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Cross-Cultural Professional Development for Teachers within Global Imbalances of Power

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Abstract

Many of the international, supranational, national, and grassroots development organizations working in the field of education channel their efforts into professional development for teachers. This type of cross-cultural educational development occurs on a massive scale, but the amount of scholarly critique and engagement are disproportionately small. As part of a larger study, this chapter on transnational teacher education draws upon development studies and critical and Indigenous decolonizing methodologies for its theoretical frame. This praxis-oriented framework is used to conduct a comparative case study analysis of two distinct models of cross-cultural professional development for teachers: a small locally based non-profit development organization in Guatemala which has worked with one school for several years, and a US government-funded program whose participants returned from a year-long program in the US to their home communities throughout Mexico and Guatemala. These case studies researched both foreign and Indigenous views of professional development for teachers and the ways in which participants in transnational collaborations negotiated these distinct visions.

Introduction

In countries which are recipients of international aid, educational systems reflect colonial legacies through varying degrees of marginalization, forced assimilation, and cultural deficit models of schooling. Thus, the literature cited in this paper reflects a decolonizing stance, which views development as an autonomous yet contested process (Deloria, 2005; Harrison, 2001; Lyons, 2007; Warren, 1998). This research strives to contribute to critical and Indigenous decolonizing movements in its topical content, research methodology, analysis, and overall purpose. In this case, *decolonization* goes beyond postcolonial analyses, addressing broad sociohistorical matrices of ongoing race and class-based discrimination. I draw upon literature from a range of development theorists and Indigenous positionalities; the thread that weaves together these thinkers from diverse geographies and cultures is a context of Indigenous marginalization and the resulting language shift that began during a period of colonization, setting into motion broadly shared political and educational strategies at the national level, and which placed distinct Indigenous peoples in similar political and educational circumstances at different historical moments (Cannella & Lincoln, 2008; Hornberger, 1998; Rockwell & Gómez, 2009; Smith, 1999).

In order to counter the global forces that are eroding communities' means of maintaining cultural distinctiveness, alliances are being formed beyond national boundaries. Cross-cultural collaborations offer a space for such transformative alliances, but it is necessary to be attentive to their *process*; a decolonizing framework analyzes processes through critical examinations of policy outcomes, placing these in dialogue with ethnographic analyses of local practice in a nested or situated fashion. School-level processes at work include such factors as rotating grade level assignments and teaching partners, varying degrees of parental support and communication, and union politics within the school itself. Community-level issues include the positioning and influence of the mayor and/or town council in relation to the school, local historical background, the number and type of schools in the area, and the language or languages spoken by residents. The national context for teachers in Mexico and Guatemala includes, among other issues, distrust in educational policies and statutes; struggles over teacher salaries, contracts, and advancement; and conflictive union-government relations. Local and national contexts intersect with international organizations during the practice of cross-cultural professional development for teachers.

This research design serves to bridge disciplinary fields and levels of analysis—so-called top-down and bottom-up. "It is untenable to divorce the cognitive from the political economic in accounting for the influence of macrosystems in microcontexts" (Fischer, 2001, p. 246). This broad lens allows connections between the voices of experts (both academic and non-academic) at each of these levels. Research on international education set within development efforts must be theoretically framed within global and class-based power imbalances (Habermas, 1971), ask what kind of education is appropriate, as part of what kind of development, and in whose interests (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983; Freire, 1970). This critical decolonizing lens helps to address the disjuncture between outside experts and local perspectives in the way success is defined and evaluated. Many foreign and international organizations do not critically examine their projects, but rather focus only on how well the steps and methods utilized correspond with a priori goals (Gasché, 2004; Horton et al., 2003). And yet the majority of literature on cross-cultural teacher

education consists of program evaluations carried out by the organizations running the programs themselves.

Transnational teacher education programs are growing very quickly, and there exists a lag for both theoretical and practical models to account for them. As described by UNESCO, one of the best-known organizations in the provision of teacher education on a global level, there exists a “lack of comprehensive frameworks for coordinating various initiatives at the international level” (2005, p. 4). Why does this lack of frameworks exist? OECD (2007) explains this gap in the research on transnational teacher education by claiming that it is “mainly because it is still too recent and too small a phenomenon” (p. 13). Development organizations emphasize increased *access* to schools, and yet “what is critical is that the challenge [of the expansion of schooling] be seen not merely as one of more schools, more books, or better teachers, but one of institutional reform and changes in incentives to make education systems responsive to parents and communities, and accountable—which often means decentralizing national systems, and giving much more autonomy at the school level to school directors and parents” (Birdsall, Lustig, & O’Connell, 1999, p. 96). The global expansion of schooling thus creates tensions between increased space for Indigenous citizenship and assimilative pressures, decentralization and standardization, teacher autonomy and teacher deprofessionalization, and student-centered versus content-centered instruction (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Ávila & Camargo, 2002).

