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International Volunteers' Serving as Teachers in Rural Indigenous Schools in Ecuador: Challenges and Opportunities for Culturally Relevant Teaching

Volontaires internationaux en tant que professeurs dans des écoles rurales et indigènes en Équateur : défis et opportunités d'un enseignement à contenu culturel

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Abstract

This ethnographic study is situated in the complexities and dilemmas of international aid education (IAE), the volunteer sector and cross-cultural learning and teaching. It examines the challenges and opportunities faced by three international volunteers (IVs) teaching in Indigenous communities in rural Ecuador. Through onsite observations and interviews, along with discussions with principal participants (IVs), and secondary participants (three local teachers and the volunteer program director), we present a narrative of the IVs experiences, pedagogical approaches and the factors which affect culturally relevant teaching (CRT) practices. This illustration serves as a platform for a cross-comparative analysis of key themes and issues related to CRT and anti-colonial education in the sphere of IAE. The paper concludes by identifying the implications of IAE may have on the local education and Indigenous knowledges and highlights issues and concerns that must be addressed so that anti-colonial CRT can occur within international cross-cultural contexts.

Résumé

Cette étude ethnographique se situe à la croisée des complications et des dilemmes entre l'éducation à l'aide internationale (EAI), le secteur du volontariat et l'enseignement/apprentissage interculturel. Elle examine les défis et les opportunités vécus par trois volontaires internationaux (VI) qui enseignent dans des écoles de communautés rurales et indigènes en Équateur. L'étude se compose d'observations sur le terrain et d'entrevues, ainsi que de discussions avec les participants principaux et trois participants secondaires (professeurs locaux et le directeur du programme de volontariat). Cet article est un récit qui raconte les expériences des participants principaux, les approches pédagogiques utilisées et les facteurs qui affectent l'enseignement à contenu culturel (ECC). Le but de ce récit est de servir de base pour une étude comparative entre plusieurs sites qui cherche à analyser les thèmes et les questions clés relatives à l'ECC et à l'enseignement anti colonial sous l'auspice de l'EAI. En conclusion, cet article identifie les implications que l'EAI pourrait avoir sur l'éducation locale et les savoirs indigènes. L'article met également en évidence les questions et les préoccupations qui devront être impérativement analysées pour que ce genre d'éducation puisse réellement être appelé éducation anti coloniale.

Introduction

This study emerged out of academic interests and personal concerns over how international non-governmental organizations' (INGO) involvement in education affects student learning globally. The growth of INGO participation in

international aid education (IAE), supported by the UN Millennium Development Goals(MDG) for universal primary education and by the UNESCO-led *Education for All* (EFA) program, has led to a considerable amount of acceptance and influence being afforded to INGO's and international volunteers (IVs) as educational aid agents.

The field of comparative, international, and development education(CIDE) presents research that both supports and critiques the global export of education in terms of its quality, social mobility, cultural relevance, equity, and affordability. World-culture theorists argue that *EFA* provides opportunity for empowerment of marginalized peoples by equalizing the playing field and spreading the most effective models of educational provision (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000). Meanwhile, World System and dependency theorists see the growth of global educational developments rooted in Western epistemologies and assert that they are neo-imperialist in nature (Tucker, 1999). Some cultural anthropologists such as Masemann (2003), claim that the attempts to "equalize educational opportunity on a global scale have led to the ignoring of cultural values and traditional forms of knowledge and ways of thinking" (p 130).

These deliberations suggest that IAE is a contested terrain, contingent on power and context. Accordingly, this study will inform the readers about the larger issues of IAE by (i) narrating the perspectives and pedagogy of three IVs teaching at three rural Indigenous schools in Ecuador, and (ii) uncovering and analyzing the challenges and opportunities for culturally relevant teaching to occur on the local level.

International Volunteerism: Research and Representations

This ethnographic study looks at IVs perceptions of their role as teacher and their pedagogy in a cross-cultural IAE context. To expand our understanding of IVs we will speak to the question of international volunteerism in academic research. We found that despite growth of international volunteerism alongside IAE over the past 60 years (Chang, 2005), there is little qualitative research regarding its nature, forms, purposes, and outcomes. Moreover, recent trends such as the rise of profit firms and agencies calling volunteers to teach in developing countries have been equally overlooked. This dearth of research is startlingly due to the ethical issues raised when economic interests, commoditization of charity, altruism, and as some argue, the exploitation of 'third world' contexts are linked to IAE and volunteerism.

In the few relevant studies made, IVs are subject to diverse representations and assumptions. For some, IVs are associated with missionaries, or those guided by religious or moral ethic. More modern conceptions of

volunteers have been politicized. While some see the IVs as idealistic leftists fighting for the socio-political and economic rights of the marginalized and oppressed, others view them as “the do-gooder tourists”. The Maseru Declaration in 1986 found that volunteerism is one of the most effective tools of development, given its altruistic and philanthropic emphases. Conversely, development studies are now beginning to demonstrate how the increase of NGOs and expatriate volunteers have contributed to the undermining of local programs, increased community inequalities, and serving larger hierarchical agendas (Chang, 2005). This is not to say that IVs are directly or actively involved with these troublesome outcomes yet it does suggest that they are not mere bystanders in development politics. This critical point highlights the need to investigate and analyze IVs' potential impacts in the sphere of IAE, especially since they remain under-researched and often ambiguously represented figures.

