade, but other than that, not much” (Participant 11);
- “I have taught in a culturally diverse school for two years” (Participant 15);
- “My students now are primarily from Mexico or born to parents from Mexico” (Participant 17);

- “Limited – only in classroom” (Participant 26);
- “100% of my 3rd and 4th grade classes are ELLs from Mexico” (Participant 27)

(2) Participants who claimed to have had a lot of experience with diverse populations but their experiences did not happen with the types of diverse populations they encountered in their classrooms. These were participants (18%) who claimed to have a lot of travelling experiences in Europe and other English-speaking countries. Their experiences with diverse cultures lacked the component of political, economic, or social disadvantage that serves as an eye-opener for non-mainstream students in our U.S. schools. The point here is not to diminish or to delegitimize their international experiences, but it is important to notice, as the Literature Review chapter reveals, that experiences in France, Spain, or Italy have very little to inform if we are to critically understand the subtle relationships that exist between mainstream culture and non-mainstream students in our U.S. schools. These relationships of power, hegemony, and perceptions are non-existent when the diverse cultural experience occurs in another Western country, or another English-speaking country that shares a lot of the same values and beliefs we have in the United States:

- “I studied about 3 weeks in Prague with people from all over Europe and North America, and Japan” (Participant 4);
- “Lived in Finland 1 year, traveled, studied in St. Petersburg one summer, taught EFL in Korea 2 years” (Participant 5);
- “I have lived in Spain, Italy, India, Israel, and Australia. I have been to every continent, except Antarctica” (Participant 9);
- “I have been to Italy for 2 weeks” (Participant 21);

- “I lived in Denmark for 5 months doing humanitarian work. I lived in Japan for 5 months learning Japanese and helping in an elementary school” (Participant 23);
- “I lived in Sydney, Australia for 6 months. Traveled 13 countries in Europe, New Zealand, Cambodia, Vietnam, & Thailand” (Participant 24);
- “1995-1996 Exchange student, France, Rotary. 1997-1998 Study abroad, Italy” (Participant 42).

(3) Participants who claimed to have had a lot of experiences with diverse populations and their experiences are directly related to the populations of nonmainstream, underprivileged students they encounter in their classrooms. I consider these participants already to have a better understanding of the power, economic, and social relationships that exist between themselves (mainstream teachers) and their non-mainstream students. Of course, having had past experiences with low income Mexicans or having lived in rural communities does not guarantee a better understanding of the educational experiences of U.S. ELLs, but it does manifest a level of exposure that could reveal a better understanding of such relationships:

- “My family lived and worked on various dairy farms for 10 years with migrant workers and their families. I grew up in what I thought was a diverse neighborhood” (Participant 8);
- “I grew up in a diverse community – American, African-American, Puerto Rican, Indian (India) on the East Coast in N.J. Honestly, we all went to the same schools and I thought we learned the same way” (Participant 13);
- “I worked and went to school in an African American area during college and I now teach in a school that is 80% Hispanic” (Participant 37).

With respect to participant's position on multicultural education, sadly, although somehow predictably, some of the answers to the pre-questionnaire question did not manifest a critical understanding of multicultural education; in fact, 10% of participants answered the question with "I love it!" without providing any more explanation as to what multicultural education means or why they love it. Other equally uninspiring and empty answers to the question were:

- "YEE-HAW! Makes us richer" (Participant 3);
- "We are different, but we are equal" (Participant 10);
- "Inclusivity is necessary" (Participant 19);
- "Diversity is the spice of life" (Participant 20);
- "I try to embrace it for my classroom with my students" (Participant 22);
- "It's important for everyone" (Participant 26);
- "I support it wholeheartedly (Participant 31);
- "Yes!" (Participant 42).

I consider these statements to be examples of a lack of critical thinking or understanding about the issues related to multiculturalism. They are simplistic and meaningless: platitudes. I critical thought from the participants about multiculturalism could consider what aspects of multiculturalism are not present in their schools or classroom, and which ones are present. To claim that one supports multiculturalism "wholeheartedly" means nothing unless it operationalizes how they support multiculturalism in their profession: how are the students' narratives, cultures, and histories incorporated, acknowledged, and respected in the classroom? How is the native language of the student acknowledged and utilize in the teaching and learning process? These are some of the issues that could have been addressed when claiming that one

supports multiculturalism. Of course, there are many reasons why participants may have answered this question in such an uncritical manner, which is discussed in the analysis chapter.

Nonetheless, there were a few participants that revealed a somewhat critical understanding of multiculturalism, and even though their answers to the pre-questionnaire were still brief and not very developed, they manifested a deeper level of understanding compared to their peers' answers. Some of these quotes revealed a number of themes related to an understanding of multiculturalism that include:

(1) inclusion of diverse cultures in the curriculum and instruction - "The world is multicultural. Therefore, teachers need to have a knowledge of multicultural education and teach in a way that values and utilizes the cultures of students" (Participant 1)

(2) scaffolding - "It is important to acknowledge students of other cultures and scaffold the lessons to accommodate all students" (Participant 6)

(3) use of native language in the teaching and learning process - "We must arrive at a plan in our district to answer the needs of these students. Instruction in their native language is what would be best. Through social studies we should explore individual cultures" (Participant 8)

(4) critical thinking - "Multicultural education is a way of transforming learning so students become critical thinkers, learn to question, and accept and value varied approaches to learning and understanding" (Participant 13)

(5) tokenism - "Multicultural education is a theme that should make up the strategies and methods of everything a teacher does. Not black history month, 5 de mayo, food festival" (Participant 16), and

(6) critical skepticism about how multicultural education is understood and being used -“That it is very superficial here and a P.R. move in most cases. I wish more people truly valued it” (Participant 25).

It is clear then from the pre-questionnaires that all participants arrived in Mexico with varied levels and degrees of understanding about multiculturalism, what it means, and how it affects their practices. The Post-Questionnaire offered participants with an opportunity to reconsider their beliefs about multicultural education and to reflect on what the experience in Mexico taught them about multicultural education. It is also important to note in here that 60% of participants, as revealed by the Course Registration Form (see Appendix C), were enrolled in the “Curriculum and Multicultural Education” course that was offered as one of the courses in the program; thus, some of the answers among participants differed immensely from each other in part because of the different amounts of time that participants had dedicated to reading and discussing about multiculturalism while in Mexico. This depended on whether or not they were enrolled in the multicultural course.

As with many of the other answers to the questions in the Post-Questionnaire, the answers to the multicultural education questions were also more critically developed and lengthy than the answers to the multicultural questions in the Pre-Questionnaire. Overall, it can be said that participants believed they learned new things about multicultural education while in Mexico. Some of the answers were definitively more critical than others, but overall, most participants manifested a deeper level of understanding about multiculturalism, especially when compared to their answers to the Pre-Questionnaire. In particular, several themes related to participants’ critical understanding of multicultural education emerged from the data, namely:

(1) validating different cultures and including them in the classroom – “Multicultural education is being open to all cultures and validating them into my classroom. I learned that culturally related teaching (CRT) is important to make sure Multicultural education is valued in U.S. education” (Participant 1); “It is important to have a deep understanding about multicultural education to better meet the students’ needs. Multicultural education helps to set a foundation for the classroom teacher’s lesson” (Participant 14); “How to use it and incorporate it into my classroom and school. What it could look like with many different cultures in one room. Respect all” (Participant 40).

(2) cultural hegemony – “I learned it is important not to assume that all people agree with you and to be aware of all sides of an issue in order to better defend it” (Participant 4); “Schools in the U.S. must strive to honor all cultures. We are losing out on a huge piece of life when we impose our view of what we think culture is on these kids” (Participant 8); “It’s important to withhold judgment and don’t make assumptions. Different cultures have different learning structures. There are underlying cultural considerations that are not always obvious” (Participant 31); “A lot of people only see culture as “what are your ethnic origins” and not also family structure as culture (living with gay and lesbian parents, no parents—aunt, uncle, etc.)” (Participant 45).

(3) empathy – “It is incredibly eye opening to change “roles” and be a guest/visitor to another educational setting” (Participant 9); “On a personal level, I feel I am able to relate to my Mexican students on a deeper level” (Participant 15).

(4) flexibility – “I think the most important thing I learned was flexibility (in terms of CRT) to allow kids from different backgrounds to learn” (Participant 25); “Be open. Be flexible. Be thoughtful and considerate. Be respectful. Watch what others do” (Participant 34).

(5) use of native language – “I learned more of the background and research that supports and experienced it first hand in the classroom that if the students know the concepts in their first language, the easier it is for the students to develop the second language” (Participant 6); “How much help the first language can help to learn the second language” (Participant 37).

(6) knowing your students – “Recognizing and validating where students are coming from empowers them and legitimizes their educational experience. Get to know them!” (Participant 20); “I learned that the people here are very proud of their traditions. People from Puebla come with many traditions. It is important to get to know your students and their backgrounds and incorporate this into your teaching” (Participant 21); “Cultures are so fascinating. Multicultural education is truly teaching me to get to know your students and families, apply different strategies and realize what your children may be going through (identity and in life)” (Participant 22); “I would say I learned that it is very important to get to know students and their culture” (Participant 35); “I learned that it is important to be aware and educated in many different cultures so that my class and I can embrace and celebrate diversity. Also multicultural education helps students to feel valued and draw on their background knowledge “ (Participant 39).

Overall, the data from the questionnaires revealed that participants were able to exemplify and explain their understanding of multicultural education in a more critical and detailed manner after the Study in Mexico Program. In particular, the surveys revealed that before going to Mexico, most participants had a very superficial understanding of multicultural education, and even though their answers to the Pre-Questionnaire revealed that most of them supported multicultural education, they failed to communicate clearly what they understood by multicultural education and why they supported it. The answers to the Post-Questionnaire

revealed a much critical understanding of multicultural education and many of the participants were able to critically elaborate on their understanding. Their answers reflected several important themes that are present in the literature on multicultural education, including validating cultures in the curriculum, cultural hegemony, and use of native language in the teaching and learning process involving ELLs.

Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life

A fourth category that emerged from the data in the questionnaires was participants' beliefs about the effects of the Study in Mexico Program on their professional lives. In particular, the Pre and Post-Questionnaires asked students to consider how the experience will help them as teachers in the US. As usual, the Pre-Questionnaire asked them to speculate about "How do you think this trip will help you as a teacher in the US?" whereas the Post-Questionnaire asked them to consider "How did this trip help you as a teacher in the US?". In addition, the Post-Questionnaire also asked participants to consider two other questions related to their professional practices: "How will you use the Puebla experience to enrich the education of your colleagues?" and "How will you use the Puebla Experience to enrich the education of your students?". The themes that emerged from these data are particularly relevant to this study because they directly address the inquiries put forth by the research questions. In particular, they reveal which improvements in their professional careers are perceived by the participants to be direct consequences of the effects of and their experiences in the Study in Mexico Program.

The answers to the Pre-Questionnaire revealed that participants had very high expectations for how the program would help their practice back in the United States. In particular, most participants' expectations about the effect of the program in their professional lives fit into one of two categories: (1) participants expected to gain specific knowledge about

ELL instructional strategies, and (2) participants expected to gain a better understanding of Mexican culture and the Mexican educational system with the hopes of being able to understand their ELL students in the United States better. In many instances, participants' answers referred to both expectations simultaneously. In fact, 20% of participants mentioned hoping to gain knowledge about better instructional strategies, 40% mentioned hoping to gain knowledge that will help them better understand their students in the United States, and 22% mentioned hoping to gain knowledge on both areas. The following answers to the Pre-Questionnaire reveal these categories very clearly:

- “This trip will provide me with the experience of how to instruct effective ESL strategies. This trip will provide me with cultural experiences that I can connect with my students” (Participant 1);
- “Better understand students and teachers (culture, background education, etc.). Better Spanish, more confidence in Spanish. Experience teaching in a regular classroom & experience with explicit teaching of language concepts” (Participant 2);
- “It will show me what some of my students are used to, helping me ease their transition to an American classroom. It will give me more ideas for how to conduct and teach my own classes. It will expose me to new ways & ideas, hopefully breaking some of my molds” (Participant 3);
- “I will see teaching and education viewed from an outside perspective. I will gain knowledge, a cultural view and more understanding of what these students bring with them [and their parents' expectations] when they come to the U.S.” (Participant 13);
- “It will give the cultural sensitivity and some of the background knowledge necessary to make my lesson relevant” (Participant 17);

- “Through this experience, I will anticipate integrating newly acquired strategies and assessment abilities within my classroom to facilitate my students’ learning. (Participant 24);
- “It will put me in a culture where I’m the minority speaking the minority language – empathy for my students. Different teaching methods” (Participant 27); and
- “This experience will broaden my awareness of the experience for ELLs in a foreign school. I will learn new strategies I can apply to my classroom” (Participant 43).

The answers to the Post-Questionnaire revealed some of the same themes as the answers to the Pre-Questionnaire did (instructional strategies and cultural awareness), as well as some other new themes like empathy, high expectations, and sharing information with colleagues. The finding of more themes with respect to the themes found in the Pre-Questionnaire is because the Post-Questionnaire asked participants three questions that allowed them to consider how the Study in Mexico Program affected them as teachers in the United States and how they foresaw it helping them enrich the education of their students. A third questions asked them to consider how the Study in Mexico Program would help them enrich the education of their colleagues, or in other words, it asked them to consider if they had plans for sharing any new knowledge or experiences with their colleagues back in the United States.

(1) Instructional strategies. As mentioned earlier, this theme was present in the answers to the Pre-Questionnaire and many participants found that their expectations for the effects of the Study in Mexico Program in their practices were met, or at least, the answers to the Post-Questionnaire revealed that 42% of participants employed the words “teaching” or “methods” in their answers in the context of being able to employ better and more effective teaching methods with their ELLs. As has been common across questions in the questionnaires, the answers to the

Post-Questionnaires were more elaborate and articulated more critically and specifically how instruction and pedagogy would be improved. For example, Participant 13 noticed in the Pre-Questionnaire that “I will see teaching and education viewed from an outside perspective. I will gain knowledge, a cultural view and more understanding of what these students bring with them [and their parents’ expectations] when they come to the U.S.”. In their answer to the Post-Questionnaire, Participant 13 mentioned instructional strategies explicitly and with specific examples, moving away from the abstract ideas about expectations to the concrete and real practices they will employ in their instruction: “I will use strategies of direct instruction I saw here, especially in reading. I also observed group presentations, i.e., S. Studies – collaborative posters. I want to use that more in my class this coming year”. Other examples illustrating real understanding of instructional strategies, as compared to the abstract, unspecific expectations found in the Pre-Questionnaire are:

- Participant 3 – Pre-Questionnaire – “It will show me what some of my students are used to, helping me ease their transition to an American classroom. It will give me more ideas for how to conduct and teach my own classes. It will expose me to new ways & ideas, hopefully breaking some of my molds”
- Participant 3 – Post-Questionnaire – “I’ve deepened my knowledge of comprehensible input, especially when it comes to giving directions for activities, and giving praise. Routine helps, as does patience while establishing the routine. I’ve also begun to appreciate choral response as a teaching method more. It can help scaffold for some students (and can be ignored). I will be incorporating it into my lessons”

- Participant 26 – Pre-Questionnaire – “I will be able to learn what feelings, concerns and experiences my students come to my classroom with. I will become better because of this”
- Participant 26 – Post-Questionnaire – “I will increase the use of repetition in my class. I will use small groups to respond to class questions. I think that both of these are effective strategies that need to be used more in my class”
- Participant 49 – Pre-Questionnaire – “Be able to understand where my ELLs are coming from since I will have a hard time communicating because of language barrier”
- Participant 49 – Post-Questionnaire – “Encourage reading, writing in Spanish so they don’t lose L1. Not care if they’re loud or yelling out answers (as much!). More choral responses and TPR.”

(2) Cultural awareness about their ELL students. Also as mentioned earlier, this theme had already emerged in the answers to the Pre-Questionnaires. The post questionnaire responses from most participants indicated that their expectations were met; they also indicated how much better they felt they understood their Mexican students after they had spent two weeks in Mexico. Most of the participants felt like they had a better understanding of where their students came from, their culture, their heritage, their language, and their traditions after participating in the program. Many of the participants also said that after the program, they felt like they would be able to implement in their classroom some of the cultural experiences they have observed or participated in while in Mexico. They also believed that this, in turn, would help them understand and connect better with their ELL students from Mexico:

- “I feel more knowledgeable about schooling in Mexico, as well as culture, even though I can only experience a limited amount in two weeks. Still, I feel like I can relate better to my families in our school that emigrated from Mexico” (Participant 2);
- “I will have a greater understanding for cultural differences that arise in my classroom, what kids may say, do, or act. I will have more confidence and background to question policies I feel are not beneficial to my students” (participant 6);
- “This trip has helped me understand where and from what many of our kids come from. I have a better understanding of how school operates for Mexican students, so I will help them adjust better” (participant 8);
- “Since the majority of my students come from Mexico, I will have a clearer picture of their backgrounds. I will also assume much less culturally” (Participant 17);
- “I am already more aware of the conditions, methods, practices, etc. that happen in Mexican schools. My understanding is better and that will positively influence my teaching delivery” (Participant 31);
- “I have seen some of this culture and witnessed things that could explain why students may behave as they do in U.S. schools. Examples--leaving to go to the restroom, toilet paper issues, talking and eating in class, etc.” (Participant 35);
- “Much more sensitive and aware, culturally, of all students. Really want to get to know my ELL’s stories and families. I want to include more first language use opportunities” (Participant 37);
- “Knowing how it feels to be an ELL will affect my awareness of the school experience for my ELL students. I will work to improve my ability to help students access meaning

and language structures through my modeling, the strategies I employ and most importantly building student voice in culturally responsive ways” (Participant 43).

(3) Empathy. This is a new theme that emerged from the data in the Post-Questionnaire. Many participants reflected on how, after their experience as “the other” in Mexico, they felt they had gained a better sympathetic understanding about the realities of their ELL students in our U.S. schools. Many participants reflected on how they felt like they had a better understanding of what it means to be Mexican, a Mexican student, and an immigrant after having participated in the program. They also reflected on how important it is to connect with students at that level because it will allow them to be more understanding and flexible with their Mexican ELL students now that they have gained a better understanding of what it means to be “the other”. Many participants also reflected on the frustration they felt at not being understood, not being able to use the local language appropriately, not being able to communicate clearly and how this helped them connect at a deeper level and more sympathetically with their Mexican ELL students. This level of empathy, no doubt, is a direct consequence of the structure of the program that intentionally places participants in a position of “unbalance” that forces them to reflect on issues related to being an immigrant, not being understood, or feeling “unheard”:

- “By having developed more empathy for my Mexican students” (Participant 19);
- “I have much more empathy for what my students from Mexico are going through. Confidence, loss of voice, wait time, frustration, knowledge without the tools to demonstrate it, etc.” (Participant 20);
- “I can relate better to ELL’s who are trying to learn a new language. It is so hard, and it takes a lot of energy” (Participant 34);

- “I now have been in the role of a second language learner. I know the satisfied feeling of a small accomplishment. Celebrate everything” (Participant 35);
- “This trip helped me to realize some of the frustrations my students in the U.S. feel. Many times I tried to talk and understand Spanish and couldn’t do it, and that is how my students feel with English” (Participant 37);
- “Understand how a kid who doesn’t speak the language feels when they come to U.S. I will learn to “pick my battles.” Let little things go. Be thankful for what my classroom has. Incorporate different cultures and language into the classroom” (Participant 40);
- “Through this experience I was able to feel what its like to be in a classroom where I do not understand much language. I found myself using a variety of strategies to access meaning. In trying to speak Spanish, I found myself code switching, using extra time to process and feeling incompetent as a student/educator” (Participant 43);
- “Helped me to know what/how my ELLs feel when we make them sit in class and just lecture – TOTALLY LOST! --Learned that a quiet classroom doesn’t mean everyone learns” (Participant 45).

