

Winter 2007

# Lessons Learned from a Collaborative Self-Study in International Teacher Education: Visiones, Preguntas, y Desafíos

Francisco Rios

*Western Washington University, francisco.rios@wwu.edu*

Carmen Montecinos

Marcela van Olphen

Follow this and additional works at: [http://cedar.wwu.edu/education\\_facpubs](http://cedar.wwu.edu/education_facpubs)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Rios, Francisco; Montecinos, Carmen; and van Olphen, Marcela, "Lessons Learned from a Collaborative Self-Study in International Teacher Education: Visiones, Preguntas, y Desafíos" (2007). *Woodring College of Education*. 3.

[http://cedar.wwu.edu/education\\_facpubs/3](http://cedar.wwu.edu/education_facpubs/3)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Woodring College of Education at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Woodring College of Education by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wwu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wwu.edu).

## **Lessons Learned from a Collaborative Self-Study in International Teacher Education: *Visiones, Preguntas, y Desafíos***

**By Francisco Rios, Carmen Montecinos,  
& Marcela van Olphen**

---

*Francisco Rios is a professor with the College of Education at the University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming; Carmen Montecinos is a professor with the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile; and Marcela van Olphen is a professor with the College of Education at the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.*

Sometimes I feel like a fraud and a failure...at least that's what I felt after the last class. I guess that the old phrase to go abroad helps you to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange has allowed me time to really think about what I teach and how I teach. I know that asking questions about why things haven't been as successful as they might is a difficult and painful road on which to embark. But embark I must. If only for my sense of professional growth and for my own sense that I really, really tried to understand. (Francisco, personal journal, 3/05)

As the journal entry from one of the authors suggests, international teacher education is no easy crossing of borders. At the time he wrote the note, Francisco was teaching a course on multicultural education from international and comparative education perspectives at the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso in Chile in spring, 2005. After a particular

### *Lessons Learned*

---

class session, it became clear how teaching from an international perspective is fraught with uncertainties, challenges, and frustrations. But evident in this entry was the hope for growth and broadened understanding that might be a concomitant result of these experiences. Engaging in international teacher education gave him an opportunity to reexamine, reflect, and consequently, enlarge the certainties he had developed about “good teaching.”

International experience is a critical part of any efforts at internationalizing the teacher education curriculum (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). Professional teacher preparation standards (NCATE, INTASC) have made clear that teachers, particularly those teaching foreign language and social studies, need to have international experiences. These experiences need to be extended to higher education faculty as well given that their experiences have the potential to influence both the pedagogy and curriculum of teacher education experiences. Indeed, it is folly to ask teacher education faculty to promote an international teacher education without having experienced and studied international education any more than we would ask teachers to teach second language learners without any substantial background or experience with these learners and expect them to do quality work. The internationalization of teacher education has not only involved USA faculty and students traveling to study/work abroad. It implies hosting international faculty and students who come to the USA as well as engaging with the international tenured and tenured track faculty who work at many teacher education programs for scholarly as well as pedagogical purposes.

### **Considering One’s Purpose**

Nonetheless, the type of immediate experiences that led Francisco to write about his frustrations raises a broader question of whether we should even “do” international teacher education in light of these challenges. It is reminiscent of Kip Tellez’s (2002) provocative article wherein he suggested that perhaps teacher educators ought NOT to pursue multicultural education in their teacher preparation program. He suggested that the end result of many of our efforts in multicultural education are trivialized approaches to diversity (characterized by a focus on food, fashion and folklore) as enacted in the practices of teachers during student teaching or early in their career. For Tellez, this trivialization of multicultural education is so inauthentic as to violate the integrity of the very persons it purports to serve.

Thus, the first question we might ask ourselves is whether we should pursue teacher education with an international focus. Initial responses to this question, we imagine, would be “most assuredly yes.” The history of education demonstrates the ways in which education has always been influenced from international perspectives (Alexander, 2001) whether we recognize it or not. Consider, for example, the influence of the English philosopher Francis Bacon (on teaching) or the Czech philosopher J. A. Comenius (Komensky) (on access). We are influenced by the

developmental theories of the Swiss scientist Jean Piaget as well as by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Our pedagogies are influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato as well as inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. By the same token, the behaviorist approach to education as well as the work of cognitive psychologists working in the United States have permeated much of the educational discourse and practices in Latin America.

It could be argued that, as with education more generally, we are always interested in what's happening beyond the physical borders: out of curiosity, care and concern, or support for those outside the nation-state. Part of this is related to our own self-interests when we are open to other perspectives, alternative approaches, and different options to the challenges of the complex work of preparing teachers for schools. And as Francisco paraphrases that international adage, "When we make the strange familiar, we make the familiar strange" causing us to reflect on our own perspectives and ways of working.