Culturally Relevant Teaching and Anti-Colonial Theories

To analyze the potential impacts of the IVs teaching impoverished Indigenous children in cross-cultural context we employ a critical framework that combines the tenets of culturally relevant teaching (CRT) and the principles of anti-colonial theories (ACT). The CRT's framework focuses on cultural diversities and differences between the students and teachers with the purpose of turn these differences into learning opportunities that ensure quality, equity, and pluralism in the classroom. CRT is a critical pedagogy that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p 16-17). Our basic idea of CRT comes from an amalgamation of various studies about creating culturally meaningful classrooms through teachers' development and transformed school culture (Banks, 2006; Gay, 2000; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997). Most research on CRT examines interactions between culture and teaching within an urban school setting in the context of the industrialized, North America and Europe. They focus on teachers' (usually white and middle class) work with minority students; reviewing curricular relevance, relationships, prejudices, hidden curricula, and school culture. In our view, the foundations of CRT can also be applied to international, cross-cultural contexts, given that IVs are teaching within ethnically, socially, and culturally diverse classrooms, where power differentials exist between students and teachers.

Such application of CRT by educators, however, requires an adaptation so that it speaks to and is reshaped by the local, Indigenous context in which the IVs are teaching. A key aspect of such adaptation is to address the (neo) colonial context in which Indigenous students in Ecuador are being taught by Western

volunteers. ACT argues that our current oppression and domination stems from colonial structures and hierarchies that are reinforced by capitalist industrialism, systemic discrimination, and the status quo which normalize them (Kempf, 2009). This is the contextual lens which directs the purpose, act and goals of CRT on the ground level. Further, by connecting CRT to ACT it creates space for critical discourse of *EFA*, and *IAE* projects in order discuss global equity, balance and a new world order (McConaghy, 2000). The combination of ACT as a social theory and CRT as a pedagogical method work together to address the colonial power structure of the student- teacher relationship, curriculum, school structure and culture; expanding on pedagogical aspects of CRT by borrowing anti-colonial strategies, such as critical self reflection. The purpose of this anti-colonial and CRT model is to use education as a tool to dismantle the colonial dimensions of the formal education systems (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001), which in turn improve comprehension of the ways internal classroom interactions and pedagogy are linked to external local matters, as well as to the *IAE* and development discourses.

In sum, this study uses ACT and CRT as theoretical and practical frames, which facilitate critical examinations of the opportunities and challenges for IVs to care for and be sensitive to their students' specific socio-cultural context and educational needs. They also illuminate the ways in which IVs understand and encourage their students' culture, local knowledge, lived experiences, and educational abilities, and how this in turn influences their educational approaches and practices.

Research Context and Methodology

An Ethnographic Research Project

Field research was undertaken at an educational project in rural Ecuador, run by a large INGO. This INGO, formed in 1995, is currently involved with 150 project partners in over 40 countries all over the world. It claims to represent a non-political, non-religious institution that provides support and services to its own educational projects, international charities, and non-profit governmental agencies by granting direct funding and access to volunteers.

The data collection sites were three state-run, rural public schools located in remote villages in the mountains of Ecuador, supported by the INGO. The students and communities were part of the Indigenous population in Ecuador that remains at the margins of a dominantly Ladino, Metizo society. This marginalization stems from years of colonial history, systemic racism against "Indios", and a deeply exclusionary language barrier between their native Quechua and Spanish, the former being Ecuador's official language.

Furthermore, their extreme geographical isolation, reliance on subsistence farming and lack of property ownership compound oppression within the society.

The educational projects at these schools came into being because of their need for extra educational assistance due to the lack of teacher availability in these remote areas, poor classroom resources, and inadequate food supplies. This INGO, as well as the schools, relied on IVs to meet all of these needs. First, the IVs presence in the schools keeps the teacher-student ratio low. Second, 70% of their participant fee, a lump sum paid beforehand by the volunteer, goes directly to project costs, which in turn provide additional educational and dietary resources to students and schools. The project director of the Latin America education projects put it as follows:

The Indigenous projects undertaken in Latin America simply would not function without volunteer money, and it's as simple as that. Without the physical presence of the volunteers, or the money generated through (INGO) invested into the projects, almost 2,000 children would not receive the education they are receiving from the volunteers. Nor would they receive fruit, school materials, food, celebrate birthdays, or even be at school. Nor would around 50 locals [workers] in the countries we work in be employed, directly or indirectly, without the (INGO) volunteers.

This sentiment that the volunteers are the force behind the success of these projects is reinforced by the INGO's slogan, "You make the Difference". Later we will discuss how these sentiments affect IVs' perceptions of their educational contributions on the project.

The data for this particular 8 week field study was conducted in three Indigenous rural schools in the Northern Highlands of Ecuador. We sought to include IVs' perspectives and practices so as to shed light on what was occurring on the ground level with IAE projects. The data collected came from 7 full day semi-structured observations of each 3 IV's classrooms (totaling 21 full day observations), 2 semi-structured interviews with each of the 3 IV principal participant at the beginning and end of their placement (about 60 minutes each), and one semi-structured interview with the secondary participants (the 3 local teachers and the project manager). In sum, 21 full-day formal classroom observations and 10 formal interviews were carried out. In addition, daily informal conversations with school staff, students and observations of the school and community during the project added to a rich qualitative data pool.

This full immersion ethnographic methodology allowed for a narrative case study, which elucidates the IVs' attitudes and perceptions of their roles as teacher, their daily teaching practices, methods and goals in the classroom, and their relationships with the local teachers and students. As for the analysis, the

data was connected to larger issue of IAE and CIDE research through bottom up identification of themes, insights and issues, and informed by literature on cultural relevant teaching and anti-colonial and development theories.

The ultimate goal of the narrative case studies is to provide in depth illustration of the complexities of cross-cultural teaching, the IVs' understanding and use of culturally relevant, localized knowledge and the impacts the IV/student relationship has on the students' learning. Further on, this narrative is analyzed so to speak to and expands upon claims of larger theoretical debates on IAE in order to gain a fuller understanding of what must be done in order for CRT to be integrated within schools that rely on IV teachers.