(4) High expectations. Several of the participants also noticed how the Mexico experience helped them realize the importance of maintaining good quality instruction and high expectations in the education of all children, including their Mexican ELLs. This is an interesting observation made by several participants that can only be understood as a personal transformation on behalf of the participants who, perhaps, before the program, felt like they were not expecting enough of their ELL students. After the program, and after they had taught Mexican students, they realized that high expectations are needed if all students are to have a good quality educational experience. It also reveals that many participants realized that Mexican

students are as “normal” as any other student they may have thought of as “normal”, thus removing from participants’ perceptions a negative preconception of Mexican students that was probably negatively affecting their educational experiences:

- “Higher expectations. I will refer to it to build rapport “ (Participant 4);
- “I feel that I will now have much higher expectations of my students from Mexico. Seeing the environment they come from gives me a much better awareness of their culture” (participant7);
- “I can see myself pushing the kiddos harder as well as doing more whole group lessons. I also think that rather than having all expensive things, I can see having the kids use things they already have at home—example—scales” (Participant 11);
- “I became more aware that students appear to be more independent and animated in their classes. This helps me to understand behavior” (Participant 31).

(5) Sharing of information with colleagues. The last theme that emerged from the data in the Post-Questionnaire was participants’ willingness to share some of the knowledge obtained and the experiences they had in Mexico with their colleagues. When asked, “How will you use the Puebla experience to enrich the education of your colleagues?” 100% of participants reflected on how they will (or hoped to) share their experiences in Mexico with their colleagues. The content and the level of enthusiasm in the answers varied significantly among participants. For example, some participants felt very excited about sharing some of their newly acquired knowledge and experiences with colleagues:

- “I won’t stop talking about it for months. I will use this to encourage a much more structured behavior plan” (participant 7);

- “I can’t wait to share my experience, i.e.: classroom, cultural events, field trips, language and research at my new school! I have learned so much” (Participant 12);
- “I will enjoy sharing what I’ve learned with my colleagues. I’m sure that I will have in-depth conversations with them!” (Participant 23);
- “I am really excited to share the techniques used down here to teach handwriting. Also try to make my colleagues even more culturally aware of all their students” (Participant 37);
- “I know my team can’t wait to hear about my experiences in Puebla. I’ll share everything I can with them” (Participant 43).

Most of the participants reflected on the possibility of talking about or sharing experiences and cultural knowledge acquired in Mexico with their colleagues, though they did not provide any specific strategies they would implement in trying to do so. They merely limited themselves to reflecting that they would “share” or “talk” about it with other staff members:

- “I will share my experiences with others in my school, especially focusing on what school experience is like, methods of teaching, curriculum, expectations and cultural norms” (Participant 3);
- “I will be able to share cultural nuances that will help combat assumptions that often occur through lack of experience or understanding” (Participant 5);
- “I will share with them my experiences and observations to allow them to see and understand more about our students from different places and cultures” (Participant 21);
- “Just talking about the experiences in Puebla with them. Discussing misperceptions with them. Sharing ideas about what was taught and how it was taught” (Participant 22);

- “Sharing about what I saw here in the school I worked in and explaining about what I learned here in the classes. Dialogue between teachers is good because it makes all of us think” (Participant 29);
- “Share my experience with my colleagues. This experience in Puebla is one of the highlights in my master’s program. I think that teachers in my school will benefit by participating in this program” (Participant 32);
- “This will encourage me to share the ideals of bilingual education and the importance of reaching out to our Hispanic students. Rumors about education in Mexico can now be shot down with fact and experience” (Participant 37);
- “Share my experience and thoughts and knowledge of ELL methods in all classes” (Participant 49).

Some participants also reflected on the possibility of sharing with colleagues new ideas about instructional practices and ways to teach ELLs more effectively:

- “Seeing the curriculum and the methods and learning the SEP’s approach can help my staff design our program to be more culturally responsive” (participant16);
- “The kids can do the work if they understand clearly what the expectations are. Repetition is not necessarily boring especially if students are learning ELR, that they can see the value of” (Participant 18);
- “I will share some of the techniques that worked well for me and some that the Maestra used. Also help make them aware of how kids show understanding” (Participant 33);
- “I will be able to share with them the new understandings I have of how Mexican students are instructed and hopefully I will also be able to share all that I have learned about biliteracy and its importance” (Participant 39).

Other participants felt the need of providing advocacy for their ELLs. This is a particularly interesting finding because advocacy is a transformational role by nature; it implies providing a voice for the underprivileged who cannot provide a voice by themselves. It also implies having an understanding of the systemic and hegemonic structures that exist in schools that serve a population of students (in this case Mexican ELLs) who are perceived by authoritative and powerful figure (in this case the White privileged teacher) as not being able to speak for themselves or provide their own advocacy. These teachers thus feel it necessary to act as advocates for them. As a direct consequence of the experiences in Mexico, this finding speaks about the possible transformational power of a transnational teaching experience:

- “I hope that someday I can work with other music teachers to help them best serve their ELLs and families and to help them to be advocates for these students” (Participant 2);
- “I would like to be a voice for students who have none, in order to make other teachers aware of the difficulties these kids face” (Participant 25).

Many other participants also manifested a willingness to train, teach, or show their colleagues the teaching and cultural experiences gained while in Mexico. This finding also is interesting because it also reveals the possible transformational power of the Study in Mexico Program. In particular it reveals that after the program, many participants were willing to engage in a kind of transformational praxis informed and inspired by their experiences in Mexico. I believe that it is transformational because they expressed a willingness to present and showcase to their colleagues their learning and experiences in Mexico with the hopes of having a transformational effect on them. In a way, it also is an advocacy role:

- “I plan to change the way of our thinking that language is a resource, not a problem. If I expose that language is a resource we can collaborate and change our ways of instruction, assessments, community involvement” (Participant 1);
- “I hope to help move toward change when my district begins to change back towards bilingual education” (Participant 6);
- “As a literacy coach, I hope to develop a professional development training to assist teachers in what to expect from our kids/parents because of cultural differences” (Participant 8);
- “I will be coaching fellow teachers next year and leading professional development sessions about culturally responsive teaching and parent/community involvement. My time in Puebla has been incredibly helpful” (Participant 9);
- “I will present to my staff Mexican Myth Busters” (Participant 34);
- “I will volunteer to do more professional development, especially with the para educators in my classroom” (Participant 37);
- “I plan on doing a slide show for our small staff when we get back” (Participant 38).

Finally, a couple of participants reflected on the possible obstacles they could encounter when trying to share some information with their colleagues. For example, Participant 11 is very clear in this respect when she reflected that “I think that I will share my experience with them. This question stumps me because I will be in a high-class white school with no ELLs in my grade. I don’t think they get what it means to not have a lot (assumption, I know but it’s what I got from subbing three weeks there)”. Similarly, Participant 24, even though she did not answer the question directly, reflected on the confrontational nature and the difficulties of communicating some new ideas to any audience: “I will know there are two sides to every story,

and we may both be passionate on them. It is the way you act and present yourself that will offer changes of thought”. These are both good examples of the difficulties involved when trying to change or transform existing beliefs and practices. However, it also shows that these participants were not so naïve as to believe that talking to colleagues and changing their perspectives would be an easy task; rather, it shows that they have a capacity to critically assess the situation they will encounter when talking to colleagues about a delicate issues that may require their colleagues to change an attitude or belief.

Overall, the data from the questionnaires revealed that most participants found the Study in Mexico Program to have the desired and expected effects, namely to obtain more knowledge about effective instructional strategies to implement with ELL students and to gain a better understanding of Mexican culture and schooling, which in turn, would allow participants to better connect and understand their ELL students. In addition, after the program, most participants believe they have gained a sympathetic understanding of the realities of ELLs. They reflect on the importance of maintaining high standards for all students, including ELLs, and they believe they will be able to share some of the new knowledge acquired in the program with their colleagues, although some participants reflected on some of the obstacles they may encounter when and if they tried to communicate this newly-acquired knowledge about their experiences in Mexico with their colleagues.

Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on personal life

The last category that emerged from the data in the questionnaires deals specifically with personal transformational experiences participants did directly attribute to the Study in Mexico Program. This is a category that emerges exclusively from the Post-Questionnaire since the Pre-Questionnaire did not ask participants to consider the effects of the program on their personal

(not professional) lives. It is in the Post-Questionnaire that participants were asked to specifically consider how the Mexico experience changed their outlook on life in general. This category is important for this study because it allowed participants to freely narrate any transformational experience or epiphany that may have occurred as a direct consequence of their participation in the Study in Mexico Program. It also allowed students to self-reflect, critically look at their own personal experiences and realities, and consider what changes may have evolved as a direct consequence of their experiences in Mexico. Finally, it allowed me to analyze the existence of language and expressions that may reveal self-reflection, critical thinking, and the development of critical consciousness, the major tenet put forth in this study.

Data from the Post-Questionnaire revealed many of the same themes that other answers to the other questions revealed, namely (1) advocacy, (2) better understanding of the ELL experience, (3) direct cultural self-reflection, and (4) global profession and global perspective.

(1) Advocacy. Several participants reflected on how the Study in Mexico Program helped them become better advocates for ELLs, bilingual education, or good education in general for all students. As I mentioned earlier, the role of advocacy is a critical and transformational role by definition, one that acknowledges unequal power, social, economic relationships and facilitates action against them by offering a voice for the less powerful side of these unequal relationships. It is not possible to know if these participants were already advocates before the experiences in Mexico, but the question specifically asked them how the program affected their outlook on life in general. If they answered that advocacy is what they want to do next, it is logical to think that it is due to their experiences in Mexico. It is also possible that the Study in Mexico Program was just the “last straw”; these participants may already had an intention to change in their personal lives and go on a new direction, a situation that I do not think diminishes the effectiveness of the

program or reduces its validity as a factor that awakens or catalyzes critical transformational roles in participants. The following answers from the Post-Questionnaire demonstrate this theme of advocacy clearly:

- “There have been many ways that this experience has changed my outlook on teaching. The most evident outlook that has changed for me is that I/we need to be advocates for best practice for all learners and to constantly reflect our beliefs on “problems” that we encounter in our education society. I want to be an advocate that bilingualism is the next movement that we need to change our frame of mind. Everyone in the education field needs an experience like this” (Participant 1)
- “My outlook on teaching has changed. With every new experience I benefit my students. I feel that I will be more aware of the identities and labels that we impose on our students and how those affect them. I will also continue to advocate for what I knew is best for our students, and now with more research and information to support what’s best. 😊” (Participant 39)
- “Wow! Big difference in me. I have worked in low-income schools, but was let go because I was told that “I was not good in this population.” I gave everything to those kiddos. I am a teacher, I am there for the kiddos! Anyway I went to the total opposite district, high income, all white. I subbed there and thought I loved it, but after going back to visit my kiddos from last year and seeing how much I meant to them helped me realize that I make a bigger difference to the other kiddos than I think. After this year I will search for a school with many ELLs so I can practice everything I have learned and a school with better administration than the first district I was forced from. So basically,

teaching ELLs is where I want to be—oh and I will also learn more Spanish. I hated the language barrier here” (Participant 11)

I consider this answer from Participant 11 especially relevant because I understand their willingness to put their energy, knowledge, and efforts to the service of ELLs instead of White upper middle-class students to be an act of advocacy for an underprivileged population of students. Another example of this type of transformational advocacy can be found in the answer from Participant 26:

“It has opened my mind. I am not okay with the “status quo” anymore. I will begin asking questions and looking for answers to find ways to better supports all of the kids in the classroom. ☺ Thank you!!”

This is a participant who acknowledges that she is dissatisfied “with the “status quo” anymore” and will use her experiences from Mexico to ask questions and find answers to alter such status quo. In her own words, the Study in Mexico Program “opened my mind”.

(2) Better understanding of the ELL experience. This is one of the major themes present in many of the answers to previous questions in both questionnaires, and it is also a major theme in the answers to this question of the Post-Questionnaire. Many participants reflected on how they believed the program helped them understand the realities of their ELLs better after they experienced being “the other” in Mexico. This is a theme that echoes a major theme that is found in the literature about transnational experiences; that is, that these experiences are known to have an effect on participants’ cultural bias, preconceptions, prejudices, and racism. They usually help participants “to become knowledgeable about other cultures, to perceive and value cultural diversity, to develop confidence and skills to communicate effectively with other cultural groups, and to overcome the distortions of cultural stereotypes” (Willard-Holt, 2001). What makes this

finding unique to this transnational teaching experience is that most participants related these changes in perceptions and beliefs to how they understood their Mexican ELL students.

Particularly important is the language factor and how many participants noted how difficult it was not being able to speak Spanish while in Mexico; it allowed them to gain a better sympathetic understanding of the ELL experience in the United States. The following answers to the Post-Questionnaire reveal this intersectionality of removing stereotypes, changing beliefs and perceptions, and understanding their Mexican ELL students better:

- “Wow. It was just an incredible experience. It was important for me to experience being in a country in which I do not really know the dominant language, not only so that I can relate to my students and families better, but so that I have that growth and understanding as a person. It was definitely difficult, and I know that I still speak a language of prestige here and don’t have to be offended by names like “gringa” or “güera”. It has to be much more difficult for those immigrating to the United States from Mexico” (Participant 2)
- “I am taking away ideas and an openness to and understanding of children from Mexico. Also an understanding of what it is like to be in a place where I am not proficient in getting across my point or understanding conversations” (Participant 5)
- “I truly feel this experience was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. My heart has grown with love for the people here. All of my biases about people from Mexico have been replaced with compassion and acceptance. I know my teaching will be effected in ways I don’t realize yet and in my style and organization of what and how I teach. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity, hard work put in by our instructors, our Maestra, the staff at Otilio, parents, students and everyone else who has helped me through this journey!” (Participant 12)

- “To know what it is like to be the “odd man out”! Try not to jump to conclusions on students and their families without first getting to know them and their situations better. Knowing a little of what it’s like to be an ELL or (SLL-Spanish Language Learning) and the difficulties or discomfort that goes with it” (Participant 37)

(3) Direct cultural self-reflection. This theme is directly related to the previous one inasmuch as they both deal with participants’ reflection on cultures. However, this theme emerged from the fact that some of the participants’ answers used what I consider to be more “direct” cultural self-reflection. That is, they reflected not only on Mexican culture and what they learned from it or what surprised them, they also manifested a critical level of self-reflection. They were able to relate their experience to their existing culture and beliefs, reflecting not only on Mexican culture but also on their own. In this way, they manifested self-awareness and critical consciousness. For example, Participant 35 clearly manifests self-reflection (and criticism):

- “This experience makes me feel that I will be more aware of my own culture. I will also be more patient and try to relate to my Spanish-speaking parents. There is more to the world than English and the United States”.

Similarly Participant 16, without naming it, reflects on cultural hegemony and bias when she says that

- “It’s important to always consider the various perspectives and realize that my opinion is based on a culture that is usually not the same as my students. The more I can I put myself into theirs, the more effective I will be at reaching them”.

Participant 8 also reflects on her own cultural limitations as her answer reveals:

- “I have always thought I was knowledgeable about people. What I know now is that I am knowledgeable about people whose culture I have experienced. But what I have not seen or experienced, I have not built a schema for. Now I have a frame of understanding to build on”

Finally, Participant 24 does not specifically mention reflecting about her own cultural beliefs but she does specifically mention engaging in an intense level of self-reflection as a direct consequence of the experience in Mexico:

- “I have self-reflected about myself more than I ever have in the whole life. This has changed me for the better for the rest of my life and teaching career. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for this opportunity you have given me”

(4) Global profession and global perspective. This is the last theme that emerged from the data in the Post-Questionnaire. It also is a major theme identified by the research literature on transnational programs as a known effect of these programs on participants; in particular, research suggests that these programs allow participants “to become motivated to teach from a global perspective and to consider themselves part of a global profession with global peers” (Willard-Holt, 2001). Several participants reflected on how this experience gave them a better global perception on things that included:

(a) feelings of global citizenry: “I would love to teach here! I will continue to seek opportunities like this out. A wonderful reminder that I am a citizen of the world. The future will tell how this has changed mi vida!” (participant 7);

(b) willingness to travel more: “Makes me want to travel more and try to engage in another teaching experience outside the U.S. This has showed me how much alike we all are!” (Participant 17); and

(c) global interconnectivity: “This experience reinforces the importance of bilingual education. The world is getting smaller, and we must know each other better to live in a global society” (Participant 31).

Several other participants commented on the feeling of camaraderie they gained with Mexican teachers because of their participation in the Study in Mexico Program. This reaffirms the research finding that these types of programs have an impact on the development of global teaching profession awareness:

- “Overall, I just feel more camaraderie with all of the teachers, both from our group and from Mexico. We share the same work ethic, love of children, preoccupation with politics, etc. it also reaffirms many of the thoughts and feelings with respect to multicultural education that I already have as a necessary tool to become a critical thinker” (Participant 22)
- “I am happy to make new networks with teachers in México. I think that teaching our children is driven by passion in our hearts. I saw passionate teachers from both the U.S. and México. This passion for teaching has changed my life. I feel lucky to be a teacher. I am also happy to learn from passionate educators” (Participant 32)

Finally, I found particularly interesting the answers from two participants. Obviously, these are isolated events and not robust enough to generate a theme, but they are particularly revealing and important enough that I felt it was important to include them in the findings. The first answer, I believe shows how difficult self-reflection and self-criticism can be for many participants of these types of transnational teaching experiences. We know that these experiences tend to have an effect on participants’ beliefs and values, but we also know how difficult it is for many to change or transform those beliefs and values. We also know how difficult it can be for

many participants to discuss or relate these transformations to an audience, not as much because of reluctance to change, but in many cases, because of lack of words to describe what has happened to them. Participant 6 clearly reflects both this “lack of words” and the certainty that a change has taken place because of their experiences in Mexico. This may indicate that Participant 6 is in one of the early Freirean stages of consciousness, a stage in which one is characterized by a willingness to change and learn, but does not have a critical understanding about those changes: “This has changed my outlook. I don’t know how to express it in words yet”. It is clear from this answer that Participant 6 knows they have experienced “something”, a “change” of some kind, but they lack the words to fully communicate their understanding of this “change”.

The second answer that I decided to include comes from Participant 30, a Mexican-native who in Spanish answered (translation is mine): “Que aún hay maestros de otras culturas, que se interesan en obtener conocimiento de otras culturas, para que su enseñanza sea más efectiva” (“That there are still teachers from other cultures who are interested in obtaining knowledge about other cultures so that their teaching becomes more effective”). I found this answer particularly interesting because it shows a level of appreciation from “the other side.” This study focuses on how White English-speaking teachers are affected by a transnational teaching experience in Mexico but every now and then, I think it is important to acknowledge that “the other side”, the Mexican side, is paying attention. It’s important that Mexican-born, Spanish-speaking teachers in the United States appreciate the efforts put forth by White English-speaking teachers who voluntarily placed themselves in an unbalanced situation to learn from it and improve their pedagogical practices to provide better educational services to Mexican ELL

students. I think it is important to notice that Mexican-born teachers in the United States are paying attention and do acknowledge the efforts put forth by their colleagues.

Overall, data from the Post-Questionnaire revealed that most participants felt like the Study in Mexico Program was a personal transformational experience for them, one that they thought would allow them to become better advocates for their students and to better understand and sympathize with their Mexican ELLs. The data in the questionnaire also revealed that many participants demonstrated in their answers a capacity to self-reflect and critically analyze their own cultural biases and beliefs. Data also revealed that many participants felt a global connectivity with their Mexican counterparts, a finding that echoes a well-known effect of these types of transnational teaching experiences. This is a connectivity that is experienced by many participants of these types of transnational experiences where they feel connected to their foreign teacher counterparts and discover that the teaching profession shares many commonalities across borders, cultures, and nationalities.

Summary and conclusion

Fifty participants answered thirty questions distributed in two different questionnaires, the Pre-Questionnaire completed before going to Mexico, and the Post-Questionnaire completed at the end of the Study in Mexico Program, yielding a total of 1,500 answers. Data analysis from the questionnaires revealed the following categories: (1) Perceptions about Mexican schools' infrastructure and materials; (2) Perceptions about Mexican education; (3) Beliefs about multiculturalism and multicultural education; (4) Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life; (5) Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on personal life. Each one of these categories contained a number of themes that helped me organize the findings within each category.

Perceptions about Mexican schools' infrastructure and materials. In this category the data from the questionnaires showed that before completing the program in Mexico, most participants claimed not to know much about Mexican schools and their educational infrastructures, and they speculated that the Mexican educational infrastructures would be considerably inferior to the ones participants knew back in the United States. Data also revealed that many participants used their experiences in Mexico to challenge some of their preconceptions about Mexican schools while other participants used their experiences to reinforce their beliefs about Mexican schools. Finally, the questionnaires also revealed that participants seemed very surprised not to find books or a library in the classroom but they were equally surprised at the level of technology available in the classrooms.