Two programs that reflect distinct models of cross-cultural professional development for teachers are used as case studies in this research. The first is the Amigos de Santa Cruz organization, an NGO run by foreigners who live part of the year at Lake Atitlan in Guatemala. Amigos is a small organization based in the town of Santa Cruz La Laguna, Sololá and focuses all its efforts in the town and its surrounding villages. Amigos has a long history of cooperation with the public elementary school in town and has facilitated teacher training exchanges with other US-based NGOs; during my fieldwork in 2009, an experimental professional development program was being sponsored in collaboration with authorities at the district level. The second program analyzed here is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS) for teachers, a self-contained year-long program housed at US colleges and universities. My research with CASS teachers began in the period *after* participants returned to their home communities throughout Mexico and Guatemala, at which point they became ex-becarios/ex-becarias¹.

The organizations which agreed to participate in this study were selected through shared dialogue with program organizers and teacher participants that generated both the original ideas for this study as well as its specific research questions. Outsider and insider views of the roles and responsibilities of teachers may be fundamentally at odds (Luykx, 1999; Wortham & Contreras, 2002). These tensions call for research questions and methodologies that illuminate the “silences that are created in institutions” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 64). The research questions for this study include the following: (1) In what ways is cross-cultural professional development for teachers a transformative process for the teachers, their schools, and the communities in which they work? (2) How is cross-cultural professional development for teachers intersecting with communities' language and cultural practices? What are the continuities and discontinuities with local and/or Indigenous knowledges? And, (3) What do the experiences of teachers who participate in cross-cultural professional development tell us about education systems in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States? These questions guide the case studies which allow us not only to examine relations of power and cultural difference but also to better understand how to mediate these tensions through critical action.

To investigate these questions I conducted observations and 16 semi-structured interviews with community members, teachers, administrators, and Amigos staff in Santa Cruz La Laguna during six months of 2009. My research with CASS ex-becarios in Mexico and Guatemala was ongoing throughout 2009 and 2010 through website discussion forums, open-ended questionnaires (11 from teachers in Mexico and 15 from teachers in Guatemala), and nine semi-structured interviews on-site in each country. Discourse of teachers, program directors, education officials, community members, development workers, national education and language policies, newspaper articles, union position statements, and contractual documents were critically analyzed during this research.

Educational Development

The seemingly linear and mechanistic success of the Marshall Plan still seduces development thinkers and policy-makers, and to this day every new effort at development is rhetorically wrapped in its mantle. (Breslin, 2004, p. 2)

The Directory of Development Organizations lists 53,750 development organizations in existence worldwide. Development discourse reveals distinct and often contradictory meanings, since *development* is "a term descriptive of an experience whose desirability, in all its vagueness, enjoys the blessing of all social groups and classes. In its looseness, it promises all to all men and women" and has now become both "an ideology of survival and an instrument for the reproduction of domination" (Prah, 2001, p. 123). Development has become mythical in its ambiguity. *Underdevelopment* is similarly taken for granted, yet its connotations have shifted over time and, in contemporary US government policy, is associated with threats to national security (Essex, 2008; Tarabini, 2010). My research takes the position that the creation of discursive categories such as *development/underdevelopment* and *progress/backwardness* and the ways in which such concepts are measured are culturally-based practices grounded in dominant Western ideologies (McFarlane, 2006; Nordveit, 2010). "The eighteenth-century Enlightenment provided the West with a legacy of hope, hope for the perfectability of mankind and the perfectability of social institutions. Behind both was the concept of progress" (Olson & Torrance, 2001, p. 3). Global development agendas since the 1990s have located one of the major routes to such progress within the field of education (Birmingham, Christensen & Mahn, 2009; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008; Tarabini, 2010; Valverde, 1999).