There has always been an exchange of ideas and other ways of doing things (Alexander, 2001). While people might be stopped at physical borders, ideas, perspectives and approaches to schooling are not. It sometimes is deliberate, as in the case of colonialism wherein part of the process of justifying the colonialist act is to also impart an ideology of superiority of ideas and their concomitant processes associated with structuring institutions for the privileged few. But the exchange of ideas and approaches to schooling also happens without deliberately trying as can be seen in the case of immigration or in processes unrelated to education as in international business (including more directly the "business" of education) or travel abroad.

We acknowledge that in increasingly globalized society (Little, 2000), there is even a particular privilege in "considering" whether or not the US should do teacher education from an international perspective. Since globalization is happening in the context of unequal relations of power, some countries are having globalization and internationalization thrust upon them with all its attendant challenges and problems. There is a degree of privilege associated with being able to ask ourselves whether or not we should consider education from international points of view!

Perhaps, then, the more important concern is the purpose(s) for which we, as teacher educators, pursue internationalizing our own curriculum. To be sure, there are important personal and professional benefits associated with understanding teacher education from multiple perspectives, crossing international borders for professional growth and development as well as for scholarly pursuits associated with the generation of new knowledge. However, most of our work in teacher education is related to the preparation of teachers and the influence that these new teachers will have on their students, schools, and communities. Thus, we need to consider K-12 schools and their teachers when we engage in international teacher education.

Toward this end, a cursory look at the state of internationalizing K-12 education is important. The need to strengthen international education in the US

### *Lessons Learned*

---

schools draws from the evident gaps in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of students that are necessary to understand fully other people's history, socio-political contexts, and cultures (Heyl & McCarthy, 2003; Kagan & Stewart, 2004; Schneider, 2003); indeed some argue that this lack of knowledge approaches "crisis" levels (Heyl & McCarthy, 2003). Engler and Hunt (2004) discuss the relationship between international education and economics and democracy as well as the disconnect that young Americans have from the rest of the world. Engler and Hunt call for action in bringing up to date current standards for students while incorporating international education into all levels of education. In their view, education should be modernized to support internationalism in terms of knowledge and skills.

To be sure, for some (like Engler and Hunt, 2004) economics and political preservation are dominant motives for pursuing internationalism in the K-12 curricula. These reasons, although valid and reasonable from the perspectives of CEOs, smack of the presence of less-benign motives such as economic colonization and ethnocentrism. If the foci of international education are expanding economic markets and 'correcting' the world's opinion, the US is limiting itself to an ethnocentric perspective (missing, for example, what we can learn from others) as well as narrowing the scope of possibility for international education. Issues such as these pull us away from engaging with and working toward genuine global understanding.

Notwithstanding, for internationalization of the K-12 curricula to occur, teachers need to be knowledgeable not only of world history and geography but also they need to be aware of how history is told (whose perspectives serve as master narratives) and the role of culture therein. Furthermore, if we expect accomplished teachers and teachers-to-be to fully understand and internalize the multiple dimensions of international education, we must simultaneously consider their attitudes and dispositions (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). In order for people to develop cultural awareness and an understanding of others, it is important that they "get it" (Merrell, 2003). "Getting it" implies re-assessing our identities, re-visiting our needs, and most of all, re-inventing ourselves.

These are often challenging processes even for even the most well meaning, open-minded teacher and teacher educator. Like multicultural education, international education sustains values and principles that cannot be checked off of a list. This explains the critical role of our work with teachers' attitudes and dispositions in balancing the international education equation. Consider the perspective of Thornton (2005), when discussing effective ways of promoting internationalism into the social studies curriculum, about balancing educating students from an international perspective and having a "reasoned loyalty to a nation-state" (p.82) as not mutually exclusive issues.

Still, Heyl and McCarthy (2003) take these concerns to a different level. Specifically, they call for a U.S. higher education that offers students opportunities to gain knowledge and skills that provide the impetus to make sound national policy with thoughtful global impact. For them, teacher education programs should

graduate professionals with an international perspective and experiences who can bring this dimension into their teaching.

As but one example of the challenge, consider Heyl and McCarthy's (2003) study of 690 licensed teachers in 2001 from three universities which found that (a) 76% of the students did not study foreign languages at all, (b) the institution with the highest percentage of students with study abroad experiences was below 7%, and (c) "international" curriculum, defined broadly, accounted for 15% of the total credits (with a low of 8% and a high of 26%).

### ***Considering International Teacher Education***

We need to be mindful that teacher education is just one player in the K-12 education equation. Heyl and McCarthy (2003) for example point to the important role of the federal government and state departments of education, curriculum development specialists, as well as Arts and Sciences departments in colleges/universities. For them, we must begin by "establishing international education as a policy priority at all levels." Nonetheless, if teacher education programs are genuinely interested in providing teachers-to-be with more than just "an international polish," they most assuredly need to start with their own faculty.

