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Advice, Cautions, and Opportunities for the Teachers of Binational Teachers: Learning from Teacher Training Experiences of Georgia and Nebraska Teachers in Mexico

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Abstract | Resumen

With the rapid growth and geographic spread of Mexican-origin student populations in the United States, the practice of U.S. teachers going to Mexico for travel study/professional development has become increasingly common. This paper considers what U.S teachers' Mexican travel study experiences entail by looking at narratives from Nebraska and Georgia educators who went to Mexico.

Guiding Questions | Para Reflexionar

1. Why are U.S. teachers going to Mexico on educational travel exchange programs? What do they hope to learn or become able to do?
2. What understandings of teacher agency and discretion underlie the design of U.S./Mexico educational travel exchange programs? What are participants supposed to do with the new knowledge and understandings they develop?
3. How might U.S. and Mexico-based coordinators of such programs protect against participants' natural impulse to generalize from their particular exchange experience to draw more general conclusions about life and schooling across Mexico?
4. How might program coordinators protect against some participants' impulse to confirm pre-existing stereotypes (e.g., that Mexico is poor and backward) rather than to have the exchange challenge or complicate such stereotypes?
5. What after-the-exchange-experience activities might improve the likelihood that exchange participants will effectively apply their Mexico learnings to their U.S. classrooms and schools?
6. How might summer educational travel exchanges look different if they were part of a school's or district's long-term professional development

Executive Summary | Resumen Ejecutivo

In the face of the rapid growth and geographic spread of a Mexican-origin student population in the United States, the idea and practice of U.S. teachers going to Mexico for travel study/ professional development has become increasingly common. This growing practice begs the question "why." Why are U.S. teachers going to Mexico? What do they hope to learn or become able to do? These questions, in turn, set up a more general consideration of what school reforms are necessary to improve educational outcomes for Mexican newcomer students in particular and Latino and English language learner (ELL) students more generally. Is there, as the travel-study programs' existence suggests, a correctable lack of teacher knowledge about efficacious methods to work with these students? Or, less dramatically, does building teachers' knowledge through travel study in Mexico solve at least one of the problems inhibiting the school performance of newcomers?

This paper considers these issues by looking at before and after narrative responses from two samples of educators who went to Mexico, one a group from Georgia who went for four weeks in 1997, the other a group from Nebraska who went for sixteen days in 2006. Both

cohorts greatly valued their experiences, which themselves perhaps justify such programs. And, in a Georgia school that sent 10 participants including the principal and assistant principal, there was tangible evidence of a boost in teacher responsiveness to newcomers in 1997-98. But some reported experiences highlight limits to travel-study as a newcomer response strategy; this is the case of the lament of a Georgia teacher (not from the school previously mentioned) that her colleagues would likely ignore or be skeptical of her experience, of the end of travel-study-related curriculum adaptations at the 10-participant school when the district implemented a scripted phonetics curriculum in 1998-99, and the lack of mechanisms to support the conversion of summer learning in Mexico to practice in U.S. schools.

Advice, Cautions, and Opportunities for the Teachers of Binational Teachers: Learning from Teacher Training Experiences of Georgia and Nebraska Teachers in Mexico

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> Though practically all of our experiences in Mexico showed me how I could become a more culturally competent and effective service provider to families of diverse cultural backgrounds, two experiences that impacted me the most consisted of observing in the schools throughout the community and attending lectures by [Mexican Catholic University] faculty members. When we visited the schools at the [Mexican Catholic University] and in the community I experienced what it was like to be an individual of a diverse background attending school in a new culture. This taught me to take into consideration many of the simple cultural and social rules and customs that are so easy to take for granted and how children or families who are unfamiliar with a language or culture need extra assistance in understanding and following the simple rituals of a new environment. In everyday situations I found myself to be very appreciative of individuals who saw that I was confused and took the time to explain certain practices or phrases to me. This made me want to try even harder to accommodate individuals of diverse backgrounds and help them adjust to their new environment. Also by attending lectures of [Mexican Catholic University] faculty members I learned even more about the struggles and trials that families of Mexican origin are put through when trying to move to the United States and how this attempt is not for the weak-spirited. Even for those who cross the border illegally, the challenges that they have faced and will likely encounter in an environment such as the United States shifted my perceptions of these individuals and made me respect their efforts and values to an even greater degree. As a result of these in depth experiences, I know that my practice and outlook toward these individuals will seek to accommodate their differences and provide them with the most effective services accordingly.
>
> —A summer 2006 travel-study teacher from Nebraska

