

## **Biliteracy Teachers' Self-Reflections of Their Accounts While Student Teaching Abroad: Speaking from "the Other Side"**

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**By Reyes L. Quezada & Cristina Alfaro**

### **Introduction**

In an article published in the *International Education Journal* entitled "Beyond Educational Tourism: Lessons Learned While Student Teaching Abroad," Quezada (2005) provides an overview of the literature regarding student teaching abroad experiences. This article summarizes his literature review and applies the findings to a study conducted by Alfaro (2003) about the experiences of four biliteracy teachers who participated in an international student teaching abroad program in Mexico and who are now teaching in the United States. The study focused on addressing the personal and professional dynamics biliteracy teachers negotiate in becoming teachers with a global perspective as a result of an international experience (Alfaro, 2003).

Blair (2002) states that in order for future teachers

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and teacher candidates to become more sensitive, and have a clear understanding of the experiences immigrant children go through in U.S classrooms, it is imperative that candidates experience student teaching in an international setting or participate in study abroad programs. Further, Heyl and McCarthy (2003) support the idea that higher education needs to graduate future K-12 teachers who think globally, have international experience, demonstrate foreign language competence, and are able to incorporate a global dimension into their teaching. According to Quezada (2005), when teacher candidates participate in student teaching abroad programs they develop and increase their sense of cultural sensitivity by viewing the United States perspective from a different place and a different point of view.

A commissioned paper on The State of Teacher Training for K-12 International Education by Schneider (2003) found that study abroad is the most cited activity in providing university students with an international experience. In many campuses it is available in principle, but few students majoring in elementary or secondary education tend to participate (Quezada, 2005). According to Schneider, too few overseas programs are appropriate and creditable (for general education or for the major) for Education students. According to the California State University System's (CSUS) International Programs Division, the Policy Studies in Language and Cultural Education Department of the College of Education at San Diego State University (SDSU) has developed effective partnerships and created international preparation programs in Mexico for prospective biliteracy teacher candidates so they may become more "worldly" and "cosmopolitan" teachers (Germain, 1998; Luke, 2004). Several institutions of higher education offer different models that facilitate and provide internationalization experiences for future teachers. The models include: (1) providing study abroad opportunities, (2) internationalizing the curriculum, and (3) allowing future biliteracy teachers to student teach in another country. The results are that preservice teachers immerse themselves, not only with the language, traditions, and customs of the country, but also within the urban and rural schools and communities.

While many institutions of higher education have study abroad programs, and have instituted end-of course evaluations and program evaluations, little else is known beyond the technical aspects of the course of study. We, therefore, in this study examine the perceptions and voices of four biliteracy teachers regarding their experiences while student teaching abroad as they developed ideological clarity as a means for teaching with courage, solidarity, and ethics in an international setting. If we, as teacher educators, are to ensure teacher education students have valid learning experiences rather than become educational "tourists," then we must ask ourselves several questions. What does it mean to be a global biliteracy teacher or a global biliteracy citizen? What does the research indicate regarding the preparation and experiences of biliteracy student teachers while teaching abroad? What best teaching and learning practices do they "transport and unpack" while in their host countries? And what do biliteracy student teachers teaching abroad bring

back that enhances their life and educational experiences and skills in their own bilingual classrooms?

### **Biliteracy Student Teaching Abroad Program Models**

In a review of the literature, Quezada (2005) identified two program models for student teaching abroad. The first model may be defined as “faculty-initiated, university sponsored,” whereby school of education faculty have created or developed their bilingual student teaching programs by themselves and then partnered with international education opportunities or programs that already exist. The second model, defined as an “affiliated program,” is one that includes schools of education that are part of a consortium made up of various universities in the United States and partnered with host country universities. In the latter type of program, students complete their student teaching in four possible types of school settings: (1) Department of Defense K-12 Schools, (2) United States Department of State American-Sponsored Overseas Schools, (3) Independent International/American Schools, and (4) host country public schools.

The Department of Defense K-12 Schools serve children of military families stationed abroad. The language of instruction is English. Countries and continents include European, Asia, Guam, Puerto Rico, Panama, and Cuba.

United States Department of State American-Sponsored Overseas Schools are private schools open to all children on a tuition basis. These schools are supported by the Department of State and serve as models for American education overseas. Some are housed in U. S. embassies but some of the embassy schools are large and therefore located in areas with large numbers of American ex-patriots. Often children from diplomatic families attend these schools. The language of instruction is usually in English but sometimes two languages, English and the host language are offered.

The third type of schools are those private schools having a U. S. or British, Canadian or international curriculum not sponsored by the U. S. State Department. The language of instruction is English, however these schools usually offer two languages, English and the host language. A growing number of schools that are American Sponsored as well as those called Independent International/American offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs.