Schneider (2003), when discussing internationalizing undergraduate education of teachers, reported that nearly 80% of the higher education participants recommended more faculty development via workshops and travel abroad experiences. Schneider's findings strongly support the need for faculty development that fosters academic foreign exchanges to revitalize and re-work their courses. Moreover, it is crucial that these experiences serve as a springboard for faculty to advance their scholarship and academic creativity. Thus, the advancement of research informs and sustains teaching practices that aim to internationalize existing curricula.

If the first question is "ought" and "for what purpose" we pursue international teacher education, the next question is "how" should we do it? A thoughtful and deliberate understanding of the demands of preparing teacher educators from and for an international perspective seems necessary to minimize learning that promotes stereotypes, trivializes the complexity of schooling in international contexts, minimizes the role of macro-structural influences or micro-cultural processes/practices, and/or dismisses or misrepresents the power of the role of culture in how schooling is performed in differing contexts (Alexander, 2001).

We argue that any robust approach to international teacher education must include ample understanding and consideration of the multiple dimensions of schooling both in the local country and in the host country (curriculum, pedagogy, experiences, etc.). That is, it needs to consider the kinds of curricular experiences teacher candidates should have, the kinds of pedagogical approaches that might best be used to understand (rather than judge) education abroad and the kinds of field based experiences that would be most productive in service of desired understandings (Cushner & Mahon, 2002).

### *Lessons Learned*

---

For example, consider what kinds of content and resultant analysis might need to be included in even attempting to describe how schooling plays out in another country. First prospective teachers need to be well grounded in how schooling is influenced in the US in terms of both national and local political influences. The invisible dimensions of one's own schooling need to be made visible since it can provide an explicit frame of reference. Second, the analysis of schooling needs to include knowledge of the history, culture and politics of the nation (Grant & Lei, 2001). It should include general knowledge of schooling as well as specific knowledge (specific grade level and academic discipline). Connection must be made between what is happening in the classroom with the local and national political context, all of which are influenced by the history and culture of the specific location (Alexander, 2000). In addition, it needs to include an analysis of the processes and impact of globalization. These assume a certain level of sophistication, broad multidisciplinary knowledge around education, and a range of analytical skills if we value authenticity in international teacher education. We might be well to ask if this is too much for most teacher educators given their current preparation.

Perhaps one way to make this task more manageable is to maintain an initial focus on understanding other systems, not evaluating them nor suggesting how they might improve. We can, in reality, only know a little of these other systems and therefore lack any credibility to offer evaluations or uninvited suggestions. In this instance, the goal for prospective teachers is an attempt to understand how things work in a particular setting and why. Thus, it is critical that multiple dimensions and levels of analysis be undertaken. The most robust preparation then will require a combination of efforts so that there is both internal coherence (within the teacher preparation program) and external coherence (across the college of education, the university and into school based experiences).

In sum, what we hope for is provocative discussion not simply around "doing" teacher education with an international and multicultural perspective, but doing so in a way that can be described as "authentic." That is, teacher educators need to move beyond being able to say "we did it" and checking it off as one among many, many other things we must do in teacher education. For us, one aspect of authenticity is for faculty/students who teach/study abroad to engage in meaningful conversations with local colleagues in a critical analysis of education at the host country/institution as well as at the foreign country/institution such that these encounters allow all parties to learn to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

The purpose of this article is to offer guiding principles for our efforts in international travel as one part of efforts aimed at internationalizing teacher education. These principles are rooted in a "self study" of the recent experiences of one of the authors (Francisco) who was on Fulbright Fellowship in Chile and teaching a course on "Multicultural Education" where a comparative/international curriculum was an essential focus of the course. It included his interactions with his Chilean colleague (Carmen) around issues of pedagogy, curriculum, classroom

processes, etc. In addition, it incorporates a colleague's perspective (Marcela) who is a Latin American faculty member in teacher education with an international perspective teaching in a U.S. university who played the role of a critical friend.

### **Collaborative Self Study in International Contexts**

We characterize the research detailed here as a collaborative self study in teacher education. Self-study is engaged in for a variety of purposes but the two most often cited are for personal/professional development and for the purpose of better understanding teacher education (in short, to make us more "thoughtful" in our work) (Cole & Knowles, 1996). Additionally, Hamilton (1998) and Dinkelman (2003) raise the possibility of ways in which self-study can also be a precursor to reforming the ways in which teacher education is carried out. Cole and Knowles (1996) offer that such possibility of reforming teacher education (and higher education more broadly) is precisely what is at the root of the threat of self-study within the academy.

Traditional forms of academic scholarship are different from self-study in that the latter is "up close and personal" with its own set of epistemological positions (personal, subjective, practical, qualitative, and communicated via narrative) (Cole & Knowles, 1996). However, this should also communicate that self-study is as rigorous (within the bounds of qualitative research) as other forms of academic scholarship despite its often marginalized status.