The next section will provide a rich and detailed overview of the three IVs' personal histories, self reflections and classroom contexts these narratives incorporate all of the data from on-site observations to the interviews and discussions conducted with both the principal and secondary participants.

Narrative Profiles: Three International Volunteer Teaching in Rural Indigenous Ecuador

The three principal participants in this study were international volunteers, Susan, Greta and Monica. Each IV is profiled individually through a narrative description that melds our interviews and observations. We chose a narrative style to illustrate the subtle differences between the IVs, as well as to counter generalizations about the type of people who volunteer internationally as teachers. Each profile looks at the participants' personal history, their schools and classroom experiences, their attitudes and perspectives on their roles as volunteers and their reasons for volunteering.

Susan: Three-month volunteer placement in Ecuador

Personal History

Susan, an American, was one of the older volunteers. She had recently ended her marriage and had taken an unpaid leave from work as a career counselor to pursue new opportunities. She grew up in a remote, rural North-Western state and still lives there today. Susan was a jovial woman with short, gray hair and a contagious laugh. Spanish was the first language Susan had ever studied and she was finding it very difficult to learn. She found that "in some cases I still can't understand anything".

School and Classroom: Teaching in the Clouds

Susan worked at *Waorani*, a small school located high up in the mountains, overlooking valleys and mountain tops. Susan was enthusiastic about the fact that she and her students were above the clouds and those clouds rolled into her

classroom on occasion. Contrasting this idyllic landscape was that Waorani was the most isolated and poorest of the communities studied. There were young toddlers barely able to walk, teetering around the school yard with no shoes or pants, while Susan wore layers upon layers of Gortex and Fleece; the sight was bone chilling. Also, witnessing children taking their hot lunches back up to their homes to share with their younger brothers and sisters was indicative of the severity of the food shortages at Waorani.

Waorani was the smallest of the three schools. There were only twenty students in total: fifteen students with a local teacher Luzane, and five students aged four to six, with Susan. Noted were many daily organizational problems within the school. Classes never once started on time; lunch break often extended well beyond the allotted thirty minutes; and there was a lack of communication and instruction between Luzane and Susan. This was due to the language barrier but also because both teachers were not prepared to vocalize all problems in their classroom as well as within the school. Moreover, Susan was the only volunteer at this school, which made the school's isolation more noticeable and the lack of support there more apparent.

Susan taught the primary aged children in the school. She had five students in total, three girls and two boys; they should have been ages four to five years old but there was one student who she believed was seven years old. Of this study's three IVs, Susan was most vocal about her difficulties as a non-native teacher with a lack of training:

My lack of Spanish makes it difficult to work closely with the teacher who handles 15 other students in the school. However, I have been given direction from (the INGO) and I've been given Ecuadorian textbooks that show me what they (the students) should be doing and where they should be. In taking a look at those, I realize that these students are much further behind.

Susan worked around her difficulties with Spanish by keeping her lessons within the realm of her language abilities. She admitted that:

My biggest barrier in all this is my lack of language skills and I find that very, very, very frustrating. I feel if I were teaching this in English I'd feel I'd have more control over the classroom. I feel we could move through things. Not so much to move through the curriculum faster but that I could be more attuned with [sic] ability to do the work.

Perceptions of her role as volunteer teacher: Helping Hand

Susan contributed in many different *helper-type* roles. As for her teaching role, Susan believed she "provided the regular teacher with a smaller classroom, fifteen kids over fewer grades." For Susan, being a foreigner provided "them [her

students] also with the opportunity, a view to the outside world a little bit... a sense; I don't want to say stability um, of adult attention that they may not get too much of at home. At home their role is definitely that of work."

An important aspect of her volunteer work was that she helped monetarily and prepared food for the children. In fact, she never spoke directly to her role as a teacher during interviews about her input at the school. This is most likely due to the fact that Susan did not see herself as a professional teacher and as such tried to be helpful in other ways. In fact, Susan started her own on-line fundraiser for the community. By the time Susan left Ecuador for Peru she had raised over one thousand dollars for the INGO's community building projects.

Although Susan did not see herself as a 'real' teacher, she did view her additional roles, including her financial contributions, as compensation for her lack of abilities as a trained professional. Throughout her placement, Susan held a "deficit" view of her teaching contributions, which was that her presence in the classroom was at least better than the alternative. Susan elucidated this notion by saying; "if they were in a classroom of twenty students and one teacher, the teacher obviously can't give them what one person can, even though I am not a trained teacher." This deficit concept was a sentiment shared by all three volunteers in this study and is a theme we will examine later.

Greta: Six-month volunteer placement in Ecuador

Greta was born in Berlin the day the Berlin Wall fell. She was the first of a new generation to live in a united Germany. Greta had wild brown hair that she pulled back in a pony tail and wore baggy clothing that hung off her thin body. At times she was shy and reserved, while at other times she was candid and open, seemingly unaware and unconcerned about what others thought of what she said or did.

Although Greta had been exposed to many European cultures on family vacations, coming to Ecuador was one of her first experience with independent travels. This was apparent in her timidity when meeting the new volunteers and her difficulties with homesickness. She was the youngest volunteer, having just graduated from high school. Yet she was eager to learn as much as possible about the new people and places she visited. Greta spoke four languages at an advanced level: German; English; French; and Spanish. She was one of the few volunteers to ever study the Indigenous language of her students, Quechua. By the end of her placement she was actually proficient in speaking the language. She also forged a friendship with the local teaching assistant Carlos at her school. Greta was the only volunteer to have made a personal friend with a teacher at any of the schools during this research. Of the three participants, Greta was the only one

with no prior teaching experience. She felt that, “In general, for teaching, I would have needed a bit more preparation. I didn’t know like anything. But it works somehow, it has to work somehow. I wasn’t prepared. I have never taught before I was only a student.”