The fourth type of setting are host country schools which are public schools attended by the local children whose language of instruction is the country’s primary language. In order to offer international student teaching opportunities some universities participate in international consortiums with U.S. universities and universities abroad. Other universities base their international student teaching programs in schools of education where they have developed international partnerships with specific elementary or secondary schools or universities abroad.

**California State University System (CSUS)  
International Teacher Education Program (ITEP)**

The International Teacher Education Program (ITEP) is a CSU system-wide bilingual credential program for elementary teacher candidates. The program was approved in 1994 by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and is administrated through the CSU International Programs office. In 1994 the program originated in Mexico City; it was moved in 1998 to the state and city of Querétaro. Besides SDSU, the program's spearhead campus, there are nine other CSU campuses that participate, including San José State University, CSU Fresno, CSU East Bay, CSU Long Beach, CSU San Bernardino, CSU Sacramento, Sonoma State University, CSU Bakersfield, and CSU Fullerton (Alfaro, 2003).

The program, in its current form, brings CSU students statewide to SDSU for one partial spring and two partial summer "bookend" sessions of coursework and student teaching, while part of the summer, fall, and spring academic year is spent in Mexico. Participants attend coursework and student teach for a total of nine months in Mexico and three months at SDSU. During their stay in Mexico candidates have access to and work with private, indigenous rural community, and public schools. Candidates who complete the program receive a Bilingual Cross-Cultural and Language Academic Development (BCLAD) Credential from the CCTC (CSUS, 2004). It is the only international credential program in California approved by CCTC. Developed to enhance the language and cultural experience of future biliteracy teachers, the program was initially designed for teacher candidates who are not sufficiently proficient, or have little oral fluency, in Spanish, although Spanish may be their primary language. In the last five years a large number of fluent Spanish speakers have participated to further professionalize their vocabulary and develop deeper cultural knowledge.

The current program has developed a partnership with the Secretaria de Educación Publica (Mexico's State Department of Education) that allows United States biliteracy teacher candidates to student teach in Querétaro, Mexico, a colonial city of approximately 1,000, 000 residents located about 125 miles north of Mexico City. After a program orientation at SDSU, biliteracy teacher candidates spend nine months studying at the Escuela Normal del Estado de Querétaro (Normal State Teachers College of Querétaro) and engage their student teaching in three settings: private, public, and indigenous schools. Their indigenous experiences include schools in Oaxaca, to Atlacomulco, Mexico. Biliteracy teacher candidates participate eight-weeks in public schools, two weeks in private schools, and three weeks in indigenous schools during their student teaching practicum as well as take education methods courses taught by Mexican professors and university supervisors. Upon their return to the U.S., biliteracy teacher candidates complete their teacher credentialing program methods courses at SDSU and engage in ten additional weeks of student teaching in a Dual Language setting with cooperating

teachers who already hold a BCLAD credential (Alfaro, 2003). During their nine-month stay in Mexico, biliteracy teacher candidates live with host families, or sometimes with families of faculty, and interact with other Mexican national teacher education candidates in educational, cultural and language workshops.

In this manner, teacher candidates learn the California State Standards as well as those of Mexico and also learn from their experiences in various situated learning and teaching experiences. While living in Mexico, teacher candidates are taught courses in methods, language, and culture by Mexican faculty and concurrently teach in private, public, and indigenous schools. The opportunity to teach in different socio-cultural contexts with culturally heterogeneous student populations forces teacher candidates to experience cultural, pedagogical, and ideological dissonance, a situation that appears to lead to increased ideological clarity (Alfaro, 2003). The pedagogical experiences are structured in such a manner to propel teacher candidates to juxtapose their personal belief systems with those of the dominant society in both Mexico and the U.S. As a result, teachers are compelled to critically examine the political and ideological dimensions of minority education on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. The experience gained plays a large part in cultural learning (Cushner & Brislin, 1996).

From 1994-2005, approximately 180 teacher candidates participated and graduated from the program with 80% currently teaching in biliteracy settings and 20% in sheltered English classrooms in the U.S. Of course, this is not to imply that every candidate has automatically been transformed through these experiences. Candidates' reflective journal entries, program evaluations, anecdotal notes, and questionnaires indicate that those who initially enter the program with the predisposition (80%) to critically analyze issues related to teaching and have the willingness to acquire multiple perspectives on both sides of the border typically develop deeper ideological and pedagogical clarity (Alfaro, 2003). For the purpose of this study we focus on student teachers that developed such ideological clarity.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Framework**

This study utilized a participatory and qualitative activist research approach that draws from what Lather (1991) and Fine and Vanderslice (1992) refer to as emancipatory and praxis-oriented research. It was chosen because this type of research calls for empowering approaches where the researcher and the researched become the changer and the changed. Through case study methodology the researchers examined interview data, observations, and reflective journals that engaged teachers in dialogue about their own value orientation and teaching ideology. The research interrogates the heuristic process of four teachers from the ITEP and their experiences with respect to the ideological dissonance they faced as they negotiated their cultural positioning in becoming biliteracy teachers in an international context.