Dinkelman (2003) asserts five rationales for conducting self-study in teacher education. These include the value of becoming more reflective about one's practices, the construction of new knowledge both of the local setting but also of broader questions for the academic discipline, the model of self-reflection for our students, the value for students who participate, and the possibilities for programmatic change. The opportunity for us to be reflective of our own practices in the context of meaningful interaction with each other as well as posing problems and advancing ideas around international teacher education is pivotal to our work herein.

### **Data Source**

The primary data source comes from Francisco's own reactions kept in a journal while teaching which stemmed from his in-classroom experiences, students' responses to assignments, conversations with students outside of the classroom and conversations with his Chilean colleague Carmen, often times "at the moment."

The intent here is to glean advice from students and colleagues in the southern hemisphere about how scholars in the US might engage in international teacher education (voices too often discounted in the academic literature; see, for example, Little, 2000). That is, the hope is for a kind of north-south dialogue wherein we can attend to the voices of our Latin American sisters and brothers in the work that we are doing in the US toward building authentic international teacher education activities. The goal is to think about international teacher education not from the



## *Lessons Learned*

---

perspective of the culture of dominance but rather as it is made problematic via interaction with the perspectives of those outside the U.S. borders. The central question guiding this work is what visions, questions, and challenges (visiones, preguntas, y desafíos) arise in the context of carrying out teacher education in a Latin American country that might help us to rethink teacher education in the U.S. based on achieving mutual benefits and convergent interests?

To analyze all of the data, we initially employed an emergent, grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As our initial examination was anchored in the specific data sets, we asked ourselves, “What is in this material?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 59). We identified each of the themes that had emerged from the analysis and examined their range. In our analysis we noted repeated patterns and identified categories and conditions within the data. We mapped the data back to these themes for final definition and clarification. We now share and explain the emergent themes identified and anchor them to examples from the data sets.

### **Themes and Points of View**

#### ***Rethinking Our Assumptions***

There is much in the cultural frameworks we have been socialized into that we do not even realize. That is, much of the ways of looking at the world are implicit and taken for granted. The opportunity to work abroad provides an opportunity, for the reflective practitioner, to become aware of, question, critique, and re-create these epistemological assumptions (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). In short, how is it that the education discourses which we swim in, often times which we are not even aware of, can be assumed to be true?

As one fairly common example, consider what we mean by the term “education” and how we describe a person who is educated (Alexander, 2001): What is a good education? What does it mean to learn? What does “development” entail? What does “teaching” imply? Alexander points out differing definitions of just one of these terms in her study of five nations. Francisco’s Chilean students’ definition of “education” noted its social sphere (*esfera social*) as well as the freedom and responsibility (*libertad y responsabilidad*) which leads to an awoken existence (*existencia despierta*). This definition is reminiscent of Valenzuela’s (1999) discussion of the distinction between learning (happens in many places) and schooling (the place where learning may or may not happen). These Chilean students see learning not as a psychological (i.e., individual) phenomena but rather as a social activity. These students bring a much larger aim to the forefront in describing the purposes of education: freedom and responsibility.

In his journal, Francisco too notes the differences with which schooling plays out and other assumptions he brings to the teaching-learning enterprise:

. . . different cultural frameworks associated with how we “do schooling;” while there’s much that’s common (fitting right in to the university classroom), the

*Francisco Rios, Carmen Montecinos, & Marcela van Olphen*

---

differences are more subtle and perhaps more robust (their expectations and perceptions of things; the culturally based knowledge that I have that I can't assume the students will know; the differing ways of using language as well as the language itself). (personal journal, 4/05)

Francisco recounts, for example, how he must negotiate two critical aspects when providing examples to explain a particular phenomena: first, he must know the language to communicate the example and second he must consider whether the examples, which are part of his professional schema, might not be known or understood by the students (e.g., the ways Black-White race relations play out in the US) even when the example can be expressed.

Related to the language restraints, in response to a prompt about whether the nationality of the teacher mattered, a Chilean student acknowledged the restraints but mentioned it brought to life exactly what effort was required to communicate across cultures. This suggests that having international faculty discuss questions of language and power gave students a concrete opportunity to live and put into practice what they were learning from the class regarding internationalizing education.

Francisco continues and suggests the discomfort associated when there is a disconnect between his assumptions and student reactions:

My own expectations about what things would be like . . . when they're not fulfilled that I have this sense of disconnectedness (perhaps these make me feel a sense of lack of trust). This raises another assumption: I have to make a difference. I have to act as if it all depends on me and so when they don't come to class, that there's something I've done wrong, bad, ineffective, etc. . . . (personal journal, 3/05)

These questions represented doubts that Francisco would bring to his conversations with Carmen. Carmen was there to help answer some of the questions that could, in turn, help Francisco find points of connection among him, the students, and the content to be covered in the class. At other times, Carmen would be a language resource that would translate from dictionary Spanish to colloquial ("Chilean") Spanish that could make the interactions between Francisco and the students less formal and impersonal. Carmen also raised more questions about the social, cognitive, and affective needs that led Francisco to want "to make a difference."