That being said, her advanced, almost flawless grasp of the Spanish language was a great advantage in the classroom. She was an exception to the norm as Cathy, the project manager, told me that generally volunteers only had from basic to intermediate Spanish.

Greta taught at *Manay*, the medium-sized school, further down the mountain from Waorani. Manay had thirty-one students, one local teacher Esmeralda, and an assistant teacher, Carlos. Esmeralda was considered an intimidating school director by the students, as well as the IVs. Esmeralda taught grades two to six, ages seven to eleven. She did it with seeming ease, commanding respect from all the students at the school. The project manager, Cathy explained that, although Esmeralda does not go out of her way to guide and mentor the IVs, she is available for guidance, if the volunteers schedule it with her: “I think Esmeralda is the type that if you go directly to her and don’t waste her time, she will answer questions about the school or the community. I think she likes being consulted because it’s a sign of respect to her.”

Greta taught the special needs’ class of four students, three of which were siblings. These children were ostracized at school by the other students for reasons Greta was uncertain of but felt that they (her students) “have problems in the community or they are seen as the worst children”. Greta also felt that Esmeralda “doesn’t really care too much about them”. Greta said Esmeralda’s only aim is that they should be able to read and write and perform basic mathematics. After that, she felt free to teach whatever she wanted:

Normally I am quite flexible. I have different things to do and I see how fast they learn or how it’s going. And normally I plan for every child something else. I have notebooks for them so I write exercises in them, for every child something different. I do it to whatever their level is, because I have one child who is nine years old, one is ten, one who is twelve, one who is fifteen.

She varied their tests according to their levels. She taught Language, Math, and Science to her students. She also taught group English, Arts, and Music classes with the oldest students at the school a few times during the week.

Of all three classrooms observed, Greta’s class was the most unruly. It was difficult for Greta to hold their attention for long periods of time. Her students would often walk out of class without asking, sing during the lessons, or sleep on the desks instead of working. Still, Greta maintained a good rapport with her students and did not see these behaviors as disrespectful. She thought this

was because her students were previously overlooked and not held to the same standards as the other students. Furthermore, Greta respected her students' needs, and was happy to let them roam for a while and pause during lessons in order to regain their attention. However at times, this leniency resulted in assignments not being completed and lessons not being fully taught.

According to Greta, volunteers make significant contributions to the project. She said:

We provide quite much money that we spend beforehand (the initial volunteer fee). I think it's much money that goes to the schools to provide food and materials, and that we actually also buy the food and bring it up. Well, we prepare classes so we provide material and, like, the knowledge. I think it's also quite good that we are from other countries because they get to know about other countries and cultures.

Describing her role in the classroom, Greta acknowledged her struggle as follows:

It's really hard because you really want to teach them, you want them to learn something and to become better and when you don't see change or when you see that they suddenly step back then it's quite frustrating... You ask yourself or you wonder why it doesn't happen or why it doesn't work.

She was worried that, "I may want to go forward too quickly and I should repeat more or maybe they are just having a bad day". Greta's lack of formal training and teaching experience made it difficult for her to gauge what common classroom speed bumps were and what may have been problematic in her lessons and pedagogy.

Monica: Six-week volunteer placement in Ecuador

Monica was a statuesque young woman with an easygoing personality that made her popular with other volunteers on the project. She was also a perfectionist and was meticulously organized while on the project. Although she was young, she had extensively travelled with her family and independently throughout the United States and Central America. Monica not only knew many different places in the world, but of the three volunteers, she had done the most extensive volunteer work abroad. This may have been why Monica was the most content with the level of work expected of her. "It's pretty labour-intensive and full on, with all the lesson planning, but that's what I signed up for." Also, her level of Spanish was very high. She first learned it in an informal setting, while volunteering in Nicaragua, but "fell in love with the language". At the time of this research, Monica was taking it formally as a second major in University.

Monica taught at *Atahualpa*, the largest and least isolated of the three schools, located in the most prosperous of the three communities. Sisa was the head teacher of the school. Sisa, of all the local teachers on the projects, had the most consistent contact with the IVs. She and Monica had a positive relationship; Monica said that it had been lovely working for Sisa and that “it sounds as though she is the most caring of the (local) teachers on the projects”. Sisa held weekly meetings with the volunteers to make sure there were no problems and that everyone was prepared with lesson guidelines for the next week’s classes. Atahualpa was also the most organized and formally structured of the three schools. Every morning there was a bell and students would stand at attention, sing the national anthem either in Quechua or Spanish, and listen to the rules of the school as outlined by Sisa. Furthermore, Sisa used an Indigenous curriculum called “Red de Chinchinca”, which was created by Indigenous educators for the particular Indigenous region in Ecuador. The other schools had this curriculum resource, but did not often use it nor share its contents with the volunteers, possibly because it was supplementary, and as such, not a part of the Ecuadorian standardized evaluation process.

When Monica arrived on the project, there were no volunteers at Atahualpa. It was decided by Cathy, the project manager that she would take over class level two from Sisa. Her four students were six years of age, although she said she could not be certain about this “because a lot of these kids don’t know what year they are born in. They are all of varying abilities; two are quite strong one is particularly strong, and the other two need a lot more help.”