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### **Research Design and Questions**

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to analyze the biliteracy teachers' "self-reflection" accounts of their experience in an international student teaching setting with respect to teaching elementary students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, (2) to examine the underpinnings of their instructional ideological orientation, and (3) to examine significant experiences and key dimensions that propelled biliteracy teachers to develop ideological clarity and a teaching ideology with a global perspective. The research questions that guided this inquiry included: (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?

### **Methodology and Data Collection**

Participants included four biliteracy teachers who completed their preservice preparation and certification between (1994-2003) while participating in the ITEP in Mexico. These four participants were selected from a pool of twenty program graduates that volunteered to participate in this study and who were representative of the types of candidates in the program. The participants included one Latino male, one Latina female, one Caucasian male, and one Caucasian female. Participants also had to have a desire to examine their teaching ideology as it related to their international study abroad experience and current classroom practice. The four biliteracy teachers were asked to address the four general questions while being interviewed by one of the authors. The interview questions addressed the research questions described above.

### **Content Analysis**

An essential aspect of experiential learning is the search for patterns that unite previously isolated incidents. This search for patterns is undertaken to explore whether emotions, thoughts, behaviors, or observations occur with some regularity (Kolb, 1984; Luchner & Nadler, 1997). The data for the present study were analyzed qualitatively using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) method of unitizing and categorizing components. The interview data and journal entry essays were read and re-read separately by the two authors to assure some measure of coding reliability. The contents of the interview data and journal entry essays were independently marked and coded in an effort to discover conceptual categories and themes in the biliteracy teacher reflections. The researchers then met to compare their individual coding efforts and a set of common analytic categories emerged.

All of the coded sections of these essays were placed into their respective

“provisional categories” using the method of constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process was intended to inductively discover the “latent content” of the biliteracy teachers’ reflections (Babbie, 1999). We explored how the university students understood their experience(s) during their international biliteracy student teaching experience, and how they interpreted the meaning of the time spent learning and teaching in an international context with the elementary school children in Mexico. This analytic process initially yielded eight categories for coding the data. Through further analysis it was evident that within the eight categories, four general themes emerged that could be used to organize and interpret the data contained in the student’s reflective accounts through their journal entries and personal interviews. The personal interview teacher comments are included in the four general themes.

## **Results**

The four themes that emerged from the study include (1) perceived inequities, (2) teachers as change agents, (3) student intimacy, and (4) internal versus external relationships. These four phenomena are explored in relation to the proposed learning outcomes of the participation in the ITEP program in Mexico and the basic research questions. Accounts of the tensions perceived between the professional responsibilities as biliteracy teachers versus their own personal beliefs about educating English language learners are a central part of the interviews conducted for this study. Respondents recalled experiences that marked their decisions to teach or impart their own personal beliefs through their own “hidden” curriculum.

### ***First Theme: Perceived Inequities***

Perceived Inequities relates to the participants’ abilities to reflect on inequities that affect children on both sides of the borders due to language, national origin, skin color or socioeconomic status. The two Latino participants realized that what they brought to “the table” could impact children and therefore needed to be conscious of not perpetuating the same perceived inequities. One male Latino participant (Carlos) commented:

*Pues que te dire* (Well what can I tell you) . . . since I was born in Mexico and raised there for a good portion of my childhood, I was aware, first hand, of some of these issues, however, they were from a child’s perspective. I knew that people of dark skin, like me “prietito” were considered lower class and treated as such. I came to California thinking that it was going to be great, and that I would leave that racism behind. *Que behind ni que nada* (I did not leave that behind), quite the contrary. Here [in California] I was not only “prietito” but, I didn’t speak the language . . . I know what it is like to be from the other side.