***The Need for Flexible and Creative Identities***

One of the issues that the person engaging in international teacher education experiences must contend with is the challenge to one's own identity. It is critical for participants to recognize how much of their identity is both created and re/created in the context of interactions with others. This recreation of identities is often spurred by the reactions from others; in turn, it leads to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Consider these excerpts from Francisco's journal:

But at other times, I feel estranged and distance, my voice echoing in a near empty room to students who seem to be more polite than engaged: at times like these I feel

### *Lessons Learned*

---

especially disengaged and wonder if I'm making any kind of difference. (personal journal, 3/05)

He goes on:

And there is this Latino thing for me as well . . . a Latino, in Latin America, who looks like them. But who can speak the language only marginally well, who dresses and acts unlike them, who brings an outsider experience from a colonial power . . . who is here to revitalize his linguistic and cultural (Latino, broadly) roots, to help his children strengthen their roots. Moving between North American, Latino, Scholar, Teacher, language learner and tourist and wondering what sense my students must be making of me . . . and which of these identities do they see (the Latino me, the North American me, the scholar me, the language learner me, etc.) or do these shift or does one dominate. (personal journal, 3/05)

These excerpts point out how students' actions (in this instance, a class where about half the students' were missing) led him to question himself and some of the critical assumptions he brings as professor socialized within a North American context. But equally noteworthy is the comments that immediately followed around identity. Consistent with a post-structuralist epistemological orientation in comparative education contexts (Ninnes & Burnett, 2003), this excerpt presents the multiple identities that any one individual might bring to the international education context. Beyond this reality is an understanding that others perceive these identities and make sense of them in their own ways. Recognizing these challenges to the "self" evident in these excerpts, it is essential that those working in international teacher education contexts be prepared for questions and challenges to identity that are bound to emerge.

#### ***Teaching as a Political Activity***

Related to the preceding theme about identity are the unique identifiers associated with being from the U.S. Regardless of what one thinks of the US politics, people will assume many things about a person from North America due to the geopolitical realities of being a United States citizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Francisco mentions this at various points within the journal when he describes the "relations of power between the U.S. and Chile," "Chilean's overall regard for foreigners" as well as their specific "regard for people from the U.S." (Chilean people assume I carry "lots of historical-political baggage even before I open my mouth); after all the field of international relations is littered with *fracasos* began with good intentions." It represents, as Francisco continues, the recognition that beyond what is assumed of him is the baggage he does bring given "that I come from the US with certain academic assumptions and political perspectives assumed." This is reminiscent of Edward Said's (1994) observation that academic scholars are not immune from carrying their social, cultural, or political worldviews with them when they cross borders any more than the casual traveler.

This fact is not lost on the Chilean students who helped Francisco realize that

globalization means very different things depending upon social group power most evident in the distinction between the globalizers (*globalizadores*) and the globalized (*globalizados*) as the newest form of colonization. These students advocated for the need to listen to the voices of the disenfranchised if real democratic processes were to be constructed.

Perhaps more critically is not just the fact that there will be certain political perspectives assumed by those in the host setting (in this instance), but the very real possibility that these political perspectives might, in fact, be present and yet unknown. Francisco makes this point, having recognized the ways in which he has been socialized within a particular cultural and social milieu. He writes about this when he wonders about “the degree to which I carry with me colonialist residuals even when I work to engage a decolonialist stance . . . but which I’m completely blind to. . .” (personal journal, 5/05).

Schooling, as we are reminded by Freire (1998), is a deeply political act. At the very specific classroom level, Francisco wonders if student lack of engagement may be students’ political response (as one part of many other factors). He writes that “The possibility that those moments of disconnect represent a kind of political response on their part to resist learning because it violates their integrity: My having read Kohl’s *I Won’t Learn from You* makes me wonder if this might be a syndrome that I might be experiencing” (personal journal, 4/05).

This entire political undertone of doing work in international teacher education conceivably works to undermine the degree of trustworthiness in the outsider. Connected with being a scholar from the U.S., lacking stronger Spanish proficiency, and differing epistemological assumptions between him and the students, it makes sense to see why students might question the degree of trust they may have in the foreign worker. There is a historical-political experience there that is critical for us to engage in given our status as a nation with both colonial and neo-colonial aspirations. These can’t be discounted with the usual deflection of this criticism such as “we, the people, are not the government” nor “the U.S. is very diverse politically.”

A Colombian student, while doing her study abroad semester in Chile, enrolled in Francisco’s class, brought this point into sharp relevance. When asked about whether her teacher’s nationality mattered, she discussed how much she hated the USA due to the political policies of the US in Colombia. Her interaction with Francisco, however, helped her to see how people in the US also struggle toward an authentic, democratic ideal.