Perceptions about Mexican education. In this category data from the questionnaires revealed five main themes: (1) participants recognized the value of the nationalized and standardized curriculum used in Mexican schools and noticed how practical and utilitarian it seemed when they saw lesson plans modeled by Mexican teachers; (2) participants gained an appreciation for direct instruction and many of them commented on how it is something they were planning on employing upon returning to work in the United States; they noticed the effective use of Total Physical Response (TPR) and choral responses from the students and they also commented on possibly using those methods back in the United States; (3) participants' perceptions about classroom management and discipline in Mexico were altered. Many participants arrived to the Study in Mexico Program thinking that the Mexican classroom would be a scary place where the totalitarian figure of the teacher imposed his or her rules over the classroom by any means necessary, including corporal punishment. It did not take long to participants to realize that those preconceptions about Mexican classrooms were not based on

reality and they noticed how the Mexican teachers created a respectful, organized, and very effective classroom environment full of love and respect for the students; (4) participants' perceptions about Mexican teachers were confirmed. Many of the participants arrived to Mexico with the preconception that Mexican teachers would probably be as dedicated and as well-prepared as their U.S. counterparts and the answers to the Post-Questionnaire revealed that most participants discovered their expectations were correct and commented on the level of professionalism and how well-prepared to teach every day the Mexican teachers appeared to be; and (5) participants' perceptions about Mexican students were also confirmed. Most participants expected Mexican students to be eager and ready to learn when in school and they discovered they were correct in their expectations as they saw Mexican students engaged seriously and respectfully in the teaching and learning process.

Beliefs about multiculturalism and multicultural education. When participants were asked to reflect on their beliefs about multicultural education, their answers to the questionnaires revealed that many of them did not have a critical understanding on the issue and merely reflected on the fact that they "liked" multiculturalism or that they "supported" it, without critically analyzing or explaining what that meant. However, other participants did show a critical understanding of multiculturalism and how it affects their practices and their students. Many of the participants reflected on multiculturalism as a construct involving inclusion of diverse cultures in the curriculum and instruction, instructional scaffolding, use of native language in the teaching and learning process, critical thinking, validating different cultures and including them in the classroom, empathy, and flexibility. In addition, many other participants demonstrated in their answers a critical understanding of multicultural education-related concepts like tokenism and cultural hegemony.

Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life. When participants were asked to consider how the Study in Mexico Program affected them as teachers and how it will affect their practice, most participants recognized that the experience was a transformational one, particularly in the areas of instructional strategies, cultural awareness, empathy, high expectations, and sharing information with colleagues. Most participants recognized that after their Mexican experience they felt more capable of reaching their ELLS academically through more effective instructional strategies they had learned during class as well as observing the Mexican teachers. They also felt that they had a better understanding of their students' experiences in the United States as immigrants and as non-English-speakers, and they reflected on how a new level of empathy was reached because of the experience. Many participants also noted how important it was for them to maintain high expectations for their ELL students, a reflection that I understood to be transformative in practice. I assume they mentioned it because they had not held high expectations for their ELL students prior to completing the program. Finally, all participants expressed a willingness to share their experiences in Mexico with their colleagues, though some participants were more specific than others as to what concrete strategies they would implement to make that happen.

Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on personal life. The final category that emerged from the data in the questionnaires revealed that all participants felt as if the Study in Mexico Program had been a life-changing experience. It was not unusual to find among the answers expressions of gratitude and thankfulness towards the administrators of the program for allowing them to have had such an enriching experience and many of the participants reflected on how the experience will allow them to become better advocates for their students and for bilingual education. Participants also reflected on how the program allowed them to connect with and

understand better the ELL experience of their students in the United States. Many also revealed a critical awareness about the importance of self-reflection. Finally, several participants also reflected that the program had given them a sense of global connectivity to their fellow teachers and to the teaching institution in general.

Specifically dealing with the research questions put forth in this study, data from the questionnaires did reveal findings similar to prior research literature on transnational teaching (Clark & Flores, 1997; Escamilla et al, 2007; Mahan & Stachowski, 1992; McKay & Montgomery, 1995; Nava, 1990; Nguyen, Hopewell, Escamilla, Aragon, & Escamilla, 2008; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Willard-Holt, 2001): that these types of experiences help participants:

- learn about other cultures;
- gain an awareness of global issues ;
- become more open-minded;
- engage in critical self-reflection;
- resist stereotyping;
- gain empathy;
- become better communicators;
- understand better the situation and needs of migrant students in the U.S.;
- perceive and value cultural diversity;
- challenge old and consider new perspectives; and
- learn from other cultural and pedagogical practices.

There is no doubt that the Study in Mexico Program achieved these goals for many of their participants, as revealed by their answers to the questionnaires. Some of the answers to the questionnaires use language that fits perfectly into those categories:

- learn about other cultures; “I have learned more about the Mexican culture and will be able to implement my experiences in the U.S.” (Participant 28)

- gain an awareness of global issues ; “It helped me have a global prospective! Understanding the motivations(?) of this country and its educational system will only help me be more understanding” (Participant 41)

- become more open-minded; “I will use my experience to connect with Mexican students and to educate my students about other cultures. I want to encourage open-mindedness and share my love for diversity” (Participant 12)

- engage in critical self-reflection; “I have self-reflected about myself more than I ever have in the whole life. This has changed me for the better for the rest of my life and teaching career. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for this opportunity you have given me” (Participant 24)

- resist stereotyping; “This will encourage me to share the ideals of bilingual education and the importance of reaching out to our Hispanic students. Rumors about education in Mexico can now be shot down with fact and experience” (Participant 37);

- gain empathy; “I have much more empathy for what my students from Mexico are going through. Confidence, loss of voice, wait time, frustration, knowledge without the tools to demonstrate it, etc.” (Participant 20)

- become better communicators; “This experience has taught me the great importance of communicating with students. Allowing them to share about them, their culture and to have

patience. I learned to speak slower and to express myself with the use of body language. I am excited to become an ESL teacher and have learned the great need of ELL in the USA.”

(Participant 28)

- understand better the situation and needs of migrant students in the U.S.; “I will have a greater understanding for cultural differences that arise in my classroom, what kids may say, do, or act. I will have more confidence and background to question policies I feel are not beneficial to my students” (Participant 6)

- perceive and value cultural diversity; “I learned that it is important to be aware and educated in many different cultures so that my class and I can embrace and celebrate diversity. Also multicultural education helps students to feel valued and draw on their background knowledge” (Participant 39)

- challenge old and consider new perspectives; “It’s important to always consider the various perspectives and realize that my opinion is based on a culture that is usually not the same as my students. The more I can I put myself into theirs, the more effective I will be at reaching them” (Participant 16)

- learn from other cultural and pedagogical practices; “I learned teaching styles, also world connections used by their Maestra daily (Mexico to many other cultures). I have a clear picture of a Mexican classroom & expectations” (Participant 5)

As these examples reveal, even the language employed by participants answering the questionnaires matches the language of the findings in the research literature around the effect of transnational teaching experiences. And I decided to only include one example per finding but I could have easily included dozens of examples in each category, which comes to demonstrate that the Study in Mexico Program is aligned with the research findings that reveal that

transnational teaching experiences tend to have a positive effect in the lives and practices of their participants.

However, this study was aimed at discovering whether or not the program and its components affected participants' cultural critical consciousness, and based on the data provided by the questionnaires, I am inclined to believe that yes, the Study in Mexico Program has the capacity to affect positively the growth in critical consciousness (Freire, 1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1978; Shor, 1993). First, I think it is important to clarify that this study did not gather sufficient data to claim that I know at what stage of critical consciousness participants were before arriving to the program. However, the answers to the questionnaire revealed flashes of language employed when a clarity exists in the mind of participants about critical issues. For example, some participants used terms like "advocacy", "self-reflection", and "cultural awareness", which at a minimum show a capacity to discuss critically delicate issues surrounding ELLs and their education. In addition, many participants also reflected in their answers a capacity for change in their own preconceptions and beliefs about bilingual education, ELLs, and Mexico. Because of that, even though it is impossible for this study to prove that participants moved "forward" in the stages of critical consciousness, I believe that the project, at a minimum, had the potential to critically affect many participants, and pushed them to critically challenge and transform preconceptions and beliefs. It is not possible for me to specifically point out how strong this effect is or how the participants changed stages of development, but I believe it is possible for me to say that the program, as it is designed, has the possibility of affecting the participants' development of critical consciousness as demonstrated by their responses to the questionnaires given to them before and after the program.

The other major tenet put forth in this study aimed at finding out which specific

components of the Study in Mexico Program were most powerful in affecting participants' development of critical consciousness. The data from the questionnaires did not provide much evidence in this respect, but it did highlight that most participants found the teaching and observing in Mexican schools experience to be incredibly inspiring, educational, and effective. In fact, because of the nature and structure of the questions in the questionnaire, participants discussed only three components of the program in their answers: (1) the aforementioned teaching and observing in Mexican schools experience (these are identified in Chapter 1 of this study as two different components), and (2) what they did during their "free" time. All these components had a direct impact in the experiences participants had while in Mexico. For example, learning from different pedagogical practices, like direct instruction, TPR, and choral responses from students, can be directly related to their teaching experience in the Mexican schools. Another major finding, obtaining a sympathetic understanding about the experiences of their ELL students, also can be related to the teaching experience in the Mexican schools as well as to some of the activities participants engaged in during their "free" time. These included trying to communicate with Mexicans in the street, trying to communicate with their Mexican teacher, or trying to use public transportation and experiencing "first-hand" the frustration of not understanding, not being understood, and feeling disenfranchised.

In fact, all major findings from the questionnaire can be directly related to these three components, which as mentioned before, because of the nature and structure of the questions in the questionnaire, were the only components participants mentioned in their answers. The following chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted for this study. In these, other components of the program are mentioned and discussed by the participants interviewed.

Chapter 5

Findings: Interviews

Introduction

Data from the interviews helped answer the research questions for this study inasmuch as they informed the study about how participants perceived the Study in Mexico Program and its components had affected their personal and professional lives. The interview (Appendix D) asked participants to consider questions about the different components of the program and to offer suggestions to the program directors. Answers to these questions could reveal possible shifts in cultural consciousness from participants as well as participants' opinions about the different components.

The analysis of the answers to the interviews revealed the following categories:

1. Perceptions about Mexican education
2. Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life
3. Favorite component of the Study in Mexico Program
4. Participants' suggestions for the Study in Mexico Program

Perceptions about Mexican education

The first category that emerged from the data in the interviews also was a category that was found in the answers to the questionnaires; it deals with participants' perceptions about Mexican education. Two main themes emerged within this category: (1) participants reflected positively on Mexican pedagogy and (2) participants reflected very positively on Mexican students.

(1) Participants' reflected positively on Mexican pedagogy. This first theme that emerged from the data in the interviews reveals that participants found the Mexican classroom to be a

place where learning happened, but in a way that they did not expect or could have predicted, especially as they compared the teaching taking place in the Mexican classroom to their teaching experiences in U.S. classrooms. In particular, all participants interviewed almost unanimously exalted the role of the Mexican teacher, which is aligned with one of the findings from the answers to the questionnaires. This feeling of admiration for the Mexican teacher expressed by the participants I interviewed is revealing because our U.S. participants found it difficult to adapt to the conditions of the Mexican classroom. They reflected on how different these conditions were compared to the ones they were used to in their U.S. classrooms, which “forced” them to acknowledge how inadequate they felt in trying to manage and reach the Mexican students, while at the same time, acknowledging how effective Mexican teachers were in their setting. Participant 25 reflects this very clearly, as well as how participants learned from these experiences in the Mexican classroom:

“I would say probably, I struggle with handling the chaos of kids. I love it but at the same time I’m not a very focused person. So if I, it’s hard to me to focus when kids are all doing their different thing, but I really admired how the teacher in my classroom in Mexico could really kind of play off the fact that, like all kids where...you know, one kid was saying something over here, and other kid was moving around over here, but the teacher kind of seems like play off that whole thing and use it to her advantage; but for me that sounds like, that’s very difficult. So I try and work towards that, being more not expecting the kids always come to my level more me trying to fit in with their motion of doing things. It’s a huge challenge for me, but I think about that all the time when I am feeling frustrated because the kids are not, you know, shutting off or calming down or

whatever that's something I try and focus on; okay, I need to find my spot in there instead of being finding their spot with me"

Participant 25 seems to have been able to critically assess the difficulty of managing the Mexican classroom while at the same time admiring the skills manifested by the Mexican teacher to successfully do so; in addition, Participant 25 was able to reflect on what these particular events taught them and how their approach to trying to "control" students was changed because of observing the Mexican teacher's practices.

Similarly, Participant 36 also reflected on the classroom management skills demonstrated by Mexican teachers but was able to link such practices to cultural manifestations and acknowledging how different they are from expectations and norms in the U.S., demonstrating a level of cultural critical analysis in their observations of Mexican classroom management:

"The whole idea of classroom management working with the 40-50 students just, but the classroom management can be... or just the whole classroom kind of setup and routine can be completely different because of the different culture that..., that's Mexican culture as different norms and expectations for people's behavior that completely happen in the classroom and how the teacher can teach because that..., so that's the norm for them"

Classroom management was definitively one of the most common references found in the data from the interviews. At one point or another during the interview, almost all participants referred to classroom management skills as something they admired and learned from while teaching in Mexico, just as Participant 33 reveals:

"The observation I got from the teacher was really, main thing was time management. For the amount of time that she had with the kids it was used completely with instruction, with help, she involved everyone in the class, she has real hands on and it seem like any

questions that the students had, she was able to answer them and they were.. and the students also were able to apply what they were learning. And she was very helpful with me as far as explaining what she was doing. And she asked questions when I will teach as well”

An interesting point related to this theme of Mexican pedagogy is that, as we have already seen in the example from Participant 25, one of the terms used to refer to what they remembered about their experiences teaching in and observing a Mexican classroom by almost half of the participants interviewed (11 participants) was “chaos.”, however, the term was not used with negative connotations; in fact, very frequently the term was used oxymoronically to accompany terms like “organized” and “structured”. I think this is another manifestation of how complex U.S. participants found to teach in Mexican schools while at the same time acknowledging how effective the process was, as Participant 31 says:

“Oh! My experience teaching in the Mexican classroom was wonderful. The thing which stands out to me the most was that we were so welcomed in the classroom. The children were very, very, excited to have us there. They were... they participated very enthusiastically. When we ask questions they, all the hands shot up, they were shouting answers, it was a very, it was a very organized chaos in a way. I learn that it’s not quite as structured as I was expecting it to be, in some ways, and in other ways it was more structured. Her day was with the curriculum that she taught; that was very organized and how she taught what she taught. The way that children responded to her teaching was very open and very unorganized and only in that they were very free to express themselves as she taught. So, they did a lot of shouting out answers and lots of, all children participated. I didn’t see any children that just sat back and did not participate.

So, they were all very engaged and excited to be learning and they all seem very happy to be there at the school”

This reflection for Participant 31 reveals a situation of unbalance that was generated and produced by the teaching in and observing Mexican classrooms. First, Participant 31 expresses a sense of “organized chaos” in the classroom and second she reflects on how the classroom seemed “not quite as structured as I was expecting it to be, in some ways, and in other ways it was more structured”. If anything, it is clear that Participant 31 is finding difficult to understand and put in words their experiences teaching in Mexico but it also reveals that, departing from their U.S. standpoint, the Mexican classroom seems unorganized and chaotic and yet, after teaching there, they get a feeling that Mexican teaching practices work, a contradiction they cannot completely expressed beyond simple oxymoronic opposites like “organized chaos” and “not quite as structured and more structured”.

Also in this reflection from Participant 31, there is a reference found in the data from many of the interviews: Many activities which were not common practices in the U.S. today but that are extremely effective in Mexican classrooms: direct instruction, choral responses from students, and whole-class learning. This finding, acknowledged by many of the participants, is aligned with another finding from questionnaire data.

“It was very informal, because she would tell by whether or not they were doing it. I would say a lot more verbal discussion as opposed to pencil and paper activities than we do. A lot more group activities. Kids get themselves close connect to each other”
(Participant 18)

“She taught pretty much out of the book and what was in the book, the kids all would open up the book and then she would have the kids would look at it and it would

be, she would read it and then they would read it after her or they would read it in choral. If it was something like Math, she would teach a concept I think we did geometry, she did geometry. And she would teach that hexagons are different from squares. And then the kids come and draw everything, you know half the class will come up and take a turn drawing what hexagons looked like and how would square look she did a lot of difference, so how were they like and how are they different” (Participant 22)

(2) Participants reflected very positively on Mexican students. The second theme in this category that emerged from the data in the interviews reveals that participants left the Study in Mexico Program with a very good impression of Mexican students, their respect for the teachers, and their eagerness to learn. This is, again, a theme that was also found in the data from the questionnaires and it reveals that two years later, participants still remember their Mexican students with the same affection they had for them when they had just finished teaching in Mexico. This reflection from Participant 9 echoes what many participants said about Mexican students:

“Experience was, it was quite different, it was definitely a little bit nervous at first, however, the difference was the amount of it, because I just had taught here for two weeks but the kids were very, very respectful of the teacher. When I asked the attention of the class, I got full attention from all kids. And when I'm talking it seem like they were able to apply what I was teaching them, based up on observation and based upon written work, which is very exciting to me.”

Respect from Mexican students was definitively a common theme across data from the interviews and it was mentioned by many of the participants I interviewed:

- “They were very independent learners. They knew what they have to do, they just worked. They were in their classroom and they did what they needed to do for the day and the principal just checked on them and they were just fine, they were very independent learners. So, very respectable children, it was wonderful. It was a very good experience, very nice to see that” (Participant 9)
- “I really understood that because they don’t get small group interaction, the kids don’t move from center to center, the kids are a little more quite and respectful, it seemed like in Mexican schools than in American schools” (Participant 27)
- “I felt like the students in Mexico are much more respectful; the kids enjoyed going to school, they enjoyed their teacher, they respected their teacher, they respected anybody of authority and for me that was the most exciting part, just to see the excitement on the student's faces when they see us come in to the school, and their sadness when we left” (Participant 32)
- “From what I saw -- I felt like the students were well disciplined and they respond to the teacher much more effectively than they do here. I think that -- and this is from my experience from what I’ve seen in elementary schools. And I think that the set of procedures that they have in a classroom are much more organized than what I see, say, in maybe some American schools” (Participant 34)

Mexican students’ eagerness to learn also was something that impressed participants, as Participant 8 explains:

“They were excited to learn, they were excited to have us there and they hung on our every word, they follow directions very, very well. And it was just a very exciting experience. We had lots of fun, lot of fun. And the activities that we had prepared ahead of time facing to

really enjoy, there was a lot of, a lot of interaction, a lot of exchange. Lots of laughter and fun and it was just, it was wonderful. Children were very loving, very fun to teach”

Some of the participants were able to more critically assess the learning of Mexican students, especially when they compared them to their students in the U.S., as Participant 13 reflected:

“Even with the lack of materials compared to American schools how literate the kids were, even though that I mean we have a lot more money, have a lot more money in Commerce City, a lot more books, a lot more computers a lot more everything, but the kids did, I don’t know, I felt like they were as advanced or more advanced than the first graders in the schools in Commerce City, so that was interesting”

Also related to differences across students, Participant 50 reflected that he had also noted a difference between students of Mexican origin who are new to U.S. schools versus those who are born here or who have been in the U.S. school system long enough that, as Participant 50 describes, have been “Americanized”, thus losing some of the positive attributes he saw in the Mexican students, like respect and listening:

“I can see that especially with the students who have most recently immigrated to United States tend to be probably closer to, yeah, more respectful, much more better listeners. They try very, very hard, the kids that have been, that have been here for quite a while are who were born here, but their families came, you can tell they’re becoming very Americanized in the sense that they’re picking up on some of the habits of students in the classroom who are typical American students, which is not necessarily listening, not necessarily being respectful, but yes, definitely a difference”

This is an interesting observation inasmuch as Participant 50 shows a critical understanding of the “Americanization” of his students in the U.S., an understanding that requires a knowledge of the characteristics of Mexican students to be fully understood. Participant 50 is capable of critically observing and commenting on his Mexican students’ changes after he has been in the U.S. for some time because he understands the characteristics of a Mexican student from Mexico, which he gained through the Study in Mexico Program.

Overall, the participants I interviewed recalled having very good opinions and memories of Mexican teachers, students, and Mexican pedagogy in general, especially direct instruction and whole-class interactions. Most participants also commented on how impressed they were at the Mexican teachers’ skills in managing large number of students in small classrooms, but they also commented on the great attitude and disposition to learn they perceived from Mexican students. Some participants were able to critically compare these attitudes and dispositions to the ones they experience in the U.S.