She followed the curriculum provided by Sisa on language, mathematics, social sciences, art and sport. Of all the volunteers, she was the only one who felt it necessary to adhere to the curriculum she was given, though she said she still had “the freedom to move forward progressively”, if she chose to do so.

Monica defined her roles as a teacher inside and a protector outside of the classroom. Inside her classroom she “keeps the kids all in line, makes sure they are working productively, makes sure if they struggle with a concept that I pull them up on that and help them out”. Outside of the classroom, she was:

making sure the kids are safe, making sure they have proper clothes on, that they have shoes to stay warm and are healthy, making sure they are eating; the food’s been cooked on time; and that a mother is there(to cook the daily lunch). Last week we had an incident where the mother didn’t show up to cook. But I think our biggest responsibility would be making sure these kids are fed every day.

The idea of IV as provider is as a recurring theme that will be discussed later in the analysis.

Profile Summaries

These profiles highlight various aspects of the three principal participants' personal histories, the classroom context, and their perceptions of their roles as IVs teaching abroad. This illustrates differences amongst the three IVs: the diversity of their life experiences and most importantly their views on education and teaching in their classrooms. Although these IVs had arrived from western industrialized countries and had Euro-centric educational backgrounds, they varied in many ways: their preparedness, willingness to learn, language abilities, and views of educating Indigenous students. Nevertheless, we found two themes pertinent to our exploration of how CRT can be enacted in volunteer cross-cultural educational settings.

They are:

- IVs' deficit notions of their roles as volunteers and how this affected their responsibilities as teachers in the classroom.
- Teacher-student difference as a way to increase IVs' cultural awareness and abilities as culturally relevant teachers.

This following section will explore these themes in greater depth so that we may further analyze opportunities for CRT that arose from of the challenges and success of the three IVs.

Emerging Themes: Challenges and Opportunities for Culturally Relevant Teaching

Deficit Notions of Volunteer Teaching and Its Effects on Teachers' Efficacy and Responsibility

The three IVs shared a *deficit view* of their roles as teachers. This view held that regardless of the quality of their teaching, it was better than having nothing at all or having local teachers overwhelmed with crowded classrooms. This *better than nothing* mentality was a prevalent outlook that can have repercussions for IAE projects reliant on IVs. Earlier we spoke of the volunteers' role as being larger than just teaching. The three IV's thought of themselves as providers of food, resources, amenities, and conduits to and from the outside world. This idea of being a contributor as opposed to a teacher at times shifted IVs focus from their main role as teacher and contributed to their lack of motivation and self reflection on how their teaching may be affecting their students' education and lives. A cross-comparison between Susan, Greta and Monica illustrates how this shared deficit notion manifested itself in their practices and what implications this has on volunteer actors on IAE projects.

Susan was inexperienced and lacked confidence as a teacher. She was also teaching at the school with the least amount of organization and support and

had major difficulties with her Spanish. Therefore, it is easy to see how Susan, an untrained IV, could become overwhelmed by her classroom responsibilities. During most observations she confessed that either the researcher had “come on a bad day” or that “she was completely unprepared” for school. The chaotic nature of her classroom and its general sense of disarray were exacerbated by her deficit notions of her role on the project which undermined her attempts at professional development or self reflection. For Susan her role was as an extra hand not a professional teacher:

I provide the regular teacher with a smaller classroom, fifteen kids over fewer grades... If they were in a classroom of twenty students and one teacher, the teacher obviously can't give them what one person can, even though I am not a trained teacher.

The view that her presence on the project was a contribution steered her away from adopting the full responsibility of a teacher, which in turn, made it more difficult to deal with challenges in the classroom.

Greta was also influenced by the idea that her work at the school was “better than nothing”. This perception was connected to her ability to make a change. Greta was aware of the great task she had as a teacher,

I think that school is one of the biggest things in their lives, probably for every student. So I mean I have a really big responsibility because I am their teacher. Especially in their lives it's quite important because it's like the only real input, like they get to their minds...And um I think I don't know how much I change in what they know or teach them but I think it's better than nothing.

This admission that at least her teaching was “better than nothing” indicates that Greta was torn between her “big responsibility” and her perceptions that whatever she did in the classroom would somehow be useful. From working with Greta for two months, it was apparent that this ambivalence did not come from a lack of caring; rather it stemmed from Greta's uncertainty about her teaching abilities. Greta adopted this ‘better than nothing’ perspective so that she could feel that she was positively contributing, while at times she admitted, she was unsure of the effects of her teaching on her students.

Nevertheless, this deficit perspective was not wholly unconstructive. Monica held a similar deficit view to Susan and Greta. Her outlook was that without her, the kids would not be getting the attention and care she could provide and that her contribution was thus better than, “playing with plasticine for two hours”. She confessed that “I like being on a project where they really need your help, like if I wasn't there, they actually would not have a teacher, so that's pretty cool”. Monica's view that her students would be worse off without

her actually fuelled her drive to provide her students with the best education she could provide. She worried that if she did not keep the academic standards high, it would disadvantage them after she left: “I want to give them the best shot in third grade and being ready for when they would have the best teacher (Sisa) before they go to fourth grade where the teacher is not as good”. In this case, the deficit view motivated Monica to make a full effort, to be open to ideas from colleagues and students, and to keep organized so as to effectively hand over the classroom to the incoming IV. That being said, INGOs cannot rely on the hope that inspiration to work hard will come from IVs' internal motivations. The final section on praxis will illustrate the need for a more balanced perspective as to why they are volunteering and the purpose of their role as teacher.