When international development organizations take action in schools, they most often do so through the training of primary teachers², a process known as *capacity building* or *capacity development*, terms that reflect organizations' purported efforts at more holistic and community-based development (Black, 2003; Dooly & Villanueva, 2006; Knight, 2007) and the "enhancing of capabilities for self-sustained learning, for the generation of new knowledge or technology, or for their application" (UNU, 2002, p. 1). Yet they must be recognized under the umbrella of trade capacity building (TCB), a focus of the 2001 WTO meeting in Doha, and one of the "primary political technologies through which neoliberal governmentality is constructed and spatialized" (Essex, 2008, p. 238). My research analyzes the process of transnational teacher education, located in the space where national policies of educational development in Guatemala

and Mexico, international development for education within North to South relationships, and educational development at the community level intersect.

While social programs for a country's citizens would be an expected role of the nation-state, outside agencies have taken a greater role as intermediaries between States and marginalized Indigenous populations in Latin America (Barnach-Calbo, 1997; Garcia, 2004; Hornberger, 1998; Warren, 1998). Public education systems' curricula, methods, parental involvement structures, and teacher education exhibit a "nationalist dimension of racism—the territorial/spatial power that is inherent in forms of exclusion/inclusion of racialized difference by those who imagine themselves as 'guardians of national space'" (Anderson, 2000, p. 383). Therefore, the vast majority of educational development in Latin American Indigenous contexts is funded and run by large international bodies, religious groups, foreign organizations, and NGOs. While many activists herald the work of NGOs, their existence represents a political double bind.

One of the most appealing elements of the rhetoric on partnering has been the idea of multilateral and bilateral aid agencies collaborating with NGOs and other civil society organizations, with the rationale of involving grassroots participation and local knowledge. However, this partnering with NGOs began in the 1980s as a direct result of the ideological shift in the U.S. and the U.K., and hence in The [World] Bank, to neoliberal policies that emphasized a diminished role for the public sector. (Klees, 2002, p. 455).

Another of the major development players is the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, which spent over \$2.3 billion on aid to basic education in the developing world between 1990 and 2005 (Chapman & Quijada, 2009)³. The bulk of these funds support State schooling systems that reflect national governments' priorities (Pinnock, 2009; Yaworsky, 2005) and might run contrary to community development and/or language maintenance goals. Another drawback to this funding structure is that "country-led development is a prerequisite for national appropriation and ownership. The national education community is unlikely to be strongly committed to an education development agenda that it perceives to have been set externally" (Samoff, 2004, p. 415). So while foreign organizations naturally frame their goals as good intentions, the *outcomes* of their involvement can be analyzed from different perspectives; "one cannot assume a good match or rapid translation between such public discourses, formal program requirements, and policy implementation" (Simon et al, 2003, p. 42). For example, USAID's dominant measure of education projects' success is the delivery of *inputs* (Chapman & Quijada, 2009). As Kamat (2004) questions, "What enables civil society to be rid of its putative elements and commit itself to the common good?" (p. 158).

We can also examine the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as an example of externally driven development relevant to this particular research. One of the major foci of the MDGs is Education for All (EFA), a global campaign to institute universal primary education, and whose main sponsoring agencies include UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank (Tarabini, 2010). A casual observer (or a well-recognized expert) might take for granted that formal schooling is advantageous for all children. Yet taking the cases at hand, we have to question who benefits from Indigenous communities' increased access to formal

schooling? Is mere “access” enough? What does access to schooling *mean*? Whose educational needs are being served? Does completion of a certain level of education necessarily lead to desirable work? Does schooling draw young Indigenous peoples away from their communities and their language? International development organizations and foreign NGOs typically encourage children to attend and remain in school, but can they answer these questions for the communities in which they offer their expertise, since their “predefined standards and solutions are not always adequate to define the needs of a community” (Nordveit, 2010, p. 116).

More than half the people in the world live in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas (Truman, 1949, n.p.).

The categorization itself of communities as underdeveloped (as in President Truman’s oft-cited speech) reflects specific and traceable sociohistorical and sociopolitical processes, as naming certain groups or individuals as experts reflects “traditional notions of change and change agency that bring in outside experts to solve local problems” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.9). Over the past decades, educational development organizations have shifted their rhetoric from access to *quality*, but this is yet another highly subjective concept; “[f]rom a neoliberal stance, it is mostly understood as internal efficiency and student attainment in ‘language’ and math, with little or no reference at all to cultural and linguistic diversity to multi or bilingualism, cultural and social relevance and the like” (L. E. López, personal communication, March 30, 2010).