Perhaps as interesting as the themes that were found in the data from the interviews is what I could not find in them. One of the themes missing from interview data was mention of lack of materials available to Mexican students, which was a very present theme in the data from the questionnaires. However barely any of the participants I interviewed seemed to recall it or to critically speak about it. This is an important observation because of the 23 participants I observed, about half of them (11 participants) had made references to the lack of materials or books in Mexican classrooms in their answers to the questionnaires. However, in the interviews only three of them commented on it, and they did it indirectly; that is, they did not comment on lack of materials in the classroom critically or as a negative thing, but as a side comment to

something different they were reflecting on, like the example from Participant 13 above, commenting on Mexican students' literacy skills compared to U.S. students:

“Even with the lack of materials compared to American schools I was surprised how literate the kids were, even though that I mean we have a lot more money, have a lot more money in Commerce City, a lot more books, a lot more computers a lot more everything, but the kids did, I don't know, I felt like they were as advanced or more advanced than the first graders in the schools in Commerce City, so that was interesting”

In fact, only one of the participants I interviewed reflected critically about the lack of materials in Mexican classrooms, specifically the lack of books, but the reflection was surprisingly positive because it did not consider the lack of books in the classroom to be a negative factor, but instead, as a factor that stimulated Mexican students' imagination and creativity:

“Yes, children, the students in Mexico seem to, with their learning they seem to be much more expressive, much more willing to express and I think part of that is because in American schools we're very structured in how we teach, we have very set programs. And in Mexico they were very few books in the classroom, there were just textbooks, but very few, very little fiction, very little picture books, there wasn't a lot of prints. And so students even though they were learning from their text, they were having to be very creative in their writing and using a lot of their experiences outside the classrooms to express especially in their writing. So, that was one thing that really set out as well”

Considering that the interviews happened over two years after participants completed the program and the questionnaires, this is an important finding because it reveals that almost none of the participants I interviewed seemed to remember the lack of materials negatively, even

though they commented on it two years before. In fact, the only participant who was able to critically reflect on it in the interview saw some positive aspects in the lack of books in the classroom. It is possible that nostalgia plays a role in the memories these participants have of their experiences in Mexico, which “forces” them to remember some of the most positive experiences they had while teaching in Mexican schools. However, it also is possible that participants’ perceptions of Mexican teachers’ practices, classroom management skills, and Mexican students’ preparation, attitudes, and eagerness to learn had a longer lasting effect than the lack of books and resources in the classroom that so many participants noted in their answers to the Post-Questionnaire.

Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life

A second category that emerged from the interview data also was a category that emerged from the data in the questionnaires. It refers to the effects the Study in Mexico Program had on participants’ professional lives. In fact, just as with the previous category, two main themes emerged from this category: (1) instructional practices and (2) cultural awareness about their ELL students.

(1) Instructional practices. The first theme that emerged from in this category also was found in the data from the questionnaires. It serves to reinforce that participants from the 2008 Study in Mexico Program believe that their experience in Mexico helped them improve their instructional practices, especially instructional practices destined to better serve ELL students. For example, Participant 31 reflects on how her experience in Mexico helped them adapt the methods she employed in the classroom and use visual, music and movement, which she saw modeled in the Mexican classroom and teacher she observed:

“Yes, definitely, definitely. Absolutely because before I went to Puebla, it was more of a, I was more structured in my teaching in terms of curriculum and now after being in Puebla and seeing how children learn in Mexico. I’m much more apt to veer away from the program and use different methods to help kids feel more relaxed and feel more a part of what’s going on and much more active learners. They just seem to me much more active learners. And then of course I have to follow the pacing guides for the programs, but I really do try to use a lot of, a lot more visuals, a lot more music and a lot more movement, physical movement and much more just letting children express themselves for as long as they need to get the words out of them”

Music, choral responses, and physical movement in the classroom were definitely practices that participants were able to observe in Mexican classrooms and they reflected on them as effective practices they learned from their observation and teaching in Mexican schools.

Participant 3 also commented on some of the instructional practices she observed in Mexico, in particular the use of realia in the classrooms:

“Right, I think it did help in the sense of showing me more ways of getting realia in my class room, I don’t use realia very well and it’s some thing that have come coming back from that I begin to realize that I wanted to use it more and is actually one of the reasons why I got more pictures on the wall, I don’t necessarily use this all the time or like having them put their work up on the walls, I’ve always done that to some extent but now it’s a much more consciously formatted piece of what I do. So they don’t just put their stuff up once they are done but will put it up into a poster walk, for example. I haven’t done yet this year but it’s there.”

This is an interesting reflection because Participant 3 claims that after the experience in Mexico, the use of realia in the classroom became a “more consciously formatted piece of what I do”, which manifests that Participant 3 gained a better understanding of the use of realia in the classroom and believed this new understanding was due to their experiences teaching in and observing Mexican classrooms.

Finally, in both the interviews and the questionnaires, participants reflected on the amount of direct learning they observed in Mexican classrooms. They noted this as something they were not familiar with as a teaching style, but said it was an effective teaching style, based on what they saw in Mexican classrooms. In a sense, direct teaching is not very “well-seen” in the U.S. as an instructional practice and yet, observing Mexican teachers implement direct teaching so effectively, caused a moment of unbalance in some of the participants who did not expect direct teaching to be so effective. Participant 18 reflected on the transformational power of this unbalance event:

“I actually changed my teaching. I learned that direct teaching is not a bad word and in Boulder Valley we tend to do so much student-led activities that it gets muddy, as far as I'm concerned, and certain kids need to be directly taught, what it is.., because we can wait and wait until they try to figure out what it is, we are trying to get them to learn, it will never happen, or they will learn something so convoluted that it actually damages their education, I think. So for some children, they need to be shown the comma goes here: this is where it goes, not having them, you know, figure out five different ways to say the sentence before they figure out they need the comma. So now, just depending on the topic, I will just say “look, this is the way it is”, and then other things, I will allow them to inquire into”

Not only was Participant 18 able to reflect on the effectiveness of direct teaching as observed in the Mexican classroom, but she was also able to critically reflect on the teaching that currently takes place in her school district and how the instructional practices they currently employ may not be serving all students well. Doing better could be done by implementing more direct learning in the classroom, an understanding participants directly related to their experiences in Mexico. This reflection also includes a deeper level of critical reflection that involves transformational practice. These are teachers who, after their experiences in Mexico, understand that the instructional practices they currently use are not as effective in certain cases and with certain students. Then they decided to change their teaching style to include some of the teaching practices they observed and learned in Mexico, thus providing better service, and a better educational experience, to all students.

(2) Cultural awareness about their ELL students. The second theme that emerged reinforced a theme that emerged from the data in the questionnaires. This dealt with participants' capacity to understand and empathize better with their ELL students because of their experiences in Mexico. This theme was found in almost every interview. Almost unanimously, participants acknowledged that going to Mexico gave them the tools to understand and empathize better with their ELL students and what they are going through as immigrant students in the U.S. trying to communicate learning a second language. Participants 7 and 35 echo what many participants said in the interviews:

- “I think the biggest thing I got out of that, that I don't think you can get out of any other class, it's just knowing what some of these immigrant kids, an immigrant from anywhere, what they are having to deal with. Knowing, being able to empathize with my students and accommodate so that they are able to learn better, like take some of the grief and the

struggles they have as being second language learners, lot of times immigrant children, off of their shoulders, so that they can actually get to the learning. And I think they are learning more efficiently. I remember a story in one of the classes we took at Puebla, about children, second language learners, especially if they have just come here, being like language brokers for their parents and the pressure that puts on kids”

(Participant 7)

- “Hmm, I would have to say, because of that experience which made me a little more aware of what the students are going through as far as being in a classroom and not understanding the language. We have a lot of students that come in here that speak no English and it helps me to understand where they’re coming from and how to maybe better get to them to know some strategies to use with them. I know I learned a lot of the strategies in the classroom, but being there in a classroom with all those students it helped me to understand. While I’m working with these kids all the time is, I need to be able to reach out to them. I think that experience has helped me better understand how to reach out to them, the things that I need to do to work with them, maybe which strategies will work” (Participant 35)

An interesting point made by both these participants, one that speaks about the power and effectiveness of actually teaching in a Mexican classroom, is the distinction they made between what they were able to learn in courses in term of strategies and awareness, and what they learned from being there, in the classrooms in Mexico, and experiencing “first-hand” the difficulties of communicating, trying to be understood, and reaching out to people who do not speak their language. This was something “that I don’t think you can get out of any other class”.

Participant 8 also reflected on the ability to connect with their ELL students in the U.S. better because of their experiences in Mexico, as the following interview excerpt shows:

Participant 8: That was awesome. I really did like the pyramids. I thought that was awesome. And just walking around and hearing the history of how the things were and how people were, and I don't know if all the stories were true but...

Interviewer: Is that why you enjoyed it?

Participant 8: Yeah.

Interviewer: Learning about the history and something, because it was something totally new?

Participant 8: No, so that was all new and really exciting, and it just gave me something that I could bring back and I can connect to so many students here and... So many of our students are from Mexico that, you know, I could say I had been to Puebla and they're like, "Wow! I've been there", you know. It's just...

Interviewer: Really?

Participant 8: ...so cool just to make that connection with them.

Interviewer: Do students recognize Puebla and they know what you're talking about, like...?

Participant 8: Lots of them do. So truly the... I love it. Or even if I talk about some things that I saw there, it's very familiar to them, wherever they're from, in Mexico. So it's really cool"

As I explained in the Methods chapter, I tried to conduct my interviews in a very relaxed, non-intimidating type of environment; additionally, many of the interviewees are my personal friends. The following example from my interview with Participant 45 demonstrates the types of

interviews I conducted, engaged in a relaxed conversation but trying to obtain meaningful information from the interviewees. In this case, Participant 45 reflects on how he changed careers after the experience in Mexico and how he felt he understood his ELL students better and became a better teacher as a consequence of the Study in Mexico Program:

“Participant 45: Well for sure that, knowing what my kids feel like learning a second language, because I, well now I have the ESL job I wanted, I didn’t have that when I was teaching in Mexico.

Interviewer: After the Mexico experience you took on the ESL job?

Participant 45: Right.

Interviewer: Because you felt more prepared?

Participant 45: Because now I can relate to my kids better, I know...

Interviewer: Honest?

Participant 45: Honestly, I swear.

Interviewer: You’re like, you came back and you’re like, now I feel like I can teach my kids.

Participant 45: No I mean, I mean I guess it made me want to teach them more...

Interviewer: Okay, there we go.

Participant 45: ...than, not like I didn’t know what I was doing before I went to Puebla, but it was more of a, I guess an acquisition, that I was on the right track if that’s what I was supposed to do, rather than this is just a Masters, so I get a pay increase. It’s what I really want to do. The second language acquisition, that’s what I want, and that’s what I am doing now, and I love it”

Overall, the participants I interviewed echoed many of the same sentiments they expressed in the answers to the Post-Questionnaire in terms of what they felt was the biggest impact of the program in their professional lives, namely that they felt they had acquired some very effective instructional practices they were now implementing in their classrooms, and that they had gained a better understanding of the ELL experience, of what their ELL students are going through as immigrants not speaking English in the U.S. There were some instances (as with Participant 45) that after Mexico, she decided to change schools and serve ELL populations of students more directly, be it because she felt a social need to serve them or because she felt she was better equipped and prepared to serve them.

The following extract from my interview with Participant 18 summarizes these findings very well, as she reflects on how, after the Study in Mexico Program, she felt the need to change schools to serve ELL students. She did this because of two factors: (1) understanding ELLs better and (2) changing instructional practices because of the Study in Mexico Program:

“Yes, well one thing that happened to me is when I came back from Puebla, I decided to change the school. The school that I was teaching in had one Hispanic child in it. And so I switched over to here, which is 25% because I felt that well, it is more interesting and I felt like, I could hope that, I would really enjoy teaching children with second language learning needs, because as a result of the Puebla class, I felt like I could do it, because I went to Puebla. So because I did see what it was like for kids who are in a completely Spanish speaking environment and learning English. And I guess that it empowered me a little bit. It also let me see that they needed to be taught differently. So you can’t use the same methods that we used for English speakers with Spanish speakers. And it's not that they just don't have it anyway, it's just that they have a different skill set and they are

coming from a whole different culture where different things are important. And so you have to think about that as you are teaching, you got to, I want to give you an example that, well, math is a good example. So how could I tell you this, it's so funny, it's hard to say it. I do teach it differently and I think it's because of Puebla"

Favorite component of the Study in Mexico Program

This category did not emerge from the data in the questionnaires partially because of the nature of the questions asked in both questionnaires. However, in the interviews, and with the research questions in mind, I wanted to find out if participants remembered, of the activities and components of the program in which they participated, which ones were best, and why. I clarified that "the program had a number of activities, but for the purpose of this interview, I'm going to call an activity anything and everything that happened, from lesson planning, teaching, observing, going out on excursions, having dinner, anything; any kind of activity. Which activity did you enjoy the most and why?"

The answers to these questions varied considerably across participants as shown by Table 4, with "Teaching" being the most common one, followed by the "cultural visits" or excursions:

N	Teaching and observing	Cultural visits (Pyramids, Fuertes)	Mercado activity	Multicultural activity	Other
23	10	4	3	2	4

Table 4: Participants' favorite component

The "Multicultural activity" was an activity that was, in fact, an assignment inside the EDUC 5445 – Curriculum for Multicultural Education course. In it, students were asked to investigate and gather information about a Mexican cultural issue, artifact, event, and manifestation; anything participants felt like investigating as long as it was related to Mexican-culture and was something they did not know anything about. This activity was useful for some

participants because it allowed them to personally investigate more in depth a Mexican cultural issue of their interest, or, as Participant 34 explains when discussing program's components:

"I love them all, because they were very different in their scope. The most, I would say I had to, I enjoyed the most, we had to go out and do some kind of enquiry, you know, study something. So we went out to the Mariachi area and interviewed the Mariachis there, it was a lot of fun. Because all of the guys were wondering what we were doing there and we found out a lot more information than we thought we were going to. That's fascinating and then we got to use Internet to get more information to connect it to actually being out there in talking in and taking pictures of what's going on"

Participant 13 was more critical of my question about the best component of the program and she reflected on how she believed what I was really asking was which component had had the longest lasting effect on participants. In part, this was true, as these interviews were conducted two years after they had participated in the program:

"When you ask that, what you end up really asking is, which one actually ticks in your mind the longest? The activity I actually enjoyed the most was for the multi-cultural piece where my partner and I looked up indigenous, religious influence on the Catholic and other church symbolism. And it was my favorite because I love doing stuff like that. What was really fun was going to the different..., when we went to some of the different churches because we started studying this stuff back up in the United States and then going down and seeing those churches and seeing that influence in the flesh was just... I loved it"

The Mercado activity asked participants to get in groups and find their ways to the central Market in Puebla, Mexico. Once in there, each member of a group was asked to provide some money to a common group fund that was going to be used to buy foods and goods at the market. The members of the group needed to agree on what they would buy with the group money and buy it at the market. The last step of the activity was to agree on a person or organization to which they would donate the food and goods they bought in the market. This was also a culturally-loaded activity, as Participant 31 reveals:

“Participant 31: One of the activities, I think the activity that I absolutely enjoyed the most was the, our trip to the Mercado. Where we got to see all the different foods that people ate, all the different market items and to me that was wonderful because we could see the different varieties of foods that were available to the people of the city, and the types of clothing and just the entire culture was just, there was a microcosm right there in the Mercado, we could see so many things.

Interviewer: Okay. So that’s why because of the microcosm?

Participant 31: Right, because there was so much to see and there was just sampling of foods and clothing and toys and it was just a really nice representation of what people would buy on any day.

Interviewer: Was there an activity associated with visiting the Mercado?

Participant 31: Yes, there was. We actually, we actually participated in a charity activity where we would gather up items and donate them to different charities either clothing or money or food. Mostly what we did was food, we had, we gathered food and we gave it to people who were in need in the city and it was a gesture of goodwill”

Participant 33 reflected on the trip to the Mercado from a slightly different point of view. He did not consider giving money to the needy the main goal of the activity. Participant 33 approached this activity with a certain level of critical understanding of our privileges in the U.S., and was in fact, able to critically analyze other people's lives and compare them to his own:

“For me it wasn't the fact of going and getting something and giving it to somebody because, I mean, a lot of people have said people are in need and that wasn't so much different; it was the fact of the Mercado was just an eye-opener to what the rest of world is like; you go into a place with children, food, and there are animals, go in running everywhere and people are just munching down, and you come here to United States and you can't eat on a table unless it's clean, and over there they are just happy to have something to eat on, whether is clean or not, and they are totally fine with that, eating a meal, and I don't know being right next to this was an eye-opener to how different the rest of the world is, and what was quite different was amazing, because you could be eating in a place where, you would consider as dirty in the United States and in Mexico it was all out the window; it didn't matter whatever is dirty or not and food still tastes good”

Participant 17 also considered the trip to the Market the activity she enjoyed the most, and when reflecting about it, she was able to critically consider the cultural and personal aspects of the activity, mentioning how important to her it was to be able to “step outside our own lives” and consider the daily lives of Mexican people:

“Participant 17: I think the activity that I enjoyed the most was when we had to all pull together money, and choose someone to donate the money to, and we, that, because we

were doing that, we went to the market, which was awesome, for me to see all of the things I never see here, what the marketplace was like, and we had to go and observe people, and observe what was happening in their personal lives, kind of step outside our own lives, which I thought that was great. So, I think that was probably the activity I enjoyed the most; we all talked together about who was most needed and such.

Interviewer: Why?

Participant 17: Why was that important to me? Because it gave me a feel for what life was like in Puebla, this small colonial town. I walked around town. I've been to Mexico several times before, but it was always the resort areas in Mexico. So, actually having to go in, observe the people, see what was happening in their lives, seeing all the kids lined up at the Catholic Church for Communion, and seeing what life was like outside of my own little box where I live. That's why it meant a lot to me"

Participant 17 refers to the Market activity as her favorite activity but when asked to expand on her answer she seems to confuse the Market activity with the other cultural activities. In fact, "the kids lined up at the Catholic Church for Communion" was something Participant 17 and myself, together with several other participants, got to observe while at the *Basilica de la Virgen de Guadalupe* in Mexico, D.F. during one of the free weekends. But aside from this "confusion" Participant 17 was capable of critically reflecting on the personal nature of these experiences while in Mexico and how they made her reflect on her own reality and compared it with the reality of Mexicans, bringing a cultural awareness about the reality of Mexico but perhaps, as importantly, a critical awareness about the self.

Also, Participant 17's reflection is indicative of the overall characteristic of almost every component or activity mentioned by participants, with the exception of teaching: cultural

experiences. The multicultural activity inside the EDUC 5445 – Curriculum for Multicultural Education course was a cultural activity; the Mercado activity was a cultural activity; and the cultural visits or excursions were, obviously, also cultural activities.

The “cultural visits” were, for the purpose of this study, two scheduled and programmed activities that included visits to two cultural sites around the area where the program happened: a visit to the Fuertes of Loreto and Guadalupe in Puebla, where the Battle of 5 de Mayo was fought, and a visit to the Pre-Columbian Pyramid in Cholula. Several participants I interviewed remembered these cultural visits very well and very positively, as Participant 41 reveals in this interview exchange:

Participant 41: I think the one I enjoyed the most was when we went to the-- but it's -- uh, I think it was a Saturday that we went-- I think it was the first Saturday where we all went up to the forts where the battles were fought against the French...

Interviewer: Um-uh.

Participant 41: ...and I really enjoyed that. But I think the visit to the pyramid in Cholula was also really nice too. So, between those two, I would say those were my two favorites organized. And then on the free time I would say, um, there was some recommended stuff that people said to do like going to the zócalo and looking at some of the churches around that area, some of the statues and even-- there was even a tour or two. So I thought those were pretty good as well.

Interviewer: Of all the-- of activities, those are your-- the ones you enjoyed the most?

Participant 41: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would you say why?