Cross-Cultural Learning: When Students become Teachers

The idea of *reverse learning*, i.e. teachers learning from their students, was an unexpected outcome of the cross-cultural relationships that I found in Monica's and to a lesser degree in Greta's classrooms. Reverse learning (or reverse teaching) creates a reciprocal act of learning that was beneficial to both students and teachers in different ways. This concept is part of Paulo Freire's (1998) idea that teacher-student relationships should be dialectical and reciprocal. This give-take relationship allowed the IVs to become more acculturated and knowledgeable about their student's environment, community, and personal lives. It also challenged students to think about their own environment, community, and lives in new ways, which occurred both inside and outside of Monica's and Greta's classrooms. Furthermore, the students-as-teachers role enhanced students' confidence, since they saw themselves as not only capable of learning, but also of teaching. This type of learning connected the students to their IV teachers in more meaningful ways and was the most profound form of culturally relevant learning about local knowledge that occurred at the schools. Classroom observations revealed that the most engaging, successful, and relevant classes were the ones where the IVs gave their students time and encouragement to explore their own worlds by showing it to their foreign teachers. Yet, creating this dialectical relationship between learning and teaching was not an explicit teaching approach that either Monica or Greta consciously adopted. Reverse learning sprung from their openness to learn about new cultures and from their close relationships with their students. Monica quickly became aware of the benefits that reverse learning had on her students:

I feel like they've probably taught me a lot. I think that them [her students] verbalizing and explaining things, is knowledge and education in and of itself, you know. I don't think I was completely prepared about this aspect of my students' lives [their personal lives] by INGO or Sisa, but I was open to it.

This openness to learning came from both Monica and Greta's eagerness to learn about the country and communities they were in. Both IVs came to this project to experience a new culture and enhance their Spanish and were receptive of their students as a conduit to learn more about where they were. Their curiosity regarding their students' lives, combined with the flexibility in the curriculum, allowed them to engage their students through personal friendships, outdoor lessons and field trips. They both tried to connect their teaching to their students' own lives and the environment. Both IVs voiced dislike for the mandated Ecuadorian textbook, which Greta said "really refers to Mestizo and also to more city children" than to the local contexts. Monica resisted using the textbook because as she put it, the children "really wouldn't know what to do with it". Since neither IV liked working directly from the Ecuadorian textbook, this prompted them to create more specific lessons aimed at involving their students.

Reverse learning was most visible in Monica's classroom. Monica incorporated field trips in her natural science classes; "For sciences I keep things very Atahualpa based". On these field trips her students took on the teacher's role. Her field trip illustrates this reverse learning:

I took my kids on a field trip and they only knew the names [of plants] in Quechua, so we kind of went with it. We talk about them ...they were pulling out wild berries and plants and I had no idea what was going on, but they were really in their element, running around, climbing up cliffs. I just let them run free a bit, there was no stopping them but, they kept coming back and bringing me stuff to try and explain what it was. So it was pretty cool, I loved it...I definitely think my kids have taught me a lot.

In Greta's case, reverse learning sprang from the friendships she forged with her students. Greta was a younger volunteer and still shared an innocent and playful personality with her students. She said "I am the teacher, so I am kind of an authority, but I also try not to be too distanced. Because I like them and they like having some fun sometimes, just making jokes. So I like to be sometimes at their level and not like an adult, because I'm not really an adult."

By trying to interact as a peer instead of an authority figure, Greta created an open and mutually beneficial teacher-learner relationship. Often her students helped her to learn new words in Quechua, about different families in the community and taught her about who was related to whom at school. When Greta wrote individual lessons in her students' notebooks, she made reference to specific people in her students' lives and past experiences her students had had. She also asked her students to create their own list of classroom values and rules,

which they posted on the wall. Greta was able to incorporate what she had learned from her students into her lessons so that they were relevant to her students' environment, and their lived experiences.

Nevertheless, IVs were outsiders in many ways. They did not speak in their students' mother tongue and were not privy to the inner workings of the communities, their cultural norms and mores. They looked, sounded and acted differently than the local teachers and their students. These boundaries, in addition to their temporary status as IV teacher, made it difficult for more genuine CRT to occur. However, learning at times occurred through difference and if reverse learning is intentionally applied as part of IVs pedagogy, it can allow the IVs to create culturally relevant learning environments for both themselves and their students. The next section will look at enhancing the potential for CRT in similar cross-cultural contexts.

Praxis: Finding Opportunities for Culturally Relevant Teaching within the challenges and successes of International Volunteers as Teachers

The IVs personal narratives contextualize their life histories, their educational views and practices, and help us to examine the challenges and opportunities for CRT by IVs teaching in cross-cultural contexts. The next section will expand on the initial findings in order to explore the opportunities for IAE to become more relevant to Indigenous students' lives and environment.

Increasing Teacher Efficacy and Accountability: Countering their Deficit Notions of the Volunteer

Teacher efficacy is found to be linked to student success, because teachers who believe they can positively encourage student learning and achievement are more likely to implement plans to achieve their goals with students (Bruce & Ross, 2008). Given that most IVs are not formally trained as teachers it is not surprising that the IVs' belief in their abilities to organize and accomplish actions relevant to the students' success was generally low.

To increase IVs' efficacy we must address the way volunteers perceive themselves and their roles on such projects. The IVs in this study tended to view their contribution as only 'better than nothing' or better than the existing alternative, which they perceived to be of very little value. This view was affirmed by the local teachers and the project manager, who were grateful to have extra hands to unburden them. Esmeralda, the teacher at Manay, underscored this perspective when she spoke of the challenges and obstacles the schools faced:

The greatest obstacle in this school is that we do not have another teacher who can help and we have many levels with only one teacher. But this is an obstacle that we have surpassed with the presence of the volunteers...Therefore, thank

you to the volunteers for superseding those problems. There are obstacles but there are solutions thanks to the volunteers.