### ***Openness and Wholeheartedness***

Fortunately, there were also times when Francisco felt very connected with the students and the students indicated they felt connected to him. About half of the students attended every class, came in to visit and talk (both about assignments but also about his travels, his experiences, their personal and professional hopes and ambitions, and academic life in the U.S.). Sometimes this happened in the whole

### *Lessons Learned*

---

class setting of the classroom. Francisco recounts his experience at the end of one particular class session:

Some times, after class, I feel like things are really clicking: things important to me like good content, good engagement with the class, I understand them and think they understand me. When I feel like I have the time to really appreciate the quality of our connectedness. When I do an activity that really takes off (*tomo una posición*). (personal journal, 6/05)

While much of this is directed at what Francisco does as the teacher in the class, it is equally important to recognize the openness on the part of the students to both education from an international perspective as well as diversity more broadly. In one assignment where the students wrote a letter to North Americans, the students' wrote about how internationalizing education was "beautiful" for its ability to expand vision, nourish society, learn different perspectives, and uncover the distinct realities of others. Connected with this are their perspectives about diversity (more broadly). For these undergraduate students, diversity was not a "problem" (or obstacle or issue as described by many North American teacher education students) but rather is a resource since it brings about "the possibility of dialogue and with it, construction of new knowledge" (*una posibilidad de diálogo y construcción de nuevos conocimientos*).

In Francisco's journal, he looks for the very real classroom manifestation that the connection he is making with the students is meaningful. For him, this is most evident in examples of student learning. He writes:

And I try to convince myself that they're really learning . . . as I sit here with posters up, summaries of what they've learned around the three themes for the class . . . which shows that they are learning lots. Or when I read their comments mid semester for the class (language isn't an issue, they appreciate the attempts to come here and speak in their language, that they like learning from an alternative perspective, etc.). Or when they turn in their outlines of their case studies . . . for the most part, really making sense of what's going else where by bringing in some critical thinking they had and some that seems connected to what we've learned in the class. (personal journal, 5/05)

It seems as though Francisco is concerned with how the students understand the classroom as space for developing a social contract with the teacher and other students in the pursuit of knowledge.

Clearly, developing a classroom of openness and wholeheartedness requires trust, confidence, and caring. And the instructor cannot only feel these elements within the classroom but must show them to students in ways that are recognized. Francisco asks about this when he wonders in the journal, "Do the students know and see that I value them? Have I given them cause to?" Beyond Francisco's concern with having an impact on his Chilean students, one could ask, how strong was his concern for being impacted by his interactions with Chilean students and colleagues? Given the length of this cultural immersion experience, did Francisco automatically

assume that he would, indeed, be profoundly impacted by those in the host country and therefore focus more on how he might positively influence the others?

***Pursuing “Authenticity” in the International Experience***

Francisco relates via the journal that “There’s more to just crossing physical borders that makes an experience authentically international (the proverbial ‘easier said than done).” Indeed, as we suggested in an earlier part of this paper, the bigger question becomes, if we can’t carry out international teacher education authentically, with a good heart, and with an anti-colonialist sensibility, should we do it all. The idea of authenticity in education (at least its pursuit) was a hope and concern for Francisco throughout the international experience. Early on he describes in his journal how his initial focus was on teaching content (not unlike many first year teachers who focus more on the “what” than the “who or the how”) given that this was his first effort at teaching multicultural education from an international perspective as well as his concern with teaching using academic Spanish. Interestingly, it was the students who “invited” Francisco to move away from content and to work to engage them in meaningful interaction. They did this by providing him with solicited feedback about one-third of the way through the course. Perhaps at the heart of this focus on content was concern about student confidence in him as their teacher. From that point on, Francisco moved away from his notes and began to use a more interactive approach to teaching (one that he describes as using most frequently in the U.S. and which he feels more philosophically at home with) with the students. He points out, however, that in moving to this approach he feared that “this does not always allow me to interact as profoundly with the students in the fast-paced academic encounter as I would like.”

Perhaps one indicator of the degree to which we have achieved “authenticity” is when we can get to the point of offering genuine critique without dancing around “offending” the other in our critique. This requires as accurate an understanding of the other coupled with developing a level of trust, rooted in genuine goodwill and not self-serving motives. This is difficult because as citizens of the U.S., we carry around with us the historical legacies of deliberate colonization (see, for example, Springs’ 2003 discussion of education in Puerto Rico) as well as its contemporary cousin (neo-colonization) vis-à-vis globalization and made manifest in foreign policies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Panama (as just three examples). These make people from outside the US suspect of our motives; it is hard to not agree that they ought to be.

Authenticity is not only marked by one’s wholeheartedness and open-mindedness in the everyday social interactions. It is also reflected in interest to read and incorporate in the classroom professional literature produced in the host country and others in the region. As a scholar, an authentic cultural immersion involves critically engaging with other scholars such that one doesn’t just translate text from English to the host country but also from the host language to English.