In the response, the participant was trying to put words to his lived experience. As he continued to respond he was going through a process of reflection and knowing,

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processes that lead to conscientization. According to Freire (1985, p. 114) an individual must experience an “archaeology of consciousness” in order to create a natural path where consciousness emerges as the capacity for self-perception. The participant continued and reflected upon the experience returning to Mexico:

After returning to Mexico as a teacher candidate, with a focus on teaching and learning, my lens illuminated the similar inequalities and linguistic and cultural equity issues that exist across borders. However, in Mexico things are more blatant, *es como es* (it is how it is) and here in the U.S. things get sugar coated . . . under laws like English for the Children [California Proposition 227] and No Child Left Behind [NCLB]. As a result of participating in this program, and my experience as a classroom teacher, I am able to see how culture, language, and socioeconomic issues are at the heart of the politics in education across the borders.

A female Latina participant (Paloma) reflected on the classism she observed in the various school settings (private and public) resulting from the various situated experiences in Mexico. Below, Paloma speaks to the process of reflection and knowing that allowed her to disconfirm and, in some cases, confirm her preconceived views:

I came into the program thinking that I knew a lot, but it wasn't long before I learned how much I didn't know . . . you know, like I always saw Mexico *como pobre* (like poor), but after working in the private schools in Queret ro I realized that classism is a big issue there like it is here in California. I saw first hand how the elitists manage to take good care of their children. This caused me to analyze, with a more critical lens, the situation here in California. It is like if you step away from where you live, your comfort zone, you get a clearer view of what is always in front of you.

A female Caucasian participant (Alexa) realized that, at times, privilege has an affect on how other people see you and how they treat you. In some instances, the participant would meet people on the street and at school and related the following:

*En Mexico, todo mundo me decia, “que bien hablas el Espa ol”* (in Mexico everyone would say, “you speak Spanish so well”). I guess you could say that for being a “White Girl.” On the contrary, my colleague who was dark Indian looking spoke better Spanish and she was never complimented, so what was up with that?

The participant kept an open and critical mind and knew the orientation of being privileged and was very aware of how this could create blind spots.

The other male Caucasian participant (Josh) would also comment during his conversation on being complimented for the fluency of the language spoken:

As result of participating in this program, my Spanish was elevated to a level that no California, or for that matter, any Latin study abroad course, could teach me. I acquired an educational, culturally sensitive language that is necessary to communicate well with the Latino community. There are forms of values embedded in the language. I say this because I also studied in Spain, but that was basically irrelevant to the linguistic and cultural knowledge biliteracy teachers need to effectively work, in my case with



children from the barrio. I often have parents tell me, "*Maestro usted habla como Mexicano nativo*" ("Teacher, you speak like a native Mexican") that to me is the greatest compliment. This has most definitely helped my effective and sincere communication with my students' parents. I don't mean to sound arrogant, but they love me, and I of course love, value, and appreciate them.

**Second Theme: Teacher as Change Agent**

The notion of change agent refers to both challenges encountered and the possibility that they have the power to be change agents in their own classrooms through their personal commitments. The teacher candidates felt that the ITEP program was aligned with the pedagogical needs of their students in their present California classrooms. The perception is a result of the philosophical underpinnings and instruction provided by the Mexican professors. They spoke to the issue of "transfer" and how what they learned from their experiences student teaching abroad has easily transferred and how they have applied their skills in new situations, both professional and personal. One participant (Carlos) summarized his thoughts through the following statement:

To have the opportunity to work with critical educators from Mexico, that subscribe to Freire, Chomsky, and Vygotsky was intellectually and personally challenging and philosophically right on with what we need to know as teachers. It was an additional challenge to decipher the issues that transfer over to the California classroom after teaching for a few years, it has become clear to me.

He continued to discuss the personal turmoil he experienced when he started to critically analyze the situation both in Mexico and California. He kept mentioning how he "never thought it would hit [him] this hard." This was the beginning to Carlos' critical view of the teaching profession, or his ideological encounter:

I have got to stay strong in my position as a teacher and continue to fight for what is right for children (. . .) the hard part is living out your philosophy, *tusabes la politica* (you know the politics) our California professors were also on the same philosophical page. It [the Mexico experience] highlighted the realities of the children we face in our classrooms. I truly believe that this program offers what no other campus program can attempt to duplicate! It was a perfect fit for me; you know it is not for everybody.

The life lessons I learned when I lived and student taught in Mexico, I utilize in my classroom today. The infrastructure of the program provided me with the opportunity to question the inequities with the goal to create change. In this program we were expected to engage in projects of change. And as far as I am concerned change is what is necessary, *pero que batalla* (but, what a battle).

Carlos' journal entries reflect some incredible triumphs he had when working with the indigenous community in Oaxaca. The impact of what happened in that experience has given him the impetus to continue his work with parents and communities at large. To this end, Carlos demonstrates that he is able to make

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pedagogical connections that put the community at the heart of the meaning making process.