Beyond such ideological questions, there are problematic practical issues to the MDGs. For those international, supranational, and transnational organizations involved in educational development, their efforts are focused primarily on teacher training (Dooly & Villanueva, 2006), reflective of prominent trends in contemporary development circles of *capacity development* and *participation* (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Gasché, 2004; McFarlane, 2006). The educational systems of relatively resource-scarce nations “require such staggering numbers of school teachers that it is usually impossible to recruit solely or even mainly from the most promising in terms of initial qualifications and talents” (Schwille & Dembele, 2007, p. 37). Practical disjunctures also arise around instructional materials. In nearly all schools I visited in Guatemala and Mexico, the director and/or the teachers outlined specific material needs that they hoped foreigners would be able to provide—everything from light bulbs to computers and projectors. Simon et al. (2003) shared a similar dilemma: “no amount of effort could disabuse some of the view that we would bring material benefits, i.e., a development project of some sort” (51). These concrete examples illustrate that no matter how much organizational rhetoric exists around “partnerships” and “participation,” the nature of North-South relationships reflect the unevenness of global political and economic power. The group that holds the expectation for gratitude or sets the criteria for participation is the party that holds power in the relationship—if the locals’ demonstrated gratitude or participation is not seen as sufficient by the group in power, that organization can withdraw its support and discontinue the collaboration—North to South aid is a seller’s market.

Cross Cultural Lenses

Of his experiences while in the US, Tsotsil⁴ speaker Pascual Jiménez of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico explained;

One time, the program coordinator asked us to volunteer to help a family she described as 'very poor,' who had just gotten a new house and needed some help with some construction materials. Our group supposed they were probably indigenous people that could barely afford a shelter, made of laminate or something like that, so we enthusiastically agreed to help the family that day. In reality it was not what we imagined--it was a concrete house that would be considered luxurious by poor people. So it was notable how it reflected the local economy and the concept of poverty. (Pascual Jiménez, personal communication, April 5, 2010)

While postcolonial States' historical treatment of Indigenous peoples helps to explain many of the challenges of Indigenous education today, it is important to consider contemporary complexities around the efforts of international organizations. Historical and contemporary global imbalances are what give "developed" countries and their citizens the surplus time and resources to "aid" peoples in "developing" countries. "This is the dilemma of linking resistance and protest movements of Indigenous and previously colonized peoples with groups of activists and social movements that have developed in the dominant Western cultures...For the most part, neither individuals nor groups in the West are willing to relinquish their privileged status and the material wealth associated with that in order to advance more harmonious relations with other peoples" (McRae, 2004, n.p.). Whether a development organization's motivation is *framed* as economic, or altruistic, or somewhere in between, the fact that foreign organizations are involved in educational development at all is revealing of power imbalances resulting from past and current global neoliberal matrices. In short, volunteering (outside of intra-communal structures) and non-profit work are luxuries, and "important contexts for elite social networking as well as the forging and re-forging of international relationships" (A. Luykx, personal communication, May 26, 2010). In effect, "rural communities nearly *always* consent to the promoters' proposals, not because they have been convinced of all of the implications for the long term, but because they signify the immediate arrival of funding and materials that must be taken advantage of in light of chronic scarcity" (Gasché, 2004, p. 108). This situation arose during my fieldwork in Santa Cruz La Laguna, when the community accepted a donation of computers even though they had a fully supplied computer lab. The Amigos director expressed her dismay that the town would accept materials they did not "need," thinking of other places that had no computers and could put them to use immediately rather than storing them.

In the relationship between a US-based organization (not Amigos) and a school in Guatemala, for example, there were two very different motivations for entering the partnership. The US-based organization selected one town in Guatemala from among all the places they could have potentially partnered with and arranged to provide professional development for the teachers. From a US perspective, the relationship added a colorful cultural element to their school's activities and provided an opportunity for teachers and students to provide service. From a Guatemalan perspective, the regional administrator and school director (and some of the

teachers) viewed the relationship as a means of meeting the school's material needs and accepted the accompanying professional development as part of the deal, without necessarily viewing the teacher workshops as a path to change. The Guatemalans knew at any time the Americans⁵ may become disenchanted and pull out. The Americans thus controlled the relationship because of this imbalance. Knowledge transfer was one-way, North to South, but the Guatemalans realized they had more to lose if the Americans were offended and therefore suppressed their own critical voices. This is much like the situation described by Gasché (2004) in which "local promoters do nothing more than submit to the imposed criteria when they want to have access to sources of funding to put towards development" (106; also see McFarlane, 2006).