This gratitude for the IVs was reinforced by Cathy, the project manager, who stated that one way she manages the difficulties is by “trying to turn that around into a positive, as in, if you weren’t here, imagine what would happen, so this is your value”. Although everyone involved with the school seemed grateful for the extra help, this gratitude may have perpetuated the notion that the volunteers’ mere presence at school sufficed. This deficit notion the volunteers held of their roles sometimes led to a lack of professional accountability towards their students’ personal and academic wellbeing. Setting the teaching standard at ‘better than nothing’ did not actively motivate them to do their best. Cathy stated this succinctly when speaking about the lesson planning workshops she tried to implement:

The difficulty is they are volunteers, so they are not people I can manage on a performance basis. There is a limit to what we can do to help before the volunteer has to step up. You can put some pressure on them because they’ve signed up for this, they’re like voluntary volunteers, but you can’t really pressure them, because they are not in a competitive environment where they are required to perform.

This issue of volunteer management comes from the fact volunteer roles are often too flexible and unclear. However, according to role identity theory, “the more others identify one with a particular role the more the individual internalizes the role and incorporates it into the self-concept” (Finkelstein, 2007, p, 10). With this in mind, there is an opportunity for IVs to proactively adopt more structured and concrete connections between their role as volunteer and teacher. Instead of seeing themselves as volunteers, they can be encouraged to perceive themselves as teachers, which would help with classroom motivation as they would strive to be more consistent with their adopted volunteer teacher role identity. Below we will look at ways to foster and reinforce the process of professionalizing the notion of volunteer.

Redefining the Volunteer

Deficit notions are reinforced by a misperception that volunteers are not professionals and as such standards and accountability do not exist or should be lowered. Consequently, there is a need to professionalize IVs’ attitudes and perceptions of their roles as teachers. Some would argue that the professional and the volunteer are antithetical by nature. Nonetheless, we argue that work identity is a subjective psychology and teacher professionalism is a socially constructed

term that is continually being redefined by theory, policy and practice in education. In fact, teacher professionalism is a work in progress (Hilferty, 2008). In other words, the concept of professional can be expounded, modified and redefined so that IVs begin to see themselves as knowledgeable, valuable, committed to, and capable of becoming good teachers.

It is, however, important to be realistic. To promote IVs' professionalism and efficacy requires many steps, one of which is their formal orientation at both the recruitment and training stages. Clear guidelines for the IVs' roles as teachers before they enter the project should be mandatory. All three IVs expressed the concern that did not know what to expect before they arrived. This led to some viewing their teaching responsibilities as too onerous and difficult. When IVs feel overwhelmed and under-qualified, it becomes easy to default to the deficit attitude. Therefore, clarity about expectations, duties, and goals of the position should be outlined by the INGO and accepted by IVs before they arrive on the project. This may help the IVs be aware of and prepared to take on all the responsibilities of full time teachers. This would tackle the issue that project manager Cathy lamented: IVs who are not willing or able to commit to their roles as full time teachers.

Further, there is a need to organize a system that ensures that all the IVs are planning and documenting their daily lessons and weekly progress reports. Documenting classroom routines and progress and transferring this information to new IVs is critical to fostering a sense of continuity and professionalism and for helping with classroom organization and consistency. Greta highlighted this difficulty when she stated, "it's hard when you come here and you don't know what they know, they should know, or what the teacher wants them to know". This idea of implementing a teaching plan for each classroom was a recommendation during the teacher workshop training. Monica took up this planning system; keeping track of her lesson plans and the students' progress. This system also allowed her to successfully hand over her class to the incoming IV who had readily available documentation of what the students had done, where they had difficulties, where they excelled and the direction in which they were headed. We advocate that classroom planners should not just be a recommendation but a requirement of which the IVs are informed prior to their arrival and trained to employ while on the project. Furthermore, IVs should be offered workshops and training on the local culture, history, and the goals of the schools as well as the Ecuadorean education system. Such workshops should be implemented by experienced (preferably local) teachers, allowing the stakeholder to address the misperception of volunteer and build on existing knowledge. This would create a professional foundation that enhances the IVs' induction as a

teacher, their efficacy and cultural awareness on educational projects such as these.

Cultivating CRT by Learning through Cultural Differences

Previous discussions looked at managing the *difficulties* inherent in cross-cultural teaching so that IVs can be better prepared to teach. Now we will look at the benefits of having IVs teaching and how engagement with their cultural differences can cultivate CRT. During this research, alternative modes of CRT occurred due to the cross-cultural nature of the IV/student relationship. Mainly, cross-cultural learning and CRT occurred because IVs came to these projects out of a desire to learn from a different culture. Overall, the IVs were happy to immerse themselves in a foreign language, land and culture, and shared appreciation for diversity and difference.

The IVs' desire to learn about their students allowed the role of student and teacher to be more interchangeable and reciprocal. All three participants wanted to expose their students to other cultures so that they could have a better understanding of the outside world and be more open and prepared should they want to leave their communities. At the same time, these IVs were open to learning about their students' culture, which to them was unfamiliar. This was mutually beneficial: it allowed their students to learn about the globalizing world and also gave their students the opportunity to educate the IVs about their environment and worldviews. Much of this student-teacher learning emerged out of students' and IVs' natural curiosity and practical needs that came from daily interactions. Even so, this natural curiosity and practicality must be harnessed and made an explicit component of CRT. INGOs can facilitate culturally relevant learning by encouraging IVs through suggestions, examples, and opportunities as outlined below.