For Alexa the experience gave her an opportunity to “interrogate” her own rationale for being in the program as well as those who were there to “teach” her about what it means to be a “critical” educator:

What I respected about the program professors in Mexico was that they worked in solidarity in the struggle for justice and equity in education. They worked as a collection of cultural workers, working to decolonize their minds and the minds of their students. They exposed us to some powerful pedagogy. This was the first time I had heard of ‘engaged pedagogy.’ Very challenging, but the foundation we were exposed to serves me well to this day. This was the first time I was exposed to Freire. Wow, what a powerful charge. Then to come back to California to learn that we would continue with his teachings. (...) I especially embraced this because of the ‘pedagogy of hope’ that was presented to us.

The participant was truly grateful for the opportunity to work with critical educators from Mexico that subscribed to Freire (1998). She was intellectually and personally ready to engage in dialogue about critical pedagogy. In her response, she refers to Freire’s (1998) insistence on the importance of maintaining hopefulness and holding on to possible dreams for what education can be.

And the most important component to the critical pedagogy were the life lessons I learned when I lived and student taught in Mexico. I will carry them with me forever.

To this end Alexa demonstrates that she is able to make pedagogical connections that have helped her continue with the struggle for change.

### ***Third Theme: Student Intimacy and Significance***

Student intimacy and significance refers to the impact the children and their community had on the student teachers and the strong relationships and connections forged between them that has made significance in their lives as professionals and assisted in developing ideological clarity. Carlos provides significant experiences in his accounts:

*Hijole* (wow), there were so many, as you know . . . um . . . from my reflective journal entries . . . one of them would definitely be . . . student teaching in the Mexican public schools and seeing myself in the students that I was teaching. I worked with fourth grade students, a very mature group.

The other very significant experience was working with the indigenous community in Oaxaca in a bilingual school. Here, I don’t even know where to begin. . . . Um pues well, O.K. . . . because this event carried over to my classroom in California.

At this point his eyes got watery. His emotion and his struggle to put into words what had to be said was evident at this juncture of the interview. Carlos comes back to a warm smile to say:

I worked with an incredible teacher who taught me how to listen to children with my heart! I therefore became very close to my students, my significant lesson here was to get to know your student's backgrounds in order to make learning meaningful, *como dice* (like) Freire (says), every teacher a learner, every learner a teacher. That was incredible, but here is what is amazing . . . I have been dying to tell you this!

Upon listening to what Carlos has had to say, the researcher found herself engulfed in sharing in Carlos' experience. He took a deep breath, and shared the following:

Last year, when I took over this newcomer class (in California) and in the middle of a chaotic first day of school, late in the afternoon a new student was brought to my classroom, and the (f-----) (expletive) resource specialist, excuse my language, said to me; this is as wet as they get: straight from the jungle. I dealt with that comment later . . . as I was shuffling all of the paper work, *tu sabes* (you know), what the system does to domesticate us, this young man, unmatched socks, clothes that were too big for him, uncombed, etc . . . looked at me with this joy in his eyes, and said, "*Tu eras mi maestro en Oaxaca.*" ("You were my teacher in Oaxaca). He was now two years older and more mature looking then when I last saw him. At that moment I was not able to hold back the tears.

At this point of the interview, we were both crying, it was an incredibly powerful moment in the interview, but more importantly, a real bonding moment for both the researcher and Carlos as he said to me:

You asked me about a significant event, it does not get more significant than this in my book . . . this program positions us in a place/space that prepares us philosophically for the kind of students we will encounter in our California classrooms.

Carlos' journal entries during his work in Oaxaca were intensive and extensive. He talked about the beauty of the people and the children with whom he lived. He also talked about the spirituality that must be present in order to be fully engulfed with children. He wrote:

It is now my belief that teaching is a sacred vocation, if I expect to really reach and touch my children in a positive and powerful manner, I must do this with my soul and intellect. This cannot be separated or compromised!

Ethically speaking, his responses clearly reflect what Noddings (1984) refers to as being true to your ethical self, the "fundamental caring from the inside." Noddings states:

When my caring is directed to living things, I must consider their natures, ways of life, needs, and desires. And, although I can never accomplish it entirely, I try to apprehend the reality of the other (...) to be touched, to have aroused in me something that will disturb me my own ethical reality, I must see the other's reality as a possibility for my own. (p. 14)

Basically, Carlos is saying that he believes in teaching from the heart to be true

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to his ethical self. He has placed a priority in embracing his students' realities as a part of his personal and professional construct.