During this research, another manifestation of the North-South imbalance of power and its direct effect on teachers during transnational exchanges was seen in the context for the CASS program run by USAID. In the areas of Guatemala and Mexico where CASS teachers were selected, educational materials, scholarships, and opportunities for travel were extremely limited. The teachers were told that the scholarship was worth \$20,000, which in local Mexican and Guatemalan currencies was a stellar amount of money. (It should be noted that not all teachers who were offered the scholarship accepted it.) Before and during the scholarship year when the teachers were in the US, program administrators controlled whether the teachers received and maintained a visa and held the teachers' passports during the year. While CASS administrators framed these actions as necessary logistical procedures, the teachers interpreted them as hierarchical. My dissertation research did not cover the period of the teachers' scholarships, it began when they returned to their home countries--this is simply an example of the amplification of power differences when organizations or their representatives cross borders.

National, Community, and School Contexts

In the new society created under western tutelage, access to [western] knowledge and its acquisition ensured privilege and material benefits....but also alienation from historical and cultural roots. Education and the acquisition of knowledge in both the colonial and postcolonial eras was never an end in itself. Rather, it has been viewed as an agency for social elevation according to the rules of the game established by the colonial order. (Prah, 2001, p. 135-136)

National systems of education, similar to national banks in developing countries, are dependent on foreign aid money and the conditions that accompany it—nothing is free. By definition, public education should be a publically funded institution, yet neoliberal policies originating in more powerful and so-called developed countries have reduced public spending on education all over the globe. These trends are magnified in countries undergoing structural adjustment while repaying World Bank and IMF loans. National systems are weakened even more, creating the apparent need for aid from foreign development organizations. These largely US and European-based organizations impose their own agendas through the process of providing “aid”; in the case of education, the ideological undergirding of curriculum, materials, and mandates for increased standardized testing reflect contemporary global educational politics. It is overly simplistic to solely fault Guatemala's Ministry of Education (MinEduc) or Mexico's

Secretary of Public Education (SEP) for their policies, for example, without looking at the international organizations shaping them. "We permit the state [under ever-increasing international pressure] to ascertain the universal educational deficiencies of its citizens and establish one specialized agency to treat them" (Illich, 1970, p. 23).

Global power imbalances are revealed at the national level when we look at the effects of the EFA's call for universal primary schooling; countries under this mandate such as Guatemala and Mexico may have complied with increased access to schooling through the expansion of infrastructure and teacher education, but the quality of education offered through these schools must be carefully scrutinized not only from above, but from below as well. Juan Esteban (Huehuetenango, Guatemala) highlighted this debate, stating the need to "impact the holistic learning of each student, helping to contribute to *surpassing the level that the educational authorities in the country have established*" [italics added]. The education provided by the Mexican and Guatemalan States could be described as skeletal, with the bare minimum of infrastructure and materials to comply with EFA requirements, while parents, teachers, and NGOs shoulder the costs necessary to raise the quality of education possible.

CASS ex-becaria Lucia (Tz'utujil—Panul, Sololá, Guatemala) described the challenges of local development due to the problems in her community—"Unemployment generates violence, principally among the youth, and the mismatch between existing institutions—the work that each one does is too isolated." Similarly, ex-becaria Sara (Mazateca—Lombardo de Caso, Oaxaca, Mexico) said in the community where she works, families have to leave the community to work, and their goal "is that they have enough to eat." Ex-becario Pascual (Tsotsil—Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, México) added that "in our state of Chiapas, there are the highest rates of achievement gap,⁶ and the involved parties stand there with our arms crossed because we're accustomed to seeing things like this, without thinking that they could improve." These kinds of community contexts serve as barriers to autonomous development and complicate the already difficult task of implementing effective formal education.