More than 10 years ago LeBlanc Flores (1996) edited a volume that described a few longstanding binational teacher exchange programs related to the U.S. government's Migrant Education Program. Until recently, teacher exchange programs to Mexico were few, marginal, and small-scale affairs that primarily involved border communities and/or communities deeply involved with the federal Migrant Education Program. Now, teachers from districts like Whitfield County Schools, Georgia and Bellevue Public Schools, Nebraska are going to Mexican cities during the summer to study in programs hosted by Mexican

universities that are partnering with U.S. universities and school districts. This growing practice begs the question: Why? What do the educators going to Mexico hope to learn or become able to do? What ideas of what educators can and should do are embedded in their very act of participating in such a trip? What do those who sponsor or support such trips hope they will accomplish?

Phrased another way, what are the problems that the various participants in this travel-study and/or their sponsors are trying to solve by pursuing this travel study? I use the term *problem* to align this analysis with a theoretical definition that emerges from the anthropology of policy (Shore & Wright, 1997). According to that understanding, all policies—both those formally created by large institutional entities and those informally developed at a personal level—share two attributes: a problem diagnosis (of whatever accuracy) and a strategy for that problem's resolution (a strategy that may or may not fit the original problem well). As Levinson and Sutton acknowledged: "In the processes of policy formation, problems are constructed for solution" (2001, p. 11). By thinking of the travel-study and its constituent parts as the strategies for some educational problem's resolution, we are positioned to scrutinize whether the strategies are likely to solve, or at least ameliorate the presumed problem(s).

This study considers two U.S.-Mexico summertime teacher exchange programs from the perspective of the program's participants. One group went from Georgia to a northern Mexican city, in the late 1990s; the other went from Nebraska to a western Mexican city in the mid-2000s. In the Georgia case, because it happened a decade ago and because 17 participants went from one district (of 24 in total), we can consider what happened when the educators returned to their classrooms. In the Nebraska case, we have participant comments and reflections offered after their return to the United States, but not after their resumption of work in Nebraska schools. On the other hand, there is much more documentation of the Nebraska teachers' take on the summer experience itself.

In both instances, educators were encouraged to participate because the experience would help them learn more about students from a Mexican background, or, more generally, it would help them better meet the needs of Latino students and ELLs. In both Georgia and Nebraska, the number of Mexican immigrant students and Mexican-descent students relocating from elsewhere in the United States has grown rapidly in recent decades, as have

the populations of ELLs and Latino students of other Latin American descent (Capps, et al., 2005; El Nasser & Heath, 2007; Flores & Treviño, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002).

The 24 Georgia teachers came from two abutting districts in Northwest Georgia that were undergoing unprecedented demographic change, as who worked in the local carpet mills and poultry processing plants changed from being mainly rural Appalachian whites to mainly Latinos of both international (mainly Mexico) and domestic origin (relocating from Texas, Chicago, and elsewhere). One of the districts became Georgia's first majority Latino district in 2001, after having a Latino enrollment of as little as 4% in 1989. The Georgia teachers' experience was part of a larger initiative called the Georgia Project that linked local Georgia business leaders and the two school districts to a private university in Mexico, a university that had close ties to a Mexican industrialist who partnered with one of the Georgia business leaders. Other initiatives of the project included community surveys, the organization of a local Latino political leadership, and a project which involved sending Mexican teachers to Georgia schools, described in greater detail in *The Educational Welcome of Latinos in the New South* (Hamann, 2003).

The Nebraska teacher travel-exchange effort brought 11 educators—teachers, pre-service teachers (i.e., undergraduates), and school support personnel—to western Mexico (although data presented here are from 9 of the 11). As Nebraskans, these participants would have been varyingly aware of the demographic transformations underway in their state, of Nebraska's emergence as a key new destination for the "New Latino Diaspora" (Wortham, et al., 2002). According to the Nebraska Department of Education's *2005-06 State of the Schools Report*, there were 32,795 "Hispanic" students enrolled in Nebraska schools, a 459% increase from the 1990-91 tally of 7,147 and more than the entire 1980 Census total count for Hispanics in Nebraska (28,000).[i] In 2005-06 five Nebraska districts were majority Hispanic, while 22 others were at least 19% Hispanic and/or had Hispanic enrollments of

[i] As Oboler (1995) has laid out in intriguing detail, there is much controversy and disagreement about what to call U.S. populations who can trace ancestry to Latin America. I find Hayes-Bautista and Chapa's (1987) definition of Latinos as all those who trace ancestry to populations targeted by the neo-colonialism of the Monroe Doctrine to be compelling. In this document, I use 'Hispanic' when I am quoting sources (like the Census and Nebraska Department of Education) that use that term and I use Latino when not directly quoting or paraphrasing.

more than 450. Comprising 11.5% of Nebraska's overall 2005-06 enrollment, Hispanics were the second largest group in Nebraska schools, behind 'White, not Hispanic' (221,252) and ahead of 'Black, not Hispanic' (21,605), 'Asian / Pacific Islanders' (5,193), and 'American Indian/Alaskan Native (4,703). The vast majority of Nebraska's Latinos can trace their own life experience and/or their ancestry to Mexico.