Participant 41: Uh, well, the -- the reason I like the forts is because I've always heard about them. So I've never really seen them, just pictures. So to actually be there, to actually see it, was pretty amazing. And then Cholula was nice because when my sister -- my older sister Cynthia, she went on this trip, like, five years before me, and so she recommended it. So, from the pictures I saw of hers...and so I finally got to see it myself, so it was kind of nice to see that"

In this interview exchange example from Participant 41, it so happens that he mentioned both cultural visits as their favorite activity; however, normally, participants would mention one or the other, separately, as their favorite activity of the program. Nonetheless, Participant 30 also reflected, like Participant 41, on all the cultural visits as his favorite activity of the program:

"De las actividades una fue las visitas a los lugares históricos; parte para conocer la cultura, puesto que yo pienso que es como la...entra uno en las culturas, a través de las tradiciones, de los lugares típicos, cualquier país, sea México, sea Estados Unidos, o sea Alemania, o sea Australia; cualquier país. Esos lugares típicos, esas tradiciones que tienes, son las que más recuerdo, son más memorable para mí²"

But, without a doubt, the most popular component of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program was the actual teaching in a Mexican classroom and observing Mexican teachers in the classroom, as Participant 13 reveals:

² Participant 30, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a Spanish-speaking participant and I conducted the interview in Spanish at his request. Here is the English translation of the quote: "From the activities, one was the visits to the historical places, in part to know the culture, since I think that is how.. one enters in the culture, through the traditions, the typical places of any country, be it Mexico, be it the United States, be it Germany, or Australia, any country. These typical places, these traditions that they have, are what I remember the most, the most memorable for me"

“Teaching in school was the most enjoyable, the most interesting; it was interesting to see what the Mexican educational system looks like. Even with the lack of materials compared to American schools how literate the kids were, even though that I mean we have a lot more money, had a lot more money in Commerce City, a lot more books, a lot more computers a lot more everything, but the kids did, I don’t know, I felt like they were as advanced or more advanced than the first graders in the schools in Commerce City, so that was interesting. It was interesting to talk to the teachers, the teacher that I worked with said that the following year all the teachers were required to teach English even if they didn’t speak it and it kind of reminded me of all the mandatory, you are going to do this, and we know you don’t have anytime, but you are going to do it anyway”

This reflection from Participant 13 contains an element of global awareness of the profession, which is a common finding across the research on these types of programs, especially since she seems to “connect” with her Mexican counterparts about the necessity of obeying mandates from administration and district, and the frustration associated with doing so, even when you do not have the resources or skills to do it but you are expected to do it.

Participant 7 is another great example of a participant who considered teaching and observing in Mexican classrooms the best part of the Study in Mexico Program, and she was able to critically analyze why she thought it was the best component, reflecting on how her practice changed after teaching in Mexico. This participant was critical of her pedagogy and the expectations she had of her ELL students before teaching in Mexico, even considering how her biases about Mexican students, as portrayed by the media and popular opinions, were changed after she taught in Mexico:

“Participant 7: Well, so the purpose of the trip, the school days, at the school were the best for me. I learned the most that I now use where I’m in, in my life, like within my profession. I use what I’ve learned in the school. Just the... gave me a really good foundation of where kids of culture, of a different culture than native suburban American probably, where they come from. I mean and it’s of course, it’s just a Mexican view of that. I certainly don’t know what the kids from Africa, you know, Sudan go through in a day, but it was just a foot on the door, it cracked the door open for me to see what, where our kids come from, when they come from other places. And that I think some time when, you know at the time I was working in Commerce City where my students really reflected the classroom I taught in Puebla, and I don’t think, I have had enough expectations of my kids in Commerce City because I had this pre-conceived notion of what going to school in Mexico is like and now in Puebla, I went to Puebla and I saw what the schools in Mexico are like, I mean I saw one school, but it’s a public school, kids generally experience, I realize that. But if my kids went to public school in Mexico, it was something similar to that I’m assuming. I didn’t have high enough expectations for my kids.

Interviewer: Pre-Puebla.

Participant 7: Pre-Puebla, and, yeah. What the media thinks, what I assume, what I kind of thought, you know, you hear how horrible Mexico, how poor it is, and kids don’t even go to school and, you know, how good can a school be in there, if the kids are coming and they don’t even know how to read and write, and I got there, and no, a totally different experience”

Overall, the findings from this category revealed that the participants I interviewed considered all components of the program to be very good but they emphasized the effectiveness of two main types of activities: teaching and observing in a Mexican classroom, and cultural activities. In fact, these cultural activities were actually several different components that different participants identified as their favorite activity or component, but in a sense, all of them share a common characteristic: they are all cultural activities. The trip to the Mercado, the multicultural activity, and the cultural visits were all cultural activities. Thus, I believe that for the purpose of this category and the findings within, those were the two major themes that emerged from the data in the interviews, and they serve to reinforce the same findings that were also found in the interviews, as well as the data in the questionnaires. Once again, two of the themes that have continuously appeared in the questionnaires and the interviews were instructional practices (teaching and observing in Mexican classrooms) and cultural awareness (cultural activities in the program). This makes sense if we understand that when participants reflected on teaching and observing in Mexican classrooms as the most meaningful component of the program, they may have been echoing what they had already repeatedly said in the questionnaires and other parts of the interview: that teaching in Mexico and observing Mexican teachers provided them with instructional practices, models, and patterns many of them absorbed and implemented later on in their own pedagogies. In addition, when participants reflected on the many different cultural activities that took place in the program, they were echoing the fact that almost all of them expressed how much more connected they felt to their ELL students, how much better they felt they understood them, after the experiences in Mexico.

Participants' suggestions for the Study in Mexico Program

In the interviews, I asked participants to think critically about the Study in Mexico Program and to provide me with general feelings about the program and anything they would have done differently to make the program more effective. Obviously, all participants I interviewed had their ideas about what could have been done differently, and there were many different suggestions, but many of them were at the personal level, as in small changes that would have probably fit a particular personality better than others. My intention is not to display in this category all the different suggestions that were reported by all the 23 interviewees, since my goal is not just to summarize or classify what they said. Instead, I am including in here the suggestions that either the participants were able to critically analyze, defend, and explain, as well as those that were echoed by more than one or two participants. With that in mind, two suggestions will be discussed in this category: (1) the program's length of time, (2) teaching and observing different teachers and grade levels.

However, first, I believe it is crucially important for me to explain that absolutely 100% of the participants I interviewed expressed an immense sense of gratitude for having being able to participate in the Study in Mexico Program. In addition, four of them reported having done the program more than once, either before the 2008 program or after it. Lastly, when I approached this section of the interview, I asked participants to provide me with "General thoughts about the program; speak freely about the program; would you do it again? What would you do the same? What would you do differently? Would you have any recommendations for the program?" and absolutely 100% of participants started their answers with "I thought this program is fabulous", "I loved it", "I would definitely do again", or "It was perfect; I wouldn't change anything", and

other similar responses. Participant 33 echoes the sentiment from most of the participants and expresses it very clearly:

“I would definitely do again. I’ve done it twice already you know; I would like to do it again, it's just finding the right time to do it, and finances, but I’d definitely do it again, that's for sure. Every time I've gone. The two times I’ve gone I’ve learnt something new; actual changes in the city which was, which was intriguing, and I found and learned new things every time I went. And there are so many things that I wanted to do that I didn’t have a chance to do, and I’d like to go and see those things. As far as teaching at the school that was my most favorite part like I’ve said earlier, and I know if I’m going back a third time and even possibly more, there are only so much, there is that much more I would be able to learn from the teachers and from the students at the schools”

It was only after I “pushed” interviewees to really think about the question and provide me with some extra thoughts, that they went into specific components or characteristics of the program that they may have enjoyed if done differently.

(1) The program’s length of time. Several of the participants I interviewed expressed the fact that, had the program been a week longer, they would have had more time to experience things longer and more profoundly:

“I wouldn’t change anything expect that maybe I would add a little bit more time because we pack a lot into the program in the two weeks that we’re there. And I think if anything I would maybe stretch it out a little bit longer just because there is so much to see and so much to do and so much to learn that it was a fabulous, fabulous experience and I’d recommend it to anybody and I hope that the program just continues on and on. It’s just, it’s wonderful” (Participant 32)

Participant 33 also discusses the program's length of time and agrees that a longer program would be beneficial. However, she also understands that some other participants may find longer than two weeks a little overwhelming:

“As far as any changes go, it's hard to point out any changes, the program is so great in itself right now, I had two weeks; I think is awesome; I think there is about the right time for me, I would like to do even little bit more, but I know a lot of people wouldn't. So I think two weeks is perfect time--possibly more. I would like to see may be more time in the schools or I know we taught in the mornings the two times I went. Maybe try to do something more in the afternoon just to see what the difference is versus morning to afternoon and just may be more time with the kids, with the students”

What is most interesting about participant 33's reflection is that it reveals a common theme across the data in the interviews related to the program's length of time. Most participants who expressed a willingness or desire to have stayed longer in Mexico specifically said she would have liked to have stayed longer so she could have observed more Mexican classrooms or taught longer and in more classrooms.

(2) Teaching and observing different teachers and grade levels. This second suggestion is directly related to the first one and was expressed by several of the participants I interviewed. As I said before, participants expressed a desire to make the program longer so that they could have taught more or observe different Mexican classrooms. For example, Participant 35 says that she would have not minded staying a week longer in Mexico if she could have had the opportunity to observe what other teachers were doing in their classrooms. At the same time, she reflected on how well-prepared they felt when going to teach to the Mexican school:

“Maybe. Maybe if that was, like, even a week longer to get a little more experience with that, maybe more time to observe other classrooms to see how other teachers do things because we were pretty stuck in the one room. I think we could use the experience; maybe more observations in other rooms at other times might be good. If we are able to see maybe the grades that we were currently teaching and see how that is the same as we are or not, how that, they compare or how it’s different might be good. But, yeah, I can’t say for the whole lot. They get you ready, I mean, they give you the packet; they tell you things to expect which is really good. They let you know in advance things that you should or shouldn’t do, which is really good. So you are, like, ready when you get there. You don’t get there and go “Oh my gosh!”

Similarly, Participant 15 also reflect on how she would have enjoyed having the opportunity to observe different types of schools, different grade levels, and even what her peers teaching and observing in other Mexican schools were doing:

“Participant 15: The only thing that I would have liked to have done differently is we were separated into, the students, Master’s students were put into two different elementary schools I believe, maybe three. I would have like to have the opportunity to maybe visit some of the other schools because we were pretty much confined to the schools that we were teaching at, so.

Interviewer: What kind of schools? Different levels? At the middle school, high school or...?

Participant 15: Well, different schools and also the other schools that Master’s students were at. Yeah, I would have liked to have seen what my classmates were doing in other schools that they were visiting or that they were teaching at. I would have like to have

visited their schools just to have seen what they were like, to make some comparisons because I just got, I got a sampling of one, one elementary school, I would have like to have seen several. I would like to, may be able to observe several types of schools would have been then and different age levels, different age groups”

Participant 15 reflects on how good it would have been to have more points of references about Mexican schools; to have more than one school she could refer to and compare to. This is also a suggestion that was offered by other participants, like Participant 7, who reflected on how much was compressed in two weeks and how good it could have been to add to their experiences by teaching or observing in other Mexican schools:

“Participant 7: Yes. It may need to be longer and not only because I wanted it to last longer, but we cramped so much into those two weeks I was like a zombie. I did not...

Interviewer: It's boot camp...

Participant 7: It's boot camp, it's boot camp. And may be that's what they wanted it to be. I'm not so sure about reasoning for that if that case, but if that was they wanted it to be then may be it needs to be that same time; but it was crazy, I mean, I had no sleep, but it was like, at the same time, you don't really care, because you're having such a fabulous times. It was so wonderful, it was so wonderful, I would do it 10 times over, I would, I loved it so much. I loved it so much. I think another thing that I would change, I would, I don't know you kind of give a little to get this, but I would maybe have people working in more than one school, so you could say, okay here is one school, but another school can do it, like is this how it is in Mexico? Were they all kind of like that? Or in Puebla in the city of Puebla? Or are other schools the same way? You know I don't know, is my

school unique? Is it normal? Is the typical? What? I don't know. All I can compare it to it's the stories of the people that were at the other schools"

The other main suggestion about extending the length of the program was associated with a desire to teach different grade levels, especially since some of the participants in the program do not teach elementary schools in the U.S. and they thought that teaching a different grade level, or a grade level closer or similar to the one they teach in the U.S. could have been more beneficial for their practice. Participant 10 clearly believes this:

"I would fully do it again in a heartbeat, if I had the time and money to do it, absolutely; it was absolutely wonderful it was such a cool experience. The only thing that I would ever change is to have better access to teaching ESL, if not at the high school level, then at the college level, you know. So I mean, designing those lesson plans for higher-age ESL students. A lot of the techniques remain the same, you still do a lot of counting, you still do a lot of chanting things like that, so that would have been nice, I could have done a better comparison. Other than that, I don't think I would have changed much"

Participant 27 also said that having taught different grade levels would have provided them with more experiences and more opportunities to compare Mexican schools, but what is most revealing about this reflection is the overall tone of gratitude towards the program, as well as the fact that Participant 27, like many other participants, considers teaching in a Mexican classroom experience to be something "invaluable":

Participant 27: Right, yeah. But two weeks was such a short time, it's too short a time to be spending three or four hours a day writing a paper you know, three days a week in your hotel room. I wouldn't have minded teaching longer, I wouldn't have minded being in the school for a day or, or teaching in two different grade levels, to get an experience.

Interviewer: Moved around instead of two weeks in the same place?

Participant 27: Yeah, or morning in one classroom and afternoon in another classroom. I don't know. I was grateful that I got the chance to do it. I had been in Mexico for a part of my undergrad for five weeks but we didn't teach in schools, we went to a language school and we had some activities that we did and we went on lots of excursions but I thought that getting the chance to teach in school was invaluable"

Overall, this category reveals that the participants I interviewed enjoyed immensely the 2008 Study in Mexico Program and they felt a sense of privilege and gratitude for having been able to participate in it. They offered many suggestions, although most of them were of personal nature, like the type of partner they received to teach with, travel arrangements, and other minor and non-critical suggestions. However, two suggestions did emerge from the data that could inform the design of the program more effectively: length of time and teaching and observation practices.

These two suggestions are inherently linked since most of the participants who expressed a desire to stay longer in Mexico wanted to do it in order to teach and observe Mexican teachers longer. Some other participants expressed a desire to stay longer so they could have "explored" the culture and the city more meaningfully. Thus, and yet again, this category yields to main themes that have been a constant throughout the analysis and interpretation of the data from the questionnaires and the interviews: the importance of instructional practices and cultural awareness. Once again, as before, this category informs us that instructional practices and cultural awareness are at the core of the suggestions participants I interviewed have for the program. This directly reinforces the previous findings that instructional practices and cultural awareness were present in almost every category in the data.

Summary and conclusion

The data from the interviews revealed that overall, the participants I interviewed felt an immense sense of gratitude and privilege for having had the opportunity to participate in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. In addition, all students said that they would go back to Mexico and repeat the program if they could.

Four categories emerged from the interview data: (1) Perceptions about Mexican education, (2) Effects of the Study in Mexico Program on professional life, (3) Favorite component of the Study in Mexico Program, and (4) Participants' suggestions for the Study in Mexico Program. The first two categories were also categories that emerged from the data in the questionnaires, whereas the last two categories came exclusively from the interviews.

Just as with the findings from the questionnaires, the findings in the first two categories from the interviews revealed that participants retained a very positive perception about Mexican education, in particular about Mexican instructional practices and Mexican students. Most participants acknowledged that they felt surprised at the amount of direct instruction, movement, and choral responses they saw in the Mexican classrooms, but they were able to critically assess that those are effective practices that work very well for many students. Participants also acknowledged that those are not "popular" practices in U.S. classrooms today, but many of them reflected on how their own instructional practices in the U.S. changed after the Mexico experience and how they started implementing some of the practices they observed while in Mexico. This is an important finding for this study because, first, it reinforces the finding from the questionnaires, but second, it reveals the transformative power that a transnational experience like the 2008 Study in Mexico Program can have on participants, especially in the area of praxis.

Some participants acknowledged changing schools after the program and moving to a school that serves a larger percentage of ELL students, a transformative and transformational praxis *per se*.

Participants also showed a sense of surprise when reflecting on Mexican students, also a finding that appeared in the data from the questionnaires. Two years later, participants still remembered Mexican students' respect and eagerness to learn very positively. The fact that participants reflect on this may demonstrate that there has been a change in their beliefs about Mexican students; otherwise there would not be a need to be so surprised or impressed by the attitudes and performance of the Mexican students they observed. In fact, reflections from Participants 50 and 7 reveal this point very clearly. First, Participant 50 comments on how Mexican students show a different overall attitude from the U.S. students they have experienced, but also, more importantly, Mexican students born in the U.S. or who have been "Americanized" after a few years, already start manifesting different attitudes from Mexican students in Mexico:

"I can see that especially with the students who have most recently immigrated to United States tend to be probably closer to, yeah, more respectful, much more better listeners. They try very, very hard, the kids that have been, that have been here for quite a while are who were born here, but their families came, you can tell they're becoming very Americanized in the sense that they're picking up on some of the habits of students in the classroom who are typical American students, which is not necessarily listening, not necessarily being respectful, but yes, definitely a difference"

Second, Participant 7 reflects on how prior to completing the program, their conception of Mexican education and students was one influenced by media and popular beliefs, a conception that was transformed after teaching in Mexico:

“What the media thinks, what I assume, what I kind of thought, you know, you hear how horrible Mexico, how poor it is, and kids don’t even go to school and, you know, how good can a school be in there, if the kids are coming and they don’t even know how to read and write, and I got there, and no, a totally different experience”

Two of the major findings of this study emerged from data from the interviews.

Participants I interviewed experienced a change in their pedagogies because of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program, in particular in the areas of instructional practices and cultural awareness. In fact the remaining findings from the interviews can be grouped into those two categories: instructional practices and cultural awareness.

Data from the interviews shows that “instructional practices” was a topic in all the categories that emerged from the data in the interviews. For example, teaching in Mexican classrooms and observing Mexican teachers was by far the favorite program component reported by the 23 participants I interviewed. In addition, the most common suggestion offered by interviewees was to expand the program a week longer so that they could teach and/or observe more classrooms in Mexico. “Instructional practices” was also the most common theme present when considering effects of the program on participant’s professional lives.

This finding echoes Lisa Delpit’s (1988, 1995) discussion about how the culture of power is enacted in the classroom and expected of all students. The small-group, indirect White middle-class way of teaching is not the only effective way to teach, and it is in fact a reflection of the rules of the culture of power (Delpit, 1988). Delpit (1988) argues that in the classroom, there are codes or rules that reflect the culture of power; these are rules related to “linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentation of self; that is, ways of talking, ways of writing, ways of dressing, and ways of interacting” (p. 296). Similarly, there are ways of teaching that are

shared and understood by the members of the culture of power. To expect poor and minority students to connect with the culture of power way of teaching is unreal and carries very negative consequences for pupils who do not partake of the culture of power. As many participants observed while in Mexico, direct instructional practices, when planned and implemented correctly, can be extremely effective in the teaching and learning process, an approach that has found an advocate for decades in E. D. Hirsch (1988), whose principles put forth in his Core Knowledge Curriculum defend and promote Direct Instruction (DI) as a research-based form of instruction. The fact that participants showed some level of surprise at how effective Direct Instruction and choral responses are manifests a level of class unconsciousness, demonstrating that many of this participants received an education and training that was class biased and that did not allow them to see beyond small group instruction: their class privilege and their experiences teaching White middle-class U.S. schools made them believe and assume that they would find a similar model of schooling elsewhere.

This finding about instructional practices also adds to the construct validity of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program: the program is designed and intended to affect the activity participants are expected to engage in when they return back home- teaching. Considering that teaching was deemed by participants as the most important component of the Program as well as one of the aspects of their professional lives that they perceived was affected the most by the Program, it seems as if the “intervention” in the program had construct validity and it effectively and authentically measured what it was design to affect and change: participant’s professional practices.