During a December 2009 interview, the director of Amigos de Santa Cruz reviewed the organization's efforts at a professional development program for teachers they had overseen throughout the 2009 school year. Although she described the program as successful in its linkage of the teachers' supplemental salary (privately funded) to their participation in the workshops and a commitment to grade-level teams' prep-time, she described it as "an artificial structure," and the cost as "not sustainable." Amigos had decided to discontinue the program for a combination of reasons. First, the movement of teachers into and out of the school within the context of labor rights protected by the teachers' union, as well as *between* grade levels as mandated by the school director, counteracted Amigos' efforts at helping the teachers develop grade level and content knowledge. Amigos viewed the program as an investment in the community of Santa Cruz, but the logistics of filling and changing teachers' positions (*plazas*) ran counter to their goals. Santa Cruz-based Amigos had been working in partnership with another US-based organization on the professional development program, from which the funds were promised. The other organization's delays in sending the funds for the program caused some problems for Amigos in its execution of other community projects. Miscommunications and frustrations also occurred with the US organization about the follow-up/assessment work the Santa Cruz teachers had been asked to complete--the director of the US organization attributed the absence of the follow up to a lack of commitment on the part of the Santa Cruz school staff, rather than to the non-correspondence that actually occurred during a time of transition between school secretaries. (Note: most schools do not have secretaries—the Santa Cruz school had

support from Amigos to hire a secretary.) Another example of an extension and withdrawal of aid occurred when Amigos began to pay for the school's cleaning supplies, but after a time decided to discontinue doing so since they felt it was important that sort of funding came from the municipality.

Further evidence for imbalances of power is found at the classroom level. Teachers whose cross-cultural experience took them into US schools described the differences in infrastructure, materials, and local context. CASS ex-becaria Vicenta (Tz'utujil—Santa Maria Visitación, Sololá, Guatemala) shared the reaction of her students at seeing photos and videos of the schools in the US. "They noticed the differences of the condition of the infrastructure, like classroom equipment. [The differences] are disturbing." Ex-becario Luis Arnoldo (Achí—Salamá, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala) wrote "a lot of things they have in the United States do not exist here—support of the State, of the community, ability of the parents to initiate or participate in the educational community, educational technology...possibly not even in 200 years will we get to have the conditions that they have." Ex-becario Pascual (Tsotsil—Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, México) also wrote about the differences between schools in Mexico from in the US, "where they designate resources for infrastructure, music rooms, computer labs, special education classes with specialized experts, substitute teachers for every teacher, school breakfasts for all the students and every day, free school transportation, and teachers have a *minimum* of an undergraduate degree and professional certification." He added that even in a school he had heard described as "poorly equipped" in the US, there was "a library with thousands of books, and computers in every classroom." These narratives are not included here to diminish the relatively poor conditions of many schools and classrooms in the US, but rather to use comparisons of school infrastructure to highlight the degree of economic difference between providers and receivers of aid that are included in my research.

Conclusion

Socially just teacher education in any society is based on a critical stance that extends far beyond aims of mere 'tolerance' and 'management' of diversity (Dooly & Villanueva, 2006). This position also recognizes that teacher learning occurs in both formal and informal contexts and must occur longitudinally in order to be effective (Schwille & Dembele, 2007). Educational change that supports Indigenous communities' needs is facilitated by participatory approaches for local education development, when teachers as researchers critically reflect on local context, educational policies, and support community action. Teaching and teacher education in general are without question under more pressure today than at any period in recent memory, as increased global access to schooling magnifies the demand for teachers and the corresponding demand for teacher education. Globalization has worsened the economic situation for many localities, but it also opens up spaces for educators to reach across geopolitical borders in new ways to transform the status quo. Educational development programs can be strengthened through critical comparative action research that improves cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. My study offers analysis through praxis of existing transnational teacher education programs. This research is generating theories of Indigenous education and teacher education in a globalized context, contributing to our understandings and bettering practices in the growing international field of cross-cultural professional development for teachers.

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¹ Ex scholarship recipients

² The focus on primary education reflects the consensus that “it generates higher rate of return; [it] will allow the poor to acquire the necessary capacities to participate in the labor market and to be better adapted to its demands” (Tarabini, 2010; 207).

³ Chapman and Quijada (2009) note that US educational aid is also channeled through the Department of State, Department of Treasury, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, among others.

⁴ Participants’ names are followed by the Indigenous language(s) they speak, if applicable, followed by the town, state (Mexico) or department (Guatemala), and country where they live.

⁵ (for lack of a better term)

⁶ *Rezago educativo* in Spanish.

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