### *Lessons Learned*

---

Although we have noted the importance of developing knowledge and understanding of the local culture, efforts need to be made to ensure that this knowledge is not reduced to stereotypes that may be constructed from single or even repeated experiences. We would claim that while in the host country as well as after returning home it is important to reflect upon the knowledge claims that we construct through cultural immersion. Do these represent broad-based generalizations? Have I attended to contextual factors that might make the patterned behavior reasonable and appropriate? Can I describe the country, its peoples and behaviors and values in many ways and with its many nuances? Am I able to see and name the precarious and contradictory ways in which I can see myself vis-à-vis how I define folks in the host country? (Montecinos, 1995). These kinds of questions exemplify the type of reflection that can lead to authenticity as we are open to scrutinize our knowledge claims.

#### **Clarifying Expectations**

Although stereotypes and misunderstanding may come from failing to scrutinize one's knowledge claims about the host country, they might also result from failing to clarify mutual expectations. This is perhaps the most practical of all the themes identified. Students need to know what a teacher expects as well as what they expect from the teacher. The one aspect of teacher expectations that was most problematic for Francisco was the students' not attending class. Consider the following excerpts from Francisco's journal: "Why do I want-need them to come to class . . . what are the ways in which these relations are important to me?" and, "Students protest for right to education but then don't come to class" and, "Is their presence (or lack thereof) simply circumstances (work schedules, class schedules, assignments due for other classes) or is there something more?" and finally "Why am I threatened by their non-attendance?"

In conversations with Carmen, Francisco would bring up the effects that students' apparent disengagement had on his sense of efficacy as a teacher. He would find some comfort in knowing that it was not a response to him but rather a common practice among students in this program. He came to understand some of the organizational factors that contributed to the students' not attending the class (the class was "optional" and did not count toward their overall course of study being one such factor). Nonetheless, it continued (as evident throughout the journal) to be an issue for Francisco. He acknowledged that:

Students bring a different history that brings them to a place different from the students in the US whose history I can assume (about the importance of coming to class, about the need to be active, about their importance in the class, etc.). . . So then, what are the "norms of engagement" which I'm assuming and which the students are assuming differently. . . . (personal journal, 4/05)

He goes on to add the following:

How does my expectations play in to my experiences? How does my perspectives

and world view come in to play (why do I feel that showing up, showing up on time, and staying till the end represent respect for education—the formal process . . . I know it does not represent disrespect for learning!

### **Points of Encounter/Points of Departure**

This paper works to shed light on challenges and possibilities of helping teacher education faculty to be competent as international teacher educators. This collaborative self study of a USA teacher educator's international experiences provides ideas we might consider that will help support teacher education faculty in movement toward this competence. 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.

These emerging themes suggest that the most robust experiences abroad must put the teacher education on a path toward (a) reflective practice as we reconsider our assumptions and clarify our expectations, (b) flexibility and creativity in acknowledging our always evolving identities as we form an open-minded perspective, (c) understanding teaching as a political activity, and (d) seeking and strengthening "authenticity" without trivializing these experiences.

Beyond the quality and quantity of international experiences, we also need to consider one's social position. Francisco benefited in ways specific and unique to his ethnic background. He was able to travel more "lightly" through Chilean culture (at times, people assumed he was Chilean). Clearly there may be some unique benefits to faculty of color: reinvigorating a primary language (evident in this self study) and professional benefits (opportunities for scholarly activity, for example). Additionally, having successfully crossed cultural borders within their own campuses, they can carry these skills/dispositions with them to the international setting as well as share these skills/dispositions with their White colleagues. These might include how to consider things from a conscious cultural framework, and questioning the role power and privilege play in different situations (to name just a few). Of course, these benefits, skills, and linkages are not automatic but rather must be nurtured in the context of meaningful opportunities to "think through" their emerging perceptions in situ, as well as opportunities for post-departure debriefing



### *Lessons Learned*

---

and extensions. Likewise, we also suggest that people of other ethnic backgrounds, including Whites, will also experience their international assignment differently based on social group factors with their own specific and unique benefits.

In this collaborative self study, Francisco described “the hope for growth and broadened understanding” in connection with his international experiences. Conversely, Francisco’s students, when discussing the goals and meaning of international education, brought forward issues such as freedom and responsibility. His students’ perspectives made Francisco re-visit his assumptions as well as reconsider his approach to elaborating examples. We learn that language knowledge and one’s own professional schemata are critical at the moment of assessing the meaningfulness of examples. Francisco’s concerns are well founded. An illustration or case scenario that is meaningful or relevant in one socio-political context does not necessarily carry out its meaningfulness or relevancy to a different one. Socio-political contexts as well as historical contexts make (or not) a message meaningful (or not). What ‘lies beneath’ shapes people’s understanding making lived experiences a critical point of departure. As we mentioned before, it may be more rational, honorable, and even sensible to try to understand others instead of trying to evaluate or even change them. Because international education should be considered as a journey, and not a final destination, teacher educators need to commit to foster these ideals while students are in our teacher preparation programs.. Like any learning process, students should develop the kind of awareness that allows them to live international education as a life-long practice nourished by new experiences and current global events.