“Cultural awareness” was also the most common theme in the questionnaires and the interviews. In the data from the interviews, “cultural awareness” was a topic present in all the

categories. For example, cultural visits and other cultural activities were the second most popular program component reported by the participants I interviewed. In addition, “cultural awareness” and understanding their ELL students better was the second most common reason for why participants would have liked to have stayed in Mexico longer. Finally, “cultural awareness”, together with “instructional practices”, was the most commonly mentioned effect of the program on participants’ professional lives. They reported being able to connect with and understand the experience of their ELL students better because of their experiences in Mexico. Participant 45 puts it all together very concisely and simply:

“I liked going to the classroom, because it was nice to see a different way of teaching from the United States, the way the kids interact towards the teacher, the way the schools were set up. Teaching kids English, when I was the foreigner that knew absolutely nothing, that was a good experience to be the new comer to the country and not knowing a single thing”

Participant 35 also reflected on how teaching in the Mexican classroom opened her eyes to different pedagogical models, while at the same time not being able to understand or communicate effectively helped with being able to connect with their ELL’s experiences:

“It was quite an experience. I felt like, I had to use my hands a lot to try to get the kids to see what I was talking about, either describing it or showing pictures or talking a lot, although they didn’t know what I was saying a lot of the times. But it was a fun experience. It helped me to see what it’s truly like to be a second language learner because I felt like I was the second language learner, not them. I’m trying to learn what they know, but yet teach a lesson in English to them who really had no idea what I was saying most of the time. Few of them had a few words, and that was good, and by the end

they were picking up the concept. We picked the phases of the moon, which was something that we were doing sixth grade, I think. So they had an idea what we were talking about. They've already had it. So they are hearing the English phrases, it was a little easier for them. So they knew what we were talking about"

These reflections from Participants 45 and 35 truly exemplify the two major findings from this study in the simplest way. Participants 45 and 35 reflected on enjoying going to Mexican classrooms because they were able to observe and exercise different pedagogies and practices, while at the same time, connecting with their ELL students better by having been to a different country, a different culture, and not speaking the language. However, none of the participants were able to critically consider how fundamentally different their experiences were to those of Mexican students immigrating to the U.S. and attending U.S. public schools. It is true that the Study in Mexico Program placed U.S. monolingual White teachers in an unbalanced situation that mimics the situation many Mexican ELL students experience daily in the U.S. like not speaking the language and having difficulties communicating, experiencing a different culture, and having to perform tasks upon which they will be evaluated. These were all factors that were acknowledged by participants as having helped them connect better with their ELL students in the U.S. However, they failed to recognize how welcome they were received in Mexico by the schools, the city, and the people of Mexico, something many Mexican ELLs in the U.S. do not get to experience. For example, as mentioned in the "Setting" section of "Chapter 3: Methods", the two Mexican schools involved with the Program prepared and presented a very elaborate and warm "Bienvenida" to all their U.S. visitors, something that is surely not part of the ELL experience in the U.S. In addition, Puebla, as the rest of the country of Mexico, caters to the tourism economy and is very conscientious of the money and opportunities U.S. tourists

bring with them to their cities, markets, and businesses. Thus, the Mexican population, as the participants experienced while in Puebla, understands the importance of making the outsiders feel comfortable and welcome while in Mexico, a much different reality than the one Mexican ELL students and their families encounter in Colorado and the United States.

A good example of this is the “Bienvenida” show that both participant schools (Otilio Montaña and Héroes de Nacozari) prepare for their American visitors. The first day in the schools, the entire U.S. delegation assigned to each school is received by a very elaborate “Bienvenida” (“Welcome”) ceremony that includes presentations, speaking, singing, and dancing where faculty, staff, and students showcase regional and traditional dances, music, and folklore to welcome their “American friends”. These ceremonies are usually very emotional for U.S. teachers who do not expect such a warm welcome into the Mexican schools, and if anything it manifests the spirit of welcoming and warmth with which Mexicans receive their American counterparts, which echoes the sentiment of the larger Mexican society towards catering to tourism, in this case White American tourism; no doubt, a much more different experience than any ELL Mexican student would (and perhaps will) ever encounter in an U.S. school, which as mentioned above, makes these two experiences fundamentally different.

With respect to the research questions informing this, it is fair to say that data from the interviews and questionnaires served to validate and reinforce the common findings in the research on transnational experiences for pre-service and in-service teachers as described in the previous chapter. In particular, data from the interviews demonstrated that the 2008 Study in Mexico Program had an positive effect on participants’ capacity to learn about other cultures, gain an awareness of global issues, become more open-minded, engage in critical self-reflection, resist stereotyping, gain empathy, understand better the situation and needs of migrant students

in the U.S., perceive and value cultural diversity, and learn from other cultural and pedagogical practices. In fact, data from the interviews shows a particularly strong effect regarding “understanding better the situation and needs of migrant students in the U.S.” and “learning from other cultural and pedagogical practices”, as explained above.

In terms of program effectiveness, data from the interviews revealed that the program does not have a unanimous positive effect in the development of cultural critical consciousness for all participants, but there are some reports from the participants I interviewed that provide a window to the transformative capacity these types of transnational programs can have on participants. For example, some participants reported having changed their instructional practices to adapt and better serve their ELL students in the U.S. after their experiences in Mexico; some other participants reflected on how they decided to change jobs after the program in Mexico to serve schools with higher ELL populations of students. Other participants reflected on having transformed their perceptions and expectations of ELLs in the U.S. after completing the program in Mexico, and they acknowledged, engaging in critical self-reflection, that the perceptions of ELLs they held before completing the program were biased by media portrayal and popular opinions about Mexican education and Mexican students.

Of course, these findings are not present in all the participants I interviewed but they are present in many of them and they are also present in the questionnaire responses from all participants. This made me believe that even though it is impossible to claim that the program has a 100% positive effect on all participants, it does have the ability to make participants question themselves and their belief systems, and challenge preconceived notions about Mexico, Mexican culture, Mexican educational practices, and Mexican students. I can also say that the program has shown a capacity to engage participants in transformational praxis; a praxis guided

and informed by the experiences they had while in Mexico and that made some participants change their instructional practices, change schools, or pursue an ESL position, so that they could better serve ELL students in the U.S.

The other research question asked in this study aimed at deciphering whether specific program components were more effective than others in helping participants develop cultural critical consciousness. Data from the questionnaires did not provide much information to answer this question, but data from the interviews does give us insight at some of the components that may have helped participants develop some critical consciousness skills. Without a doubt, the 2008 Study in Mexico Program could have been called the 2008 Teaching in Mexico Program because most participants I interviewed agreed that teaching in a Mexican school was what the program was all about. It is from teaching and observing Mexican classrooms that participants gained new insights, new pedagogical practices, and new knowledge that they brought home with them and implemented in their classrooms and lives in the U.S. teaching and observing more Mexican classrooms would be the main reason why participants would have stayed longer in Mexico. Thus, it is possible to say that teaching and observing in Mexican classrooms has a profound effect on participants, an effect that includes changing and adapting pedagogical practices to better serve their ELL students. The connection between these changes in pedagogical practices and development of cultural critical consciousness is not totally clear, but at a minimum, it can be said that many participants were able to self-reflect about their own practices and expectations for their ELLs, and they were able to critique them, change them, and adapt them as a consequence of their experiences teaching and observing Mexican classrooms during the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. This finding could reveal a positive effect in their development of cultural critical consciousness.

The other component most of the participants I interviewed considered a favorite was in fact a group of components, all of them related to Mexican cultural awareness. Be it the cultural visits to the forts in Puebla or the pyramid in Cholula, the cultural activity as part of the EDUC 5445 – Curriculum for Multicultural Education course, or the trip to the market activity, participants acknowledged that these cultural events helped them understand Mexico and the Mexican culture better, which at the same time, allowed them to understand and connect with their Mexican ELL students in the U.S. better. Thus, it is also possible to say that the components of the 2008 Study in Mexico Program that included some type of cultural activity served to spark new critical reflection and understanding of Mexican ELLs for the participants. In addition, even though it was not mentioned as a favorite component by participants, “free time” during the program was unanimously used by the participants I interviewed to explore Mexican culture and life more in depth and independently, which caused some situations of unbalanced and difficulties communicating with Mexicans that also helped participants connect with their Mexican ELL students’ experiences and difficulties living in a foreign culture and not speaking the language. It is true that there is a “touristy” component in these “free time” outings from participants, who reflected on how “cool” was to visit churches, eat at restaurants, go shopping, and even going out for drinks and dancing. There is no doubt that there is a component of “American tourism” associated to these outings, but many of the participants who reflected on cultural activities as their favorite components, specifically referred to the organized ones: the cultural visits to the pyramid in Cholula and the forts in Puebla, the cultural activity for the multicultural course, and the trip to the central market.

The fact that participants were able to recall these particular components as their favorites more than two years after they happened also reveals that, although they could be interpreted as

not be the most effective ones for the development of cultural critical consciousness, they are definitively the components participants remember the most, providing these components with a sustained effect that other components may lack.

Overall, the interviews provided many of the same findings that emerged both from the questionnaires and the research literature about the effectiveness of these types of transnational experiences. They also provided some new insights about specific program components that were found to be particularly effective and memorable by the participants I interviewed.

Chapter 6

Findings: Vignettes

Introduction

The use of vignettes is well documented in the realm of qualitative research, especially as a complementary tool for reporting findings. Finch (1987) describes vignettes as “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond” (p. 105) and Hughes (1998) describes them as “stories about individuals, situations and structures which can make reference to important points in the study of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes” (p. 381).

The two vignettes presented in this chapter provide a rich description and picture of the typical experiences participants had in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. They also provide more detailed descriptions about the setting and about some of the components and activities in the Program. Finally, the vignettes also address the research questions inasmuch as they describe changes in participants’ beliefs and practices as revealed by the questionnaires and the interviews. By placing it all together in the form of a vignette, my intention is to provide the reader with a clear narrative of what the day by day and the duration of the program felt like for participants.

Mary

Mary is a public school teacher in Colorado working for a district in the larger Denver-Metro area. She is a monolingual English-speaking White woman who has been working as a teacher for a little over five years. She teaches in a school that serves families and students who enjoy the lifestyle of the middle-class in Colorado, with a large majority of monolingual English-speaking White students. However, like many of her teacher-colleagues in Colorado and other

states in the U.S., her classroom has experienced an increase in the number of ELL students, especially of Spanish-speaking students of Mexican descent. Her limited knowledge of Spanish, her stereotypes and preconceptions about Mexicans, and the lack of education she has received on how to reach and teach ELL students intimidate and frustrate her.

She has found out that through the school and district, she could complete a Master's Degree at the University of Colorado with an endorsement in the area of linguistically diverse education that could give her the tools to better reach and teach the diverse population of students she has in her classroom. She also found out that she could complete the Master's program for a reduced tuition, since both the school district she works for and the BUENO Center at the University of Colorado contribute two thirds of the cost of the tuition. Also, an MA with an endorsement will get her a salary raise and will open future opportunities for teaching and other jobs if she ever needed them.

All these factors have made Mary decide she wants to start the MA program even though she cannot put a stop to her busy lifestyle as a full-time teacher, a wife, and a mother. She has weighed the pros and cons of starting the Master's Program and she has decided in favor of starting it, knowing that the years ahead will be busy ones, with full-time teaching, a family, and many nights attending classes, reading articles, doing research, participating in group-work, and completing assignments and final papers.

During the first semester in the Program, Mary finds out the requirements for completion of the MA. She also finds out that she belongs to a cohort of students from her district that have also joined the MA program. She is in fact completing the program with her friend Jennifer, who also teaches in the same school Mary does. The cohort has the MA Program delineated for them by the BUENO Center, semester by semester, with all the courses they need to complete to

obtain the Master's Degree. As part of the degree, students need to complete a Practicum-experience that includes 200 in-school hours. The BUENO Center offers students the opportunity to complete some of these hours teaching in Puebla, Mexico through a summer Study in Mexico Program, where student-participants complete a number of hours observing and teaching in a Mexican school. The Program is optional and degree candidates have other opportunities and venues to fulfill the requirement of in-school hours, but Mary likes the idea of travelling to Mexico and being in a Mexican school. Besides, she knows she enjoys travelling in Mexico since the only international travel Mary ever did was during Spring Break to Puerto Vallarta, and she liked it!

Before making the decision to spend two weeks in Mexico with the Program, Mary wants to be sure her friend Jennifer is also interested in going to Mexico. After she talks with her and confirms that they are both excited about going to Mexico, they sign up for the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. She knows the Program will be intense, with many hours of work, attending classes, and completing coursework, but she has been told participants in the program will have some free time in the evenings and a free weekend for tourism if they so decide. And so, faster than she thought, the summer arrived and she saw herself on her way to Mexico, to learn, to observe, to teach, to work, and to have some fun.

Even though she has not travelled internationally much in her life except for a Spring Break on Mexican beaches, Mary has arrived in Mexico with a set of expectations for Mexican schools, Mexican teachers, and Mexican education in general. She thinks Mexican schools will probably be in worse condition than the school she works at in Colorado. She is pretty sure Mexican schools do not have the level of technology she has in her classroom and she thinks the materials available to students will be limited and very basic: things like pencils, erasers, and

little more. Nonetheless, she expects Mexican teachers will be well trained and professional.

She also thinks Mexican students will be well prepared and taught well. She is expecting to see some negative classroom management issues; nothing serious, but definitively some behavioral things from the students, after all, she thinks, Mexicans are emotional and very expressive. In terms of Mexican education, she believes they probably follow a very rigorous curriculum and she has heard from other colleagues that they follow a nationalized program that includes textbooks. She heard this during the two weekends of classwork she had to complete on campus at the University of Colorado prior to leaving for Mexico. During those sessions, Mary was assigned a Program mentor, was told which school in Mexico she would be working at, and was put into a team with two other teachers with whom she would develop and implement the ESL lesson plan they would teach in Mexico. She felt lucky she had an opportunity to select her friend Jennifer as the roommate with whom she would share the room they were assigned in the Hotel in Mexico where all participants, Program directors, administrators, and mentors live for the duration of the two weeks experience in Mexico. She likes her teacher-partners, one more than the other, but she thinks she will be able to work together as team and implement a good ESL lesson plan to teach Mexican students for two weeks. After all, one of her co-teachers is English-Spanish bilingual and she feels she can approach him with questions or to help her communicate with the Mexican teacher they will be working with in the Mexican school. Overall, she feels they have a good plan and after the two weekends in Colorado preparing it, even though there are still a few things to finalize and improve, she feels ready.

The flight to Mexico was nice but the Mexico City airport was a little intimidating: too big and too crowded; at least, she is happy her luggage made it and did not get lost. A few more hours travelling by bus and the entire group finally made it to the Hotel in Puebla with not

much time left in the day: just a dinner, get in the rooms, and get some rest. It is Saturday night and they have Sunday free but one of the Program Directors has organized a trip to attend Mass at a church in a nearby town and she and Jennifer have decided they would join the director and others. The only problem is that they need to be out of the hotel and on the bus very early in the morning, which means not going out on Saturday night. She thinks the experience will be well worth her time.

On Sunday, early in the morning, Mary, her friend Jennifer, and a group of other participants and program directors head out by bus to a nearby town where they visit a church during Mass. The church is a classic representation of Colonial Baroque style of architecture and Mary, like many others in the group, has her photo camera ready to take photos of the ceremony and the beautiful decorations inside and outside the church. As the flashes start flashing, local members of the Catholic congregation attending Mass turn around and yelled “no fotos, no fotos”, which reminds Mary for a moment of how sacred and important Mass is to these Catholics and for a second, even though she is not Catholic, she feels like she understands how important the role of religion and faith is in the lives of these locals.

After the group returns to the Hotel, there are a few free hours left before lunch is served in the Hotel. Participants know they will receive breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the Hotel everyday for the duration of the Program and Mary likes it because she was told that food from street vendors could get her really sick and she does not want to get sick in Mexico. So, for now, she will stick to eating at the Hotel, but before lunch, she, Jennifer and a new friend they made from the group of participants go out to explore Puebla, especially the Sunday flea market, where she buys a few souvenirs for her husband and children. She likes going out shopping with her friends in Puebla and this is only the first day in Mexico. She is told she needs to see and buy

some of the Talavera pottery Puebla is so well known for, but she feels she has done enough shopping for the day and the Talavera will have to wait until another day of shopping, which surely will happen soon, she thinks.

Back in the Hotel after the trip to the flea market, Mary is informed that after lunch, participants need to find their way to the Pyramid of Cholula. It is a cultural activity designed by the directors in which students are placed in groups and are asked to find their way to the Pyramid: they can get there any way they want (bus, taxi, walking) but they need to do it as a group. Luckily for Mary, her group has one bilingual English-Spanish speaker in it and they are able to ask for directions, take a bus, and make it to the pyramid on time. Mary thinks the pyramid is very cool and she even gets to climb up the pyramid and take some pictures of the area from the top. She can't wait to tell her family about this!

After taking a taxi back to the Hotel, the rest of Sunday is free time to get organized, do more shopping, or rest. Mary decides to stay in the Hotel, calls her family on the phone and talks to them for a while, and meets with her co-teachers to prepare for the first day at the Mexican school tomorrow morning. She was assigned to Escuela Otilio Montaña.

On Monday morning, Mary has breakfast at the Hotel at 7:30 AM and by 8 AM she is expected to be outside the Hotel, ready for work, with a group of four other participants who would share the same Taxi every morning to take them to Otilio Montaña. The Taxi driver does not speak English but again, there is a bilingual English-Spanish participant in her group taking the taxi who facilitates conversation and translation when needed. After a couple of days in Puebla, Mary is starting to notice she can recognize some Spanish sounds, words, and starts to make sense of conversations and body language. She feels like she is learning a lot. Once the Taxi arrives at Otilio Montaña, all the participants wait outside the school gate until it opens. She

knows there is a welcoming celebration being prepared in the patio of the school because she was told and because she can hear teachers and students getting ready in the patio. When the gate opens, participants go inside and direct themselves to a section in the patio with chairs reserved for them and the ceremony starts with the U.S. and Mexico's National Anthems. Mary is brought to tears of emotion when she hears her National Anthem and the U.S. Flag being raised on the pole with so much respect and care by the Mexican students.

The ceremony impresses Mary: students from different grade levels performing traditional and folkloric songs and dances dressed in traditional attire with a great level of organization and order. The ceremony also includes some welcoming words from the principal of the school, and after the ceremony participants are introduced to the Mexican teacher they will work with and head out to their classroom with the teachers to start observing and teaching. That first day in school is full of emotions and Mary is a little intimidated by the Mexican teacher and the students not speaking English. She feels like she understands what's going on but she knows she is missing a lot due to the lack of Spanish on her part. After observing the Mexican teacher, her group starts teaching the first class of their lesson plan. They are placed in a fifth grade classroom, which Mary is not used to since she teaches first grade back in Colorado but she will adapt.

After completing her first day in Otilio Montaña, Mary feels like they did well. They will have an opportunity to meet and re-evaluate the lesson with a mentor in the afternoon, so that makes her feel better. For now, it is time to take the Taxi back to the Hotel and from there, straight to the first course for the day in a nearby building owned by the University of Puebla: Materials and Methods in Bilingual ESL Education. After the class, back to the Hotel to eat lunch and immediately after, to the second class: Curriculum for Multicultural Education. Then,

it is free time but she already has an appointment with her teaching group and their mentor to go over the Lesson plan and how the first day teaching went. After the meeting, Jennifer wants to go shopping but Mary feels like she needs to stay in the Hotel reading for the classes and starting some assignments she needs to turn in. At night though, she decides to go out for dinner. Even though the Hotel has dinner available for all participants, there is nothing impeding her from going out to eat at a restaurant in Puebla. She, Jennifer, and a small group of other participants decide to go out and have some Tacos at a local Taquería. After dinner, she is tired and goes to bed, ready for her second day at Otilio Montaña.

The rest of the week has the same routine as the first day: observe and teach at Otilio Montaña, attend the first class, eat lunch, attend the second class, meet with group and mentor, and then free time, with a few small variations: on Wednesday, she goes out for lunch to a different restaurant in town, and on Thursday, a program director organized a trip to the “Fuentes de Loreto y Guadalupe”, in which she participated. She enjoyed learning about the battle of Cinco de Mayo and she feels like she understands better some of the celebrations that Mexicans have back in Colorado.

Friday night marks the beginning of the free weekend in Puebla. Participants are told they can do anything they want but they need to keep the Program’s directors informed of their whereabouts. There are a number of groups heading in different directions for the weekend: Veracruz for the beaches, Teotihuacán for the pyramids, Mexico City, and others. She decides to go to Mexico City on Saturday and stay in Puebla on Sunday, resting, shopping, and preparing for the final week in Puebla. But first, on Friday night, she goes out for dinner and drinks with a group of participants and goes to bed late at night, past Midnight, but excited about her trip to Mexico City on Saturday.