Similarly, Josh also comes to this understanding as he speaks of his experience when he began teaching at the public school he was assigned in Mexico:

I had a very significant experience at the public school where I student taught in Mexico a sixth grade classroom of very astute students. They were very respectful and well disciplined when the master teacher was there. So, naturally I thought, no problem taking over. One day when the teacher left me *alone* with them. They fully tested me. They went bonkers on me. They wanted to see how this *gavacho* (anglo) would respond. I didn't know the first thing about how to get them back to order so I started threatening them, and giving them my serious look, you know all those things we were taught in our classroom discipline course . . . this was to no avail. I had no recourse but, to appeal to their hearts, I told them, "I have come from California and am here because I want to have the opportunity to teach you and learn from you, *estoy muy triste, que en este momento siento como que soy un gran fracaso como maestro*" (I am very sad, that in this moment I feel like I am a failure as a teacher). I think I had tears in my eyes and my face was red and my body language showed a lot of emotion.

Josh got somewhat emotional during his response to this question, he talked about how he had never felt so helpless and weak, he was use to resolving things at an intellectual level, and in this case, with the authority that he "supposedly" had. He learned that as soon as he spoke to the students from his "heart" they stopped to listen. They apologized for their behavior and discussed how they would proceed in order to benefit their (students) learning and his (teacher) personal and professional improvement of teaching and learning.

The scenario described by Josh is exactly what Hooks (1994) reminds us is the act of teaching. To undertake such an act, to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students, is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin, Josh was missing the intimacy with his students. We discussed that teaching from the heart requires you to be open with your students. Josh learned through this experience that it is critical to present himself as a human being with struggles, in this manner his students will know who he really is:

I have placed a priority in embracing my students' realities as a part of my personal and professional construct, however I feel that it is equally important that students are aware of my reality so that there can be a real kinship between us.

Like Josh, Paloma made me take note of the following:

Umm . . . As you know from my reflective journal entries . . . one of them would definitely be . . . student teaching in the Mexican public schools, I was so far away from home but I really wasn't. What I mean is that although I was in a foreign place, I felt very much at home. I was treated with so much respect and love that it made me want to become a better teacher.

Her response parallels her journal reflections that indicate that she became intimately connected to her true vocation by allowing herself to embrace the love and respect that allowed her to know herself as a social being—to be human:

I learned to live in very humble conditions; this is not to say that I come from a materially privileged background. I realized after living and working in Mexico that what I considered to be humble conditions were nothing compared to how I lived when working with the indigenous Masahua community. I am ashamed to confess that I was starting to become very materialistic and somewhat assimilated to the values of the dominant culture, but after living and working in this community I was able to rekindle my appreciation for aspects of life that don't carry a dollar [\$] sign.

Her learning experiences were both joyful and rigorous. In *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, Freire (1998) argues that:

We must dare to learn how to dare in order to say no to the bureaucratization of the mind to which we are exposed every day. We must dare so that we can continue to do so even when it is so much more materially advantageous to stop daring. (p. 3)

To this end Paloma begins to demonstrate her acute ability to read her world to transform her realities through self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others.

Like the other participants in the program, Alexa was asked to “stretch” herself not only academically, but also emotionally, psychologically, and socially when it came to appreciating what it means to be a “teacher” for social justice:

I worked with the Otomí indigenous community. There I worked alongside a wonderful young woman named Flor. One night I was complaining to her about how much homework I had to do and that I was so tired etc. . . . a couple of days later, I found out that Flor walked five miles each day to get to and from work. Additionally, after school, she would plan for the next day, walk home and go work a second job. All this with joy. She was always positive, ready to go . . . I learned then what was meant by teaching as an act of love!

Alexa's reflective journal entries indicated how embarrassed she was for complaining, she kept stating that, she was so “spoiled” that she needed to learn about what it really means to struggle. She wrote:

(. . .) starting today I will commit to deconstructing and reconstructing my value system and what it really means to be strong. I am here to grow and to learn how to be aware and sensitive to my surroundings. . . . I have so much to learn! I want to know how I can transfer what I learn here to my personal and professional life.

Below, is an excerpt from Alexa's journal in which she also includes a piece of text which she recorded from Flor, her cooperating teacher in the indigenous school in Mexico where Alexa spent part of her teaching practicum.

*Alexa:* One day I was trying to take initiative and contribute to the teaching of the children with my California expertise. I expressed to Flor that I thought the children

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should be further along in writing, you know I had just come from a writer's workshop seminar, her response blew me away:

*Flor:* [. . .] our community has been oppressed for so long [. . .] many of our Otomí children do not see their lives, stories, and voice as valuable material for literature. We must not concern ourselves, so much with the mechanics of writing, but rather, with including our students in the literary world.

*Alexa:* I was so touched that her response aroused in me something that disturbed me—my own naïve reality. I learned that I must see other's reality as a possibility for my own.