Place-Based Education (PBE)

Place-based education is a crucial element of anti-colonial CRT in that it is a "critical pedagogy of place that purports to identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments, and abandon ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). At the three schools in this study, it was apparent that the land was an integral part of these students' educational experiences; and to varying extents PBE was enacted by all three local teachers. They all emphasized the importance of connecting their students about their land and viewed their schools as community centers, adopting one form or another of PBE (e.g., teaching the names and uses of crops indigenous to the area or how to grow and

tend to plants as part of a reforestation project). Their emphasis on PBE for their students came from a concern over the diminishing of inter-generational learning and traditional customs, due to parents leaving the countryside to work in the nearby cities. Sisa illustrated this as follows:

You know that the community here is economically very low. It's (the community) poor as we all know. And our education should be focused on that. For the older kids the idea is to teach the culture of working with the land. This is assistance for them, so they can work with the land because each child has a little land, each family has land. So they can cultivate food and grains in order to have nourishment. This is very important.

One way this was achieved was through artisan workshops and environmental projects. Clearly, the IVs would not be able to teach these students the traditional modes of production. However, their genuine interest and support in learning about their students' lived traditions and cultures could be a key factor in promoting this. IVs could participate by learning with and from the students about their customs, traditions, and ways of life in and out of the classroom. Similarly, the IVs could better appreciate the boundaries of what their students want them to know and be aware of the power differential and their privileged status, which they possess as teachers and international volunteers. An understanding of power, privilege, and difference must be a comprehensive component of the IVs' training before, upon, and throughout their placements at these schools. This can be through information sessions, workshops on the history and struggles of Indigenous peoples in Ecuador (and globally), and a delineation of the personal and professional boundaries they should respectively maintain.

We found that via cross-cultural learning and anti-colonial pedagogy CRT can occur *if* (i) implicit mandates promote IVs to become actively involved in their students' cultural traditions and way of living; and (ii) explicit programming fosters learning environments where the students can comfortably teach IVs about their own lived experiences and perceptions of the world.

The Implicit and Explicit Aspects of CRT

To resist dominant Western worldviews and begin to acknowledge, value and incorporate Indigenous students' own epistemologies, implicit and explicit aspects of CRT must be undertaken. The INGO must prepare IVs for the fact that they are on the project not only to teach but to learn from their students. The IVs should be given instructions on the many ways cross-cultural learning can be achieved. This could be done implicitly through the lesson planning workshop that all IVs attend during their first week on the project. Here, they could be

given practical examples of how a regular lesson can be transformed into cross-cultural teaching and learning (e.g., asking the students to share their own lived experiences through art, creative writing, and drama or even through play). Student led group presentations on customs, traditions, and history that they share, will allow them to learn from one another while expanding their teachers' comprehension of their community life. Outdoor activities and field trips help students to tacitly take on the role of teachers while exploring and learning from their environment. In order for these outdoor excursions to be culturally sound, the IVs could work with the local teachers to prepare lessons so that the students could teach the IV something new about their environment and surroundings. In this way, the learning process would be supported by the local teachers, enacted by the students, and enhance the cultural competence of the IV. This reciprocal and integrated form of teaching and learning through cross-cultural difference would be a key benefit to emphasizing CRT.

Another way to integrate cross-cultural teaching and learning is to embrace explicit structural changes that would implement PBE. Certain structures at these schools already existed, which connected the students to their land and culture. There were plant projects funded by various international and local charitable organizations that provided plants for the students to tend and cultivate. Also, Waorani had sewing lessons for the students to practice their needle work. To enhance these projects, students could be seen as mentors to the IVs, imparting their knowledge about the land, the cultivation process, or the sewing of traditional patterns. However, for this relationship to be fostered, the INGO must support consistent and frequent place-based projects. For ideas regarding what projects to sponsor, the IVs could ask the local teachers and community members what they think the students could do to help the community thrive and develop. Fortunately, Cathy made this her *raison d'être* on the project:

...my goal is to work so closely with the communities so that I am absolutely confident that we are doing in the communities whatever the communities need us to do...I have my own ideas about education, and I have my own ideas about what the priorities should be, but those are my ideas from my own background from my own upbringing and that is irrelevant to this particular arena.

Cathy has been on the project for three years and had a visibly close personal and professional relationship with all the local teachers and the communities. In facilitating a concerted effort among the IVs, local teachers, the project manager, and the community members on setting specific land-based projects, students will be enabled to learn about their land, and peoples' cultures, histories, and traditions, while supporting community empowerment.

Conclusions

This research provides insights into the ground level occurrences of IAE projects. Although the study is specific, it speaks the global educational phenomenon *Education for All* which advocates education as a universal right and normalizes and promotes IAE projects reliant on foreign capital and human resources. We argue that the internationalization of education in the name of human rights, development and progress must be better understood in order to avoid unforeseen conflicts of interest or reinforcements of hegemonic knowledge/power structures. What's more, the growth of international volunteerism is characterized by many contrasting ideals and values, such as altruism versus tourism; educational concerns versus personal and professional motives; and epistemological and cultural differences. Consequently, we call for additional research to encourage critical dialogue regarding the roles of IVs, promoting improved foresight and cultural relevance in IAE projects. .

This research demonstrates that provisions for anti-colonial and culturally relevant education require critical engagement and targeted training at local and global levels. These implementations could provide equitable opportunities to marginalized local and Indigenous knowledge systems, enabling them to flourish in relation to the more dominant knowledge paradigms, epistemologies, and educational institutions. As research develops and broadens, criticality and learning will be promoted, directing the *EFA* movement beyond enrolment numbers toward questions of quality, equity, and relevance. This refocus towards culturally relevant and anti-colonial education is evermore necessary for the increasing number of IVs teaching globally in a cross-cultural context, providing them with access to the tools required not only to teach, but to teach well.

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