She remembers Mexico City being big and crowded but she enjoyed the city and the people. She visited two museums and the Palacio Nacional with the famous murals by Diego Rivera. In the Zócalo downtown, she saw some Aztecs dressed in traditional clothes performing dances and chants, and she even saw a politician communicating with her constituents who were protesting in the Zócalo. The group had dinner at a very nice restaurant in downtown Mexico City and at night, they returned to their Hotel in Puebla.

Sunday is a day Mary has reserved for shopping, studying, and preparing for the last week in the Mexican school. In the morning, after breakfast, she, Jennifer, and another friend, head out to the market, and this time Mary does not forget to buy some Talavera pottery to take back with her to Colorado. She also buys small things and some tapestries she wants to put on display in her classroom; she feels that by doing that, she will make her Mexican ELL students more comfortable and, at the same time, establish a better connection with them, since she will be able to tell them that she has been to Mexico and has a better understanding about their lives and culture. After shopping, they eat lunch in a restaurant in Puebla and return to the Hotel to study and prepare the lesson plan for the following week.

The last week in the Mexico school feels very much the same as the first week to Mary, although overall she feels a little more comfortable in the classroom now that she has been doing it for a week. On a personal level, she misses her family and she can't wait to return to Colorado but she knows this last week still holds a lot of things for her. For example, on Monday night, she and her teaching partners were invited to dinner at the house of their Mexican teacher and Mary remembers feeling very honored to be invited to her house to eat. For a second she thinks about if she would ever do something like that for somebody who is visiting from Mexico for a couple of weeks to observe her and teach in her classroom.

On Tuesday, the entire group of participants went to the market downtown as part of a “Mercado” (Market) activity designed by the program. This activity divided participants into groups of five or six and asks them to put together some money, go to the market, decide on what they would buy, and select somebody or an organization to which they will donate the shopping. Mary felt very emotional during this activity and her group decided to buy non-perishable food products and donate them to a church. She remembers this activity as a very effective activity that affected her on a personal level and made her realize how privileged and fortunate she was to live where and how she lives.

On Thursday, her school, Otilio Montaña organized a “Despedida” (“farewell”) for them, with more dancing, singing in traditional clothes, after which she needed to bid farewell to her Mexican students. That was a very emotional moment for Mary who could not contain her tears when saying goodbye to the students she had taught for two weeks. At night, the school organized a dinner for the U.S. teachers and administrators that included a band and a bar with alcoholic beverages. Mary remembers feeling very thankful for everything the Mexican school had done to make her feel welcome. Finally, the last night in Mexico, the program administrators organized a party in the Hotel for all participants and teachers from both Mexican schools in the program are invited. The party runs until late at night and everybody has a great time drinking, singing, and dancing. Everybody goes to bed late and tired but there will be time to rest tomorrow on the flight back to Denver from Mexico City.

Back in Colorado after two weeks in Mexico, Mary tells her family all about the things she did in Puebla and shows them all the photos and video she took, telling them about the school, the children, the pyramid, Mexico City, the churches, the food, and the hotel. She feels

good to be home while at the same time, realizes she just completed an experience she may never forget.

Two years later Mary still remembers perfectly the name of her school in Mexico, the name of the teacher she observed, the excursions, the trips, and the parties. She has completed her MA now, and for the last two years Mary has felt more comfortable teaching her ELL students in her elementary school. Her classroom has many of the artifacts she brought back from Puebla on display: tapestry is on the walls, a couple of photos of Puebla are behind her desk, and pens and pencils are inside a Talavera cup on her desk. Ever since she came back from Puebla, she has tried to use some Spanish with her ELLs to try and make them feel more welcomed and comfortable in her classroom; she also has some signs in Spanish on her classroom walls. She feels that because of her experience in Puebla, she can understand and connect better with her Mexican students. She believes a lot of her stereotypes and preconceptions about them have changed into a more critical and less biased perception about who they are as students and what they bring to the classroom. But the biggest impact the program had on her, Mary thinks, is in her teaching. While observing the Mexican teacher, she realized that direct instruction and choral responses worked very well in the Mexican classroom and she has tried for the last couple of years to do some of that in her classroom, with all her students, not just her Mexican ELLs. She feels as if, because of that, her instruction is more effective and she is able to reach all students and move them to where they need to be academically; and that, Mary believes, made the two weeks in Mexico more than worth the time.

Victor

Victor is a bilingual English-Spanish native English speaker White man who has been teaching social sciences in a secondary school in Boulder, Colorado for a little less than 5 years.

He is an avid world traveller and has visited many countries on three different continents: he has backpacked in Central America, lived in Brazil for a summer visiting a girlfriend he met in college, and spent a semester abroad studying Spanish in Spain, where he also had the opportunity to visit Europe and Northern Africa.

When the district approached him with an opportunity to complete a Master's degree in Education with an endorsement in the area of linguistically diverse education, he was very excited and signed up immediately. In his school in Boulder, he does not have many of ELL students but he gets a few each year and he is very conscientious about providing them with a great educational experience in his classroom and in the school. He is also very aware of how different his ELL students feel from the rest of the mainstream group of students in his school, which are largely from White middle-class monolingual English-speaking families and he never hesitates to talk to them during break or lunch in Spanish, share some thoughts about soccer, Mexico, and living in the United States. So, the program, Victor thinks, is a great opportunity to acquire some real skills about reaching these students academically, something he cares greatly about. The fact that he will only be responsible for one-third of the cost of the program is also a great incentive.

Shortly after he starts the Program at the University of Colorado at Boulder, he finds out there is a summer program in Mexico where participants are placed in Mexican classrooms to teach an ESL lesson. He is not an expert in early literacy and has never taught elementary education before but the idea of going to Mexico for two weeks, teaching in a Mexican school, and completing three classes towards the degree are very attractive to him. He also remembers the Mexican friends he met during the summer in Brazil with whom he has kept contact for the last few months, and he has been talking about visiting them in Mexico City for years now. This program, and the free weekend it offered is the perfect opportunity for him to get a number of

things accomplished. After talking to his friend Jared, an elementary school teacher in Boulder, who is also in the MA program and whom he met when they were both completing the undergraduate teacher education program at the University of Colorado at Boulder, they decide to sign up for the 2008 Study in Mexico Program and they make plans to stay and travel together through Mexico for an extra two weeks after the completion of the summer program: Oaxaca, Acapulco and Cuernavaca, in addition to Puebla and Mexico City. They are very excited about this summer.

Before leaving for Mexico, the participants of the summer Program gather together on campus in Boulder for two meetings to prepare them for the experience and to start preparing the lesson plan they will implement in the Mexican schools. He and Jared will be roommates in the Hotel in Mexico and he is happy about that, but he is placed in a teaching team with two White monolingual English-speaking White women who work together in the same elementary school in Denver. At first, he thinks everything is going to be OK but the more he talks to them, the more he realizes how different they are, not just academically (they are literacy elementary educators and he is a High School Social Science teacher) but also on a personal level: perceptions about Mexico, stereotypes, preconceptions, and so on. Victor has visited Mexico before, he speaks Spanish, he has Mexican friends, and he feels like he has a better understanding of Mexico and Mexicans than his two co-teachers, and that frustrates him. In addition, he feels like because they are elementary school teachers and he is not, they are taking on a more dominant role in the development of the lesson plan they will implement in Mexico. Victor wanted a lesson about American society, industrialization, transport, technology, and other related topics and they agreed to that but when they started developing the lesson, he felt like his co-teachers were developing a lesson on American ideals (democracy, freedom, the flag,

history) rather than on what they had originally agreed upon. After some discussion, he feels like they all reach a consensus of some kind to start developing a lesson plan that keeps American politics and ideals aside. Nonetheless, he knows his two weeks in Mexico teaching with them is going to be “interesting”, to say the least, but he is excited and ready to start the summer Program.

Once in Mexico, Victor checks in the Hotel with the group and heads out for dinner and drinks with a group of Participants that include Jared and five other participants (three men and two women) he met during the gatherings on campus before the Program; they had also sat together in the flight to Mexico City and had started to connect and become acquainted with each other and they decided to go out for drinks; after all they arrived in Mexico on Saturday night and Sunday was a free day. They heard there was a trip to a church nearby on Sunday morning, but Victor feels like he has seen enough churches and he does not like to do group oriented tourism; if he wants to explore churches or the city, he can do it alone or with a couple of friends. So, after checking in the Hotel, they meet in the foyer and out they go for dinner and drinks. They stay out until late at night, they meet some locals, and visit different bars through the night. Overall, a perfect first night, Victor thinks. A great start to the program.

On Sunday Victor sleeps in and skips breakfast with the group in the Hotel. He knows there will be a trip to the pyramid in Cholula later in the day and that one, he has to do; but for now, the morning is free and he and Jared decide to go and explore Puebla together. Jared is also bilingual English-Spanish so they both have no problem navigating the city, talking to locals, finding a good restaurant with authentic local food, and enjoying people watching at the Zócalo. Upon returning to the hotel, they discover the trip to the pyramid is actually an activity where students are placed together in groups and they need to find their way to the pyramid in any way

they see fit. Victor is placed with a group of four other monolinguals and he finds himself doing all the talking with locals, asking for directions, bus routes, and ways to get to Cholula. For the moment, he enjoys the attention and he feels useful helping his U.S. colleagues find their way around Puebla.

Upon returning to the hotel, after the pyramid activity, Victor meets with his co-teachers and finalizes the lesson plan activities they will implement beginning Monday morning at the Mexican school they were assigned: Héroes de Nacozari. Victor's expectations about the Mexican school are good; he knows a lot of Mexicans and has talked to his Mexican students at his school in Colorado about their Mexican educational experience. He knows teachers are very well respected, that students wear uniforms and are very well mannered, that they follow a standardized curriculum, and that schools probably have fewer resources than schools in the U.S., especially the middle/upper-middle class schools he is used to seeing in Boulder. What he does not expect is the "Bienvenida" ceremony the school had prepared for them. He knows the hospitable nature of the Mexican people; he is very well-aware of how much nicer and welcoming Mexicans are compared to the culture he knows from Colorado, but the ceremony truly surprises him because of how well prepared and how elegant and respectful it was, even more after he goes into the classroom and notices the lack of books, the lack of technology, and the chalk board they use. He understands the limited resources with which this school operates and he is surprised and honored to have received such an elaborate welcoming ceremony where students sang, danced, and performed different types of traditional songs and music, just to welcome their U.S. visitors.

The teacher he and his co-teachers will work with does not speak any English so Victor connects very quickly with her by speaking Spanish. He also serves as a translator for his co-

teachers when they want to communicate something to their Mexican teacher. Victor also makes use of his Spanish while teaching the ESL lesson. Later in the day, back in the Hotel, he meets with his co-teachers and their mentor to go over the day and the plan and he is surprised to hear his co-teachers say that he should not be using Spanish during the ESL lesson implementation, something the mentor agrees with. He is not too offended, but a little hurt, and it makes him think about how he cannot speak Spanish during the lesson but how his co-teachers do not hesitate to use his bilingual skills to communicate in the school and at the Hotel. For a moment he feels “used” but he gets over it quickly; Victor’s personality does not let him be upset for too long and he chooses not to take it personally and agrees to limit his Spanish in the classroom, especially while teaching.

The rest of the first week is very similar in terms of routine: early in the morning breakfast in the Hotel, then take a taxi to Héroes the Nacozari, teach and observe, return to the Hotel in the Taxi, attend a class, eat lunch, attend a second class, meet with co-teachers to go over the plan, and then free time. Victor feels like school work takes a lot of his time during the afternoon but he, Jared, and a group of several other participants have connected very well and have decided to have dinners out almost every night, as an opportunity to explore the local restaurants, foods, people, and bars. They find a Cuban bar nearby that they start frequenting almost every night. They do not stay up too late but they always find some time after dinner for a drink, some salsa dancing, and some comingling with the locals.

By Friday, Victor and Jared are ready to head out to Mexico City and spend the weekend with Victor’s friends. They had arranged a visit before arriving in Puebla, and Victor’s friends were waiting for them in Mexico City, where they will all spend the weekend together at their

house and visiting the city. Victor had a great time visiting with his friends; he had not seen them in years. He then returns to Puebla with Jared on Sunday night, ready for the last week of work.

The last week teaching and observing in the Mexican classroom feels the same as the previous week, but by now, Victor has befriended some of the students who have felt very comfortable coming to him and speaking with him because they know he speaks and understands Spanish. He talks to the students in Spanish before and after the lessons each day and he feels like he has become close to some of them. He and his co-teachers have also invited the Mexican teacher out for dinner; ideally, participants can invite the Mexican teacher to have dinner in the Hotel with them but Victor thinks that's "cheap" and convinces his co-teachers to take the Mexican teacher out for dinner to a nice restaurant in town.

During the week, he participates in the "Mercado" activity and he is placed in a group with participants he really likes and with whom he connects really well. The activity runs very smoothly; they buy a large amount of food and produce, and they decide to give it to a person in the street. Because several of the members in his group speak Spanish, they do not have a problem finding somebody with whom to talk and to whom to offer the shopping. The activity makes him feel happy and sad at the same time: those are feelings Victor needs to deal with after a situation like this because he does not want to feel like he is superior to anybody, but at the same time, he understands his privilege economic and social position in this world, and giving to others is part of his core worldview. Nonetheless, the activity provokes in him a series of mixed feelings he needs to confront.

Also emotional is the last day in Héroes the Nacozari. They have prepared a "Despedida" ceremony for them and he found it very difficult to say goodbye to his Mexican students among

hugs and tears. That night, in the Hotel in Puebla, the Program directors have organized a party for all participants and they have also invited the teachers and administrators from the two Mexican schools involved in the Program. Victor has a great time at the party and as people start going to bed preparing for the trip back to Colorado the following day, he, Jared, and a group of ten other participants decide to continue celebrating in town, going to bars, drinking, and dancing until early hours in the morning. In fact, that night Victor does not go to bed until he has said goodbye to many of his new friends, his co-teachers, and the program directors, as they get on the bus that will take them to the Mexico City airport on their way back to Colorado. Victor and Jared stay behind in the Hotel, one more day in Puebla, sleeping, before they head out to Oaxaca to start a two-week stay in the area.

Two years later Victor remembers the program perfectly. He remembers his school, the Mexican teacher, and even remembers the names of some of the Mexican students he taught. For the last two years he has had an opportunity to discuss his experiences in Puebla, teaching in a Mexican school with a large number of colleagues and also with his Mexican students in his High School. He feels like he connects with them at a much deeper level once they know he taught in a Mexican school. He also believes the program was an eye-opening experience, especially because it asked him to change roles and to become a guest/visitor in a different educational setting. He remembers how well prepared, educated, and nice the Mexican students were, and how professional and welcoming the school and the teachers made him feel. He also acknowledges that after the program his practice, which he now calls praxis, changed for the better because he was more aware of the issues surrounding ELLs in Colorado schools; in fact, for the last two years, and after completing his MA, he was given the responsibility by his principal to coach fellow teachers and to lead professional development sessions on culturally

responsive teaching and he thanks the experience in Mexico for the invaluable experience that enriches his practice and workshops today.

To this day, his experience in Puebla was the first and only time he ever taught elementary education, but he had such a powerful experience doing it that he cannot avoid having a smile on his face when he says, “Who knows? I might want to teach elementary school...Love the hugs!”

Chapter 7

Interpretation and Discussion

Interpretation

I approached this research study hoping to find out if participants demonstrated in their answers to the questionnaires and in the interviews a clear gain in their development of cultural critical consciousness. I also wanted to find out if specific program components could be identified as the most effective ones in achieving that goal, that is developing cultural critical consciousness on participants. I now believe that the findings of this research study reinforce some of the previous findings found in the literature and research about transnational teaching experiences for pre-service and in-service teachers. Findings also reveal that the program does have the possibility of affecting the development of cultural critical consciousness on participants; the findings also reveal that the program has the possibility of affecting participants' professional and personal lives in a transformative way, one that could eventually cause changes in the lives and opportunities of the Mexican ELL students participants serve.

The findings in this study also revealed two specific facts related to instructional practices and cultural awareness. First, teaching and observing in Mexican classrooms was, without a doubt, the most effective program component. It was a component that allowed participants to appreciate new pedagogical approaches that they found effective and that they would implement in their U.S. classrooms after the program. It also allowed participants to reconnect with more “traditional” teaching practices (like direct teaching, choral responses) that are not very popular anymore in the U.S. but that they recognized as valuable for their U.S. classrooms, especially when trying to reach and connect with their Mexican ELL students. Second, and related to this last point, the 2008 Study in Mexico Program provided participants

with new cultural capital and understanding about Mexico, Mexican education, and Mexican students. The large majority of participants recognized that this newly gained cultural capital helped them understand and connect better with their Mexican ELL students, a connection they all understood to be a tool that allowed them to reach students and teach them better. This capacity to connect and understand the experiences of their Mexican ELL students better emerged from two main factors: (1) the amount of organized cultural activities and exposure participants participated in and (2) the situation of unbalance in which they were put as a consequence of being placed in a foreign country not speaking the local language. This is a situation of unbalance that in addition asked participants to perform in a foreign country, in a foreign language, and to complete mandated tasks upon which they would be evaluated, similar to the situation their ELL students experience in their schools. Participants repeatedly reported these two factors as being the most important factors that allowed them to connect and understand better their Mexican ELL students' realities. Empathy, flexibility, compassion, higher expectations, and removal of stereotypes and preconceptions were natural consequences of this new cultural awakening. No negative aspects or reflections were reported by any of the participants about the program or any of its components in their answers to the questionnaires or in the interviews.

When interpreting these results, the immensely positive responses from all participants and the lack of negative observations and reactions to the program, it is possible to believe that my findings are skewed on the positive side mostly because of two fundamental factors: (1) the questionnaires were not anonymous, and (2) the nature of the interviewees.

(1) Participants completed the questionnaires before going to Mexico and after completing the program. Most of the participants who attended the 2008 Study in Mexico

Program were enrolled in the Master's program at the University of Colorado at Boulder and most of them were enrolled and participated in the courses that were offered in Mexico; courses that they needed to pass in order to graduate and obtain their Master's Degree and courses for which they would receive a grade upon the completion of the program. Thus, it is not difficult to understand that, if participants were asked to complete the questionnaires and to write their names on them, many of them may have just said what program administrators wanted to read. Interpersonal communication theories around "Facework" (Ting-Toomey, 1994) and "Politeness Theory" (Brown and Levinson, 1987) may help understand this concept better. Brown and Levinson (1987) differentiated between two types of "face needs": "positive face" and "negative face". Some of the participants may have engaged in "positive face" in their responses to the questionnaires, which means they tried to avoid conflict and showed a desire to be liked and respected, probably because they did not want to see their course grades affected by their personal commentary and opinions. For example, when participants were asked to reflect on multiculturalism, it was obvious to them that all program managers, administrators, and collaborators in the 2008 Study in Mexico Program were big defenders of multiculturalism, pluralism, and multicultural education. Thus, if we ask participants to write their names in the surveys, it would be naïve to believe that some of them would negatively criticize multiculturalism if that was how they really felt about it. Instead, as shown in Chapter 4, some of the responses to that question lacked any type of critical reflection about multiculturalism and what it means for their practice; instead, some of the participants engaged in cheerleading and chanting things like "YEE-HAW!", "I love it!", and "Yes!" as if they were saying what the administrator wanted to hear, perhaps abandoning a good opportunity to self-reflect and recognize the erroneous nature of their preconceptions.

(2) Most of the 23 participants I interviewed for this study were my friends, and I had not seen them (and they had not seen me) since the program in Mexico. It is possible that many of them offered themselves to be interviewed to help me with my investigation, and also as an opportunity for us to see each other again, catch up about life, and chat for a while. The transcriptions of the interviews prove this point as I found in them many instances of personal conversations not related to the research study. In addition, as I reported in the Methods chapter, I sent an invitation to be interviewed to all the participants from the 2008 Study in Mexico Program and only 27 of them responded to my email call for interviews. It is possible to believe that, of the remaining 23 participants, some did not receive my email, some liked the program but did not feel comfortable or did not have the time to talk to me, and some did not have anything positive to say about the program. Thus, it is possible to believe that the findings in this study are skewed on the positive side because of this lack of participation from the participants who did not like the program and did not want to be interviewed by me.