Alexa is cognizant and made to be cognizant in some instances of the cultural and linguistic diversity, along with its political dimensions; that of the indigenous school exploring how the indigenous people keep their dignity and courage against all odds. Alexa's journal entries stated that from that day on she listened to her students' voices, seeking out their suggestions to build a curriculum that was grounded in their experiences. Alexa placed a priority on embracing her students' realities as a part of her personal and professional construct. Freire (1998) fervently argues:

It's impossible to talk of respect for students (. . .) without taking into consideration the conditions in which they are living and the importance of all the knowledge derived from life experience, which they bring with them to school. I can in no way underestimate this knowledge. Or what is worse, ridicule it (. . .).

#### **Fourth Theme: External Versus Internal Pressures**

External versus internal pressures refers to the pressure felt by biliteracy teachers in their current teaching positions regarding a standard based curriculum and the mismatch for their English language learners. Internally, they believe that the current system perpetuates a deficit model and that it does not take into account their children's socio-economic, cultural and language conditions. Therefore, in developing a clear teaching ideology the tensions between what the school district expects and what they believe is right for children supports their activist role in defining their teaching ideology. As one participant, Carlos, summarizes his feelings:

First of all, to get it right, as in tenure (. . .) I must be very well informed of all the content area standards, and the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, *por que aquí es todo lo que les importa* (because here that is all that matters). But, you and I know that it goes way beyond the standards . . . ummm . . . with my students and the space of freedom I have created in my teaching, I bring in reality! Students need to know/understand *sus condiciones* (their conditions), and most importantly what they can do to change their condition.

Basically, Carlos is focused on developing a resilience paradigm to advocate for a shift from the "risk" paradigm to a paradigm of hope and change. His response demonstrates his clear understanding of the politics he must deal with to stay

employed. However, he continually reflects and struggles to create a space of freedom for his students. He is well versed on the standards but is conscious about delivering a powerful pedagogy that will provide his students the tools necessary for them to empower themselves. According to Freire (1989) conscientization “is not a magical charm of revolutionaries, but a basic dimension of their reflective action” (p. 89).

Carlos further states:

It is important that I begin to take more risks, *por que* (because) I have gotten to the point where my mind gets colonized and paralyzed, consequently not allowing me to follow through with what I believe is right. I have been willing to take little risks, not big risks. I have become more knowledgeable about my personal values and the values of the school system that I teach for, *que nuevas* (what’s new) standards and tests, and English only is their value system.

Reflection is another important factor, *I learn so much from reflection* . . . I have been working with my own students on the reflective process . . . they are so mature when they engage in reflection. I do this through a ‘Socratic Seminar,’ a teaching method I was told by my principal is only for ‘gifted’ students. When she told me this, I asked her what made her think my students were not gifted? Maybe that is why my principal told you I am ‘too ambitious.’

Another example of this tension is expressed by Josh:

I don’t want to give you a standard answer, but I believe in the five R’s of teaching: respectful, responsive, responsible, resourceful, and reasonable. These are key elements to what I believe enables me to be culturally responsive to my students.

Josh went on to explain and give examples of how he respects his students, their language, culture, background, families, and communities. He emphasized his resourcefulness with respect to responding to their needs. He demonstrates a very caring heart for his students:

So . . . to answer your question more directly, my teaching ideology must consist of knowledge about how the standardized-prepackaged curriculum does not work for anyone, teachers can only know this if they take into account the dynamics of the community and students they teach. And since we have been talking I realize that dialogue addressing these issues is necessary for reflection and so on.

By the time he was done addressing this question he was overwhelmed and a little fatigued, he shared that he had a very hectic day at work. He was grappling with the heavy handed leadership in his district, which was very much opposed to his way of thinking with respect to what he deemed educationally sound for children. He is a very creative individual, he engages students in inquiry projects that infuse the multiple intelligences and the arts. This, he has been “told,” has no place in the classroom because he needs to have his students engaged in “Literacy” by way of the district’s definition.

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Another candidate, Paloma, stated:

Ummm . . . a clear teaching ideology transfers over to powerful teaching . . . I know what I need to do, but am not at a point in my life and career that I am able and willing to take big risks. I take risks with my students, behind closed doors, and in advising parents, but I don't take risks in public spaces. I want to come to the place where I have the courage to stand up in public to fight the fight. *Este es mi gran problema* (This is my big problem).