So what did Francisco learn and bring back with him? Consider a follow up reflection, as a result of writing this article, he shared with a few friends. He is detailing the sources of his own learning (provided for consideration to other sojourners): the people (including colleagues and people he met in his everyday interactions), the places he visited and cultural events he attended, and things he read (about international education more broadly and about education, especially multicultural education, in Latin America). But then he continues with the following:

But perhaps most importantly, I learned from my students. I was a scholar of my interactions with them in my classes and, especially after the invitation to be more interactive, by the spaces I created in my class for them to share their thinking and perspectives in interaction. I designed assignments and then read them carefully which provided me insight into how they see and understand the world, what were the elements of their (especially) critical thinking, what their life experiences were, how they felt about Chile and the U.S. (identity and politics), their response to globalization, how and what (their) education meant to them, etc. In doing this, I did not come to understand Chile but rather the many Chiles that exist. And I realized that Chile is both part of the Latin America but in more critical ways very different.

Equally important, Francisco describes how these experiences and these learnings have impacted him on his return home. He describes how his work teaching “second language acquisition” to teachers seeking an ESL endorsement

has brought on additional meaning and depth (including a renewed appreciation for foreign-born faculty on campus). He describes his enthusiasm when people describe their own international opportunities. And he shares the new knowledge dimension associated with including a focus on international perspectives on education in his foundations class. But he points to the challenge of this work:

But I also struggle with how easy it is to fall back into “business as usual”; like watching your uncle’s vacation picture slide show, “others” seem a bit . . . well, bored. The structures don’t ask me to reflect on meaning, to do anything different than what I’ve always done. In fact, the standardization and accountability movement (in teacher education) has created so much structure that more time is spent figuring out how to navigate these common assessments and detailed rubrics (in our case) that very little in the structure works to encourage and support me within my own efforts to bring international education into my work with teachers.

Indeed, many questions and challenging issues still need to be addressed. Questions such as: How do we maintain focus on social justice and promote values such as global respect, collaboration, and solidarity? How do we instill the ideals of international education into the very structure of our teacher education programs? How do we promote change in accomplished and educators-to-be attitudes and dispositions? These questions and reflections are consistent with those Noddings (2005) has put forward, “Where do we start? Does global citizen education promote world peace? Or does peace precondition global citizenship?”

## References

- Alexander, R. (2001). Border crossings: Towards a comparative pedagogy. *Comparative Education, 37*(4), 507-523.
- Alexander, R. (2000). *Culture and pedagogy*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- Cole, A., & Knowles, J. G. (1996, August). The politics of epistemology and the self study of teacher education practices. Paper presented at the International Conference on Self Study in Teacher Education, East Sussex, England.
- Cushner, K., & Mahon, J. (2002). Overseas student teaching: Affecting personal, professional, and global competencies in an age of globalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 6*(1), 44-58.
- Dinkelman, T. (2003). Self study in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 54*(1), 6-18.
- Engler, J. M., & Hunt, J. B., Jr. (2004). Preparing our students for work and citizenship in the global age. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(3), 197-199.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Grant, C., & Lei, J. (2001). *Global constructions of multicultural education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Hamilton, M. L. (Ed.) (1998). *Reconceptualizing teaching practice: Self study in teacher education*. London, UK: Falmer
- Heyl, J. D., & McCarthy, J. (2003). International education and teacher preparation in the U.S. Paper presented at the Global Challenges and U.S. Higher Education: National Needs and

### *Lessons Learned*

---

- Policy Implications, Duke University, Durham, NC
- Kohl, H. (1995). *I won't learn from you*. New York: New Press
- Little, A. (2000). Development studies and comparative education. *Comparative Education*, 36(3), 279-296.
- Merrell, F. (2003). *The Mexicans: A sense of culture*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Montecinos, C. (1995). Culture as an ongoing dialogue: Implications for multicultural teacher education. In C. Sleeter & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference* (pp. 291-308). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ninnes, P., & Burnett, G. (2003). Comparative education research. *Comparative Education*, 39(3), 279-297.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *Educating citizens for global awareness*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Said, E. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. London, UK: Vintage.
- Schneider, A. (2003). *Internationalizing teacher education: What can be done?* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 480869).
- Spring, J. (2003). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tellez, K. (2002). Multicultural education as subtext. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4(2), 21-26.
- Thornton, S. (2005). Incorporating internationalism into the social studies curriculum. In N. Noddings (Ed.), *Educating citizens for global awareness* (pp. 81-92). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.