Another factor that may have skewed the results of my study is the characteristics of the male participants that completed the questionnaires and that I interviewed. These male participants have a number of characteristics that lead me to believe they are already passed the earliest stages of critical consciousness and joined the 2008 Study in Mexico Program with a certain level of cultural critical consciousness. For example, six of the nine men interviewed are Spanish-English bilingual; two of the remaining three monolinguals consider themselves Chicanos; one of the nine is married to a Mexican woman and another one is dating another Mexican woman; five of them are avid world travellers and have visited many countries on different continents. All these characteristics make me think of these male participants as liberal secular progressive individuals whose responses to the questionnaires and the interview

questions may have skewed my findings towards a more positive and culturally aware end of the spectrum.

Implications

The findings from this study reinforce the findings that can already be found in the literature and research around transnational teaching experiences and its implications are multiple. With the growing number of Mexican ELL students in our U.S. classroom, it is obvious that the teaching profession needs to prepare itself to reach them more effectively. Still, with the teaching profession in the U.S. being heavily dominated by White monolingual English-speaking females, it is imperative that these teachers receive proper training and experiences so that they can reach and teach Mexican Spanish-speaking ELL students more effectively.

Knowing that these types of transnational teaching programs offer participants the opportunity to effectively be exposed and learn from instructional practices in Mexico, and knowing that these types of programs have a positive effect in removing stereotypes, making participants culturally aware, and helping them connect and understand better their ELL students' experiences, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs across the U.S. include a similar type of transnational teaching experience for pre-service and in-service teachers alike. Pre-service teachers may benefit from experiencing pedagogical practices and cultural experiences they may never encounter in their teacher preparation program, whereas existing in-service teachers may get the opportunity to receive training and observe instructional practices that they never received in their teaching preparation program.

Reaching out to and teaching effectively our ever-growing population of Mexican ELL students in the U.S. is an imperative task that all practitioners in the U.S. should take seriously, and participating in these types of program may provide them with tools and skills necessary to

do so effectively, especially if their teaching preparation program is lacking the coursework or the knowledge in their faculty to obtain some of this necessary knowledge and skills. And even so, as reflected by several of the participants, an experience of this kind provides knowledge and experiences that cannot be obtained in a classroom.

Limitations

This study has some very obvious limitations. Besides the ones mentioned already in the “Interpretation” section about “positive face” and the nature of the interviewees, there are some innate limitations to case studies. First, the findings should not be generalized to any other groups or situations beyond the group and situation study in here, which is the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. This study is first and foremost a case study about that specific program and its participant’s perceptions about that program. Second, the data employed in this study is mostly self-reports, which also limits the validity of the study in different ways. First, because I could not interview all the participants who completed the surveys, the study lacks concurrent validity. There is concurrent validity in the 23 participants I was able to interview since I was able to compare their answers to the questionnaires with the data from their interviews; but again, I was not able to interview many other participants and that would have provided stronger concurrent validity to the study. As it is, is possible to believe the findings are skewed to the positive side of perceptions about the 2008 Study in Mexico Program. Second, we know self-reports may not have internal validity; as I explained in the “Interpretation” section, participants lie and say what they think their professors want to hear to obtain the results they want. In addition, self-reports are innately biased by our own perceptions of reality; that is not to say our perceptions are wrong or invalid, but they are definitively biased and limited.

I found one perfect example of this situation in the interviews. Participants 30 and 35 were team members when teaching in the Mexican school and I was able to interview them separately. Participant 30, as explained before, is a Spanish-speaking Mexican-national, whereas Participant 35 is a White monolingual English-speaker from Colorado. In their reflection, Participant 30 remembers how he felt like his two monolingual Anglo teaching companions “used” him as a translator:

“Participant 30: Mi experiencia fue diferente porque al principio me usaban como traductor para estas dos personas que me tocaron como...para estos dos compañeros, colegas de trabajo...entonces fue para mí...yo pienso que me usaron, fui usado en ese aspecto, bueno que estas personas dependían más de mí al principio que yo de ellas³”

At the same time, Participant 35 reflected on how she and her other monolingual teaching companions felt like they needed to pull Participant 30 back at times from teaching the class in Spanish, when the goal was to use English at all times while teaching the class in the Mexican classroom:

“Interviewer: And with whom were you teaching?

Participant 35: We had [participant’s name] and... no, I had [participant’s name] and a guy that was bilingual.

Interviewer: [participant’s name]? No.

Participant 35: No...

Interviewer: [participant’s name]? No...

³ My experience was different because at the beginning they used me as translator for these two people that I was assigned as...for these two partners, colleagues...then for me it was ... I think they used me, I was used in that aspect, well, that those two people depended on me more than I on them.

Participant 35: ...his last name was...[participant's last name].

Interviewer: [participant 30's name]?

Participant 35: [participant 30's name], yes.

Interviewer: [participant 30's name]...

Participant 35: Yes.

Interviewer: ...[participant's name] and you.

Participant 35: Uh-ha.

Interviewer: How did you find working with [participant 30's name]?

Participant 35: It was, it was very helpful except for the fact that, you know, sometimes it's-- we just had to really pull him back because it was easy for him just to try to teach it all in their home language, which was not the idea. So, but so it was real good to have him to at least back us up and he would be able to explain things to the kids in that language. So he had a good connection with them there”

If anything, these examples manifest that self-reflections are always loaded with personal biases and that we experience our realities differently and individually, and all self-reports will have biases and personal perceptions into consideration and when possible, validated through concurrent validity.

Recommendations

Because of the effectiveness of these types of programs, the first recommendation from this study is directed to teacher preparation programs in the U.S. and it echoes what was said previously in the “Implications” section: teacher preparation programs must include a program with similar characteristics to the 2008 Study in Mexico Program for their teacher candidates and in-service teachers. Of course, it is up to the university and the districts it serves to decide what

kind of transnational program they need to serve their communities. For example, there are several major cities in the U.S. that are experiencing a rapid growth in the number of Chinese-speaking students, and even Arabic-speaking students. In those cases, it would make sense for those universities to provide their teachers with training and transnational opportunities that would help them reach and understand those populations of students better. However, in Colorado and in many other parts of the U.S. the growing population of ELL students continue being Spanish-speaking and particularly of Mexican descent. Thus, it would make sense for universities to offer transnational experiences similar to the 2008 Study in Mexico Program.

The second set of recommendations is directed to the design and implementation of these types of programs; in particular the BUENO Center Study in Mexico Program, and it includes four specific recommendations:

1. Consider extending the length of time of the program. This is a recommendation that emerged directly from the data in the interviews. I recognized that it may be difficult to for some participants to stay more than two weeks in Mexico as some of them expressed in the interviews; it is already a different country, a different culture, and a different language, and many of them are not avid travellers and two weeks is more than enough for this type of experience. But the program could have an extra third week of extension at the end for those participants who desire to stay. In that third week, course work would be over and it would be exclusively a third week to continue working on the Mexican school, expanding on their lesson plan started two weeks earlier and observing more classrooms and Mexican teachers; maybe even relocating them to a different school for observations. Not having coursework in the afternoons would open time for more observations or personal time to explore the city and to engage in other personally meaningful cultural events. However, this recommendation must be understood with a lot of

caution because program directors must consider that this recommendation is coming from U.S teachers who desire to stay longer in Mexico without considering how their Mexican counterparts would feel about having them a longer period of time in their schools and classrooms. It is clear that any kind of visit to a classroom represents a distraction and an alteration of the order and structure teachers struggle all year long to create and implement in their classrooms. Having the U.S. teachers come into their classrooms for two continuous week, observing Mexican teachers, and taking teaching time from them to teach their students is a strong form of distraction and unbalance for a lot of teachers. Reclaiming wanting to stay longer in Mexico shows a positive side that reveals that participants enjoyed their time in the schools and would like to extend it; but it also shows a lack of critical analysis about their effect in the lives of the Mexican schools, teachers, and students they are “visiting” for two weeks. It reveals a level of egocentrism that lacks a deeper analysis about how their hosts feel about their presence, manifesting a perception that assumes Mexican teachers and administrators are happy having them there and would not mind having them in their schools and classrooms a longer period of time; not acknowledging the amount of work and effort put forth by the Mexican schools, faculty, and staff to make the experience a great experience.

2. Consider offering the program to more in-service teachers via establishing connections with school districts. These types of programs are excellent opportunities for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers alike. In fact, several of the participants who attended the program as a regular student, with course work and all the other obligations related to being a Master student attending the Study in Mexico Program, returned to the program later in the future, which allowed them to teach and observe in the Mexican schools without the pressure of the course work. In-service teachers could take advantage of an opportunity like this and receive credit

towards their professional development or license renewal. In fact, it is feasible to believe that many in-service teachers in Colorado and in the U.S. did not receive proper instruction and training on how to reach out to and teach Mexican Spanish-speaking ELL students while completing their teacher preparation program, a growing population of students they will certainly encounter in their classrooms. Attending a program with these characteristics would expose them to methodology and cultural events that could inform their practices and transform their beliefs. In addition, not having to complete course work would open up time for them to engage in extra teaching and observation or personal time to experience more personally the city and its culture.

3. Consider administering anonymous surveys. This is a recommendation that would facilitate future research studies on the effects and the design and implementation of transnational programs. As mentioned earlier, I believe many participants were not completely honest in their responses to the questionnaires because they were asked to write their names on them. I believe we would get more truthful and meaningful responses if participants were granted anonymity in their responses to the questionnaires.

4. Make explicit to participants that they will be asked to analyze ethnocentrism, racism, stereotypes, and White Privilege while in Mexico. There is no doubt that the program challenges participants existing assumptions about multiculturalism, Mexico, and Mexican students. However, the program could be improved if these goals are made clear to participants. Opportunities for Self-reflection and cultural awareness could be maximized if participants are explicitly taught about ethnocentrism, racism, stereotypes, and White Privilege, and also explicitly asked to consider and challenge their existing stereotypes and preconceptions about these issues. The Multicultural Curriculum and Methods seminar is an excellent opportunity to

present these issues to students but other components of the program must also be linked to the content that is presented and taught to them in the seminar, via specific prompts for reflections, journal entries, and even with questions in the questionnaires.

Conclusions

The findings and implications from this study are of significance to the field of education, in particular Schools of Education teacher preparation programs and the design and implementation of transnational teaching experiences. Research has shown the effectiveness of these types of programs, especially in the areas of instructional practices and development of cultural awareness. With the ever-increasing number of Mexican Spanish-speaking ELLs in our schools in the U.S., the necessity of training teachers to reach out to and teach effectively this growing population of students is more important today than ever. Thus, research that examines the effectiveness of these types of programs and its components is always a needed addition to the already robust research around the effectiveness of transnational teaching experiences (Alsop et al., 2007; Clark & Flores, 2007; Escamilla et al., 2007; Mahan & Stachowski, 1992; McKay & Montgomery, 1995; Merryfield, 1995; Nava, 1990; Nguyen et al, 2008; Olmedo, 2004; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Rios, 2007; Sleeter, 2001; Smith et al., 1997; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007; Willard-Holt, 2001; and Wilson, 1993).

This study illustrated that the 2008 Study in Mexico Program manifested a level of effectiveness that aligned almost perfectly with the findings that already exist in the literature and research on the effectiveness of transnational teaching experiences. This study was also able to demonstrate that the program and its components could critically affect participants' belief systems, attitudes, and instructional practices, specifically those components directly related to instruction and cultural events. In fact, even though the program may not have a guaranteed

positive effect on the development of participants' cultural critical consciousness, it is valid to believe that the program has a general, and different, effect on a majority of participants. Besides, it is unrealistic to expect that these types of short-term programs (2 weeks) would have a big effect in complex areas like shifting critical consciousness. Nonetheless, for those participants who already have a considerable level of critical consciousness (the equivalent to Freire's second stage of consciousness), the program serves to revitalize some of their already existing ideas and principles; it serves as a reminder about what they believe is important. There also are others who echo that sentiment; the program serves for them as an energizer, a reminder of the things they know and they believe in. Participant 25 reflects on this and the overall experience in the Master's Program when, in his interview, he said that, sometimes, it felt like the same things were being repeated over and over again in different classes, but at the end, it allowed him to develop a better understanding of the concept:

“Participant 25: This is more of my personal feel with school rather than the program, but I think that even in the masters program, like all my classes, I thought some times that was like, things were just being repeated over and over to me, or it was like things we were being taught were just like common sense, or something, you know? I mean, I thought we could have got...some times this happened, but I feel like more often the material could have gone more in depth, more and been more meaningful, rather than like I felt, like in the same class, I felt like we read the same article two or three times, we covered the exact same topic multiple times.

Interviewer: And did you felt like that you felt that what's happening.

Participant 25: Yeah, I just at some point I was ready you know, like I never wanted to hear the word BICS and CALP again. I wanted like I don't even like Jim Cummins

anymore... By the end, actually it was kind of good because I heard it so often I was able to like formulate my own theory, and then agree with it more; that was like... well my whole, my whole, when I took that class with Dr. Baca, my whole like research paper was structured around it”

For those participants who may be at the lower levels of critical consciousness (equivalent to Freire’s first stage of consciousness), the program may serve as “wake-up call” to some of the issues that Mexican ELLs experience and for them to perhaps commence to self-reflect and to question some of their attitudes and beliefs about Mexico, Mexican education, and Mexican students; the program may “plant a seed” for self-reflection, self-critique, and critical thinking that may allow these participants in the lower levels of critical consciousness to eventually make progress in their development.

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Appendix A**Pre-Questionnaire – Puebla 2008**

Name _____

Current School where you teach _____

How many years have you been teaching _____

Have you been to Mexico before? If yes, under what circumstances.

How do you expect Mexican elementary students to compare to U.S. elementary students?

What do you know about Mexican schools?

What do you expect the schools in Puebla to be like? Reflect on the following aspects:

- Curriculum

- Materials

- Teaching methods
 - Discipline
-
- Student readiness
-
- Teacher preparation

How do you think this trip will help you as a teacher in the US?

What experiences have you had with people of diverse cultures?

What is your position on multicultural education?

What do you expect to observe in a Mexican school that you would not observe around here?

In what ways would teachers in Mexico differ from teachers in the US? In what ways would they be the same?

Appendix B**Post-Questionnaire – Puebla 2008**

Name _____

Current school where you teach _____

How many years have you been teaching _____

How did the elementary students in Puebla compare to U.S. elementary students?

What did you learn about Mexican schools?

What was the school in Puebla like? Reflect on the following aspects:

- Curriculum

- Materials

- Teaching methods

- Discipline

- Student readiness

- Teacher preparation

How did this trip help you as a teacher in the US?

What experiences did you have with people of diverse cultures?

What did you learn in Puebla about multicultural education?

What did you observe in the Puebla schools that you have not observed in the U.S.?

In what ways did teachers in Puebla differ from teachers in the US? In what ways were they the same?

How will you use the Puebla experience to enrich the education of your colleagues?

How will you use the Puebla experience to enrich the education of your students?

How has this experience changed your outlook on teaching or life in general?

Appendix C**Course Registration Form**

Name _____

1. Are you bilingual (English/Spanish?) Check One

_____ yes

_____ no

_____ some bilingual skills _____

Mexico Course Offerings

2. Please place an (x) next to the courses in which you will enroll.

8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Teaching ESL in an Assigned School – All Students will be required to participate in this activity

10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. (Select one)

_____ EDUC 5435 – Materials & Methods in Bilingual ESL Education

_____ EDUC 6805 – Special Topics in ESL Methods

2:00 – 5:00 p.m. (Select one)

_____ EDUC 5445 – Curriculum for Multicultural Education

_____ EDUC 5035 – Pro-Seminar: Parent and Community Involv.

_____ EDUC 5595 – Practicum in Bilingual/ESL Education

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: José M. García-Paine

Interviewee:

Elements in the ethnographic interview (Spradley, p. 67):

1. Greetings
2. Giving ethnographic explanations
3. Asking ethnographic questions
4. Expressing interest
5. Expressing cultural ignorance
6. Repeating
7. Incorporating informant's terms
8. Creating hypothetical situations
9. Asking friendly questions
10. Taking leave

Descriptive questions:

1. Could you describe a typical day in the Study in Mexico Program?
2. Describe what you did on your "free" time.
3. What activity did you enjoy the most? Why?
4. Describe your experience teaching in a Mexican classroom.
5. What did you learn from observing Mexican teachers?
6. If possible for you to differentiate the Mexico program from the rest of your Masters program; if possible for you to do that, is there anything that you can pinpoint particularly to the Mexico experience that informs your practice today?

Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent Form

Effects of a transnational teaching program in the development of cultural critical consciousness

Principal Investigator José M. García-Paine

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

May 31, 2010

Please read the following material that explains this research study. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by José M. García-Paine, a graduate student in the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Education, 249 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-249. This project is being done under the direction of Professor Kathy Escamilla, School of Education, 249 UCB. José M. García-Paine can be reached at 720-234-8009. Professor Escamilla can be reached at 303-492-0147.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This research study is about the effects of the Study in Mexico Program on participants.

You are being asked to be in this study because you participated in the Study in Mexico Program in the summer of 2008.

15-20 participants will be invited to participate in this research study.

PROCEDURES

Taking part in this study is completely **voluntary**. You do not have to participate if you don't want to. You may also leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be interviewed once for 1-2 hours.

Description of Surveys/Questionnaires/Interview Questions

You will be asked questions about your experience in Puebla during the Study in Mexico Program. Questions are very general, open-ended, and will allow you to speak freely about your experiences in the Study in Mexico Program. Sample questions are:

1. Could you describe a typical day in the Study in Mexico Program?
2. Describe what you did on your “free” time.
3. What activity did you enjoy the most? Why?
4. Describe your experience teaching in a Mexican classroom.
5. What did you learn from observing Mexican teachers?

Time Commitment to Complete Research Procedures

Participating should take 1-2 hours of your time.

Research Location

Participation will take place at whatever location is more comfortable to you. We can meet at the BUENO Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder (249 UCB) in the School of Education, in a coffee shop, or any other location that is easy and comfortable for you.

Audio Recordings

Participation in this research may include audiotaping. These tapes will be used for transcription purposes, to facilitate investigator’s access to the data from the interview, and will be retained for 6 months after completion of the research.

Those individuals who will have access to these tapes will be the Principal Investigator (Jose M. Garcia-Paine) and his advisor (Kathy Escamilla).

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

BENEFITS

You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, your participation in this study may help us learn more about the design and implementation of transnational experiences for teachers.

COST TO PARTICIPANT

There are no direct costs to you for participation in this study.

ENDING YOUR PARTICIPATION

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or refuse to participate in any procedure for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your data. Interviewers will be assigned a number. The principal investigator (Jose M. Garcia-Paine) will keep in a locked cabinet the name of the participants and the number they were assigned and he will be the only person with access to that list and in possession of a key to the cabinet. A professional transcriber will transcribe all data from the interview and they will not have access to participants' real names, just their assigned number. Audiotapes will also be securely stored in the same locked cabinet as the list with the names of participants and their corresponding numbers. At the end of the study, tapes will be kept in the locked cabinet for 6 months, after which, they will be destroyed (cut, broken into pieces, and thrown in the trash).

All electronic files with the transcription of the data will only contain the number of the participant and they will be password-protected files.

During the write-up of the research, pseudonyms will be used.

Other than the researchers, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Colorado at Boulder Institutional Review Board may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact José M. García-Paine at 720-234-8009.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them -- confidentially, if you wish -- to the Institutional Review Board, 3100 Marine Street, Rm A15, 563 UCB, (303) 735-3702.

AUTHORIZATION

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Name of Participant (printed) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____.
(Also initial all pages of the consent form.)

Appendix F: Email Template Requesting Interview

Hello (name of participant),

I hope you are doing well. As you may remember, I am working on my PhD dissertation and my topic of study is the effect of the Study in Mexico Program on participants' critical consciousness.

I am contacting you because, for my dissertation, I am going to interview 10-20 participants with the hope of collecting enough data from the interviews to shed some light on what component and activities of the program have an effect on participants' critical consciousness.

Attached please find the Consent Form you will be asked to sign if you decide to participate in my study. The Consent Form contains more information on the purpose of the study, benefits, and risks, among other information.

Please, understand that the study has no risks for you, there is no financial benefit for anyone involved, and your participation is completely voluntary. The interview process should not last any more than 60-90 minutes and we can meet anywhere you want. It will also be nice to see you again.

Please, do let me know if you would like to participate in my study at your earliest convenience by emailing me at garciapa@colorado.edu so we can arrange a day and time to meet.

Thank you in advance.

José M. García-Paine
EECD Doctoral candidate
School of Education
University of Colorado at Boulder

P.S. Please, excuse the formal tone of the email but it is for research purposes.