Paloma went on to share her struggles with matching her global teaching ideology to her classroom practice. We continued with a dialogue based on accepting and controlling fears. Remembering Freire (1998):

When we are faced with concrete fears, such as that of losing our jobs or of not being promoted, we feel the need to set certain limits to our fear. Before anything else, we begin to recognize that fear is a manifestation of our being alive. I do not hide my fears. But I must not allow my fears to immobilize me. Instead, I must control them, for it is in the very exercise of this control that my necessary courage is shared. (p. 41)

As can be observed from the above excerpt Paloma's responses depict her continuous struggles and commitment towards liberating her mind of fears that keep her from practicing the ideology to which she so fervently subscribes.

For Alexa, much the same is true:

For me the key dimension for developing a clear teaching ideology is to always be ready to learn, and when I learn something new I must change my pre-judgment or prejudice view(s). My life is full of rich learning experiences, it is up to me if I am to learn, only then can I teach, only then can I live out my ideology that includes multiple perspectives.

Alexa's response illuminates what Friere (1998) argues:

To learn ( . . . ) precedes to teach ( . . . ) [T]o teach is part of the very fabric of learning ( . . . ) [T]here is no valid teaching from which there does not emerge something learned and through which the learner does not become capable of recreating and remaking what has been thought ( . . . ) [T]eaching that does not emerge from the experience of learning cannot be learned by anyone. (p. 31)

### **Discussion**

Study abroad and international student teaching experiences have a positive effect on university students' cultural understanding of the host country (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Stachowski & Visconti, (1997); and Stachowski, Richardson, & Henderson, (2003) support such claims. Quinn, Barr, Jarchow, Powell, and McKay (1995) report that such experiences result in an expanded view and increased professional competence. Further, the review of the literature supports three themes based on student teaching self-reflections, program documentation and evaluation, and perceptions from educa-



tors who have hosted student teachers. Quezada (2005) reports three themes that support these claims: (1) instructional pedagogy, (2) learning about self, and (3) genuine multiculturalism.

This study adds to the results of previous research findings regarding student teaching in an international context setting and beyond the experience into the classroom itself. 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 (internal versus external relationships). Biliteracy teachers reported a sense of alienation where they felt they were no longer teaching “from the heart or from a social justice perspective” but from the textbook in order to meet the many demands of their school district. They observed daily inequities regarding how English language learners are viewed by some in the United States and with what can happen if one is not “part of the norm or dominant group” (perceived inequities). They felt a sense of isolation that created a dialogical space between their own beliefs about teaching and learning which limits moving forward towards praxis.

Yet, the need to maintain a dialogue regarding their teaching is what transforms education and keeps a transformative agenda alive. Their participation in the study and in the international student teaching experience developed a sense of community learning (student intimacy and significance) because it allowed them 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 (teacher as change agent).

## **Conclusion**

If we are to develop biliterate global citizens who support efforts of cultural and global diversity then we must increase efforts to globalize our institutions of higher education by infusing, integrating and implementing international biliteracy student teaching programs. We need to ensure that our biliteracy teacher candidates are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens. We need to ask ourselves if teachers have the required skills and are sensitive to and have respect for human dignity if we are to improve current and future inequities in education. These are the fundamental issues that we as educators face as we prepare future teachers (Kirkwood, 2001).

The key ingredient is to provide international biliteracy student teaching experiences if we want future teachers to be culturally and globally biliterate in meeting the challenges of this new century. Over 100 universities in the United States participate or provide some form of student teaching abroad, but only a few are approved to provide bilingual certification. As a result of participation in this biliteracy international student teaching abroad program the four biliteracy teachers in this study grew personally and professionally from their experiences. They

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too, as Quezada (2005) reported in his review of the literature, learned effective pedagogical practices and adapted their instructional lesson plans. They became more sensitive and were genuine to issues of multiculturalism and therefore were able to relate to experiences immigrant children and families go through in the United States. There is evidence, as reported in their self-reflections to show that they had an increase in self-efficacy as they learned more about themselves, the international community they lived in and the children they worked with. They moved beyond educational tourism (Quezada, 2005).

Further, as this article reports, there are many researchers who have documented ways to evaluate international student teaching program outcomes and the effects they have on participants both in the host country and, when they return to their country and the impact they have on their elementary students while teaching in their own U.S. classrooms. The outcomes of the biliteracy teachers that participated in this study indicate that this international experience and preparation positively influenced their present work with English language learners in their California classrooms.

Biliteracy teachers in this study ultimately held a predisposition/desire to prepare and think globally (Mexico) in order to more effectively teach locally (California). Their personal narratives uncover the experiential knowledge of biliteracy teachers, graduates of ITEP, as they struggle to develop ideological and pedagogical clarity in an international context. As teacher educators we realize the impact this study can have in the field of teacher education. This is only the beginning of a new way to prepare intercultural global minded teachers.

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