Why Teacher Travel-Study in Mexico Matters

As the overlapping categories of Latino, Spanish-speaking, and Mexican descent students all grow in absolute number and geographic spread in the United States, longstanding patterns of relative lack of school success by these groups have become a more widespread concern. On national and regional indicators, those in the overlapping categories of Latino students and ELLs have long been more likely to not finish high school, more likely to repeat a grade, and less likely to be in higher track classes, less likely to score well on state-mandated standardized assessments, and less likely to continue on to college (Carter, 1970; De la Rosa & Maw, 1990; Garcia, 2001; Harklau, Losey, & Siegel, 1999; President's Advisory Commission, 1996; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 2005).

To clarify, the education of Latinos and ELLs can be successful. Indeed, the literature is full of success stories (e.g., Carter & Chatfield, 1986; Edmonds, 1979; Ernst, Statzner, & Trueba, 1994; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Mehan, et al., 1996; Pugach, 1998; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Walqui, 2000; Wilde, Thompson, & Herrera, 1999). So the big question is: Why, if Latinos and ELLs can fare as well as any other student population, are there so many schools where they do not?

Scholars have offered multiple responses to this question, but the one that concerns us here is the explanation that too many U.S. teachers do not now much about Latino students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Valenzuela (1999) has poignantly argued that a lack of understanding and responsiveness to Latino students' experience and worldview by high school teachers keeps many of those students from feeling acknowledged or engaged at school and, relatedly, keeps many from being successful. Related to ELLs (a population of which Mexican newcomers constitute the largest share), Zehler, et al. (2003, pp. 69-73) noted that in 2001-02 there were 1.27 million teachers in the United States with at least one

identified ELL in their classroom (about 43% of all U.S. public school teachers). Of these, 23.2% had bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), or other ELL-related certification and 5.6% had a masters or doctorate in a relevant field; but 9.8% were working with just provisional certifications. Further, 39.9% reported having had no in-service development related to ELLs in the last five years and an additional 20.8% of teachers reported less than 10 total hours of in-service related to ELLs in that period. Schools with more than 30 identified ELLs had higher percentages of new teachers than did schools with less than 30 ELLs. Finally, middle school and high school teachers of ELLs were substantially less likely to have had significant training for working with ELLs than their elementary colleagues.

In a different study, Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) found that a lack of knowledge about ELLs often leads teachers to have lower expectations for their ELLs' performance. Ruiz-de-Velasco later noted, "The long-term shortage of new teachers specially trained to work with ELL students underscores the importance of training *veteran* teachers to work more effectively with new populations of ELL immigrants" (2005, p. 40, italics original).). Gándara et al. (2003, p. 1) noted that in California, ELLs "are assigned to less qualified teachers [and] are provided with inferior curriculum and less time to cover it."

So there is an emergent problem diagnosis, grounded by the studies describe above: That teachers' lack of knowledge about ELLs and Latinos limits their capacity to engage Latino and ELL students successfully. In turn, that lack of engagement reduces prospects for such students' academic success. Put another way, teachers might more successfully work with Latino youngsters if they better understood them. This problem diagnosis echoes that which grounds the University of Arizona's Funds of Knowledge project (Gonzalez, et al., 1995; Moll, Tapia, & Whitmore, 1993). In that project preservice teachers visit South Tucson and other Latino *barrios*, stopping at pre-arranged households, where they visit with families and inventory, from an asset orientation, the various uses of language and literacy in the household, as well as the family's and larger community's history and heritage. Although Funds of Knowledge does not involve international travel, it does involve teachers crossing cultural borders to learn more about what Latino newcomer families bring to U.S. schools. It shares with the travel-study programs the belief that developing educators' understanding of Latino students is worthwhile and an arena where higher education collaboration can support improved capacity at the K-12 level.

Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005), in an article about teacher education writ large, suggest that teacher learning requires *unlearning* problematic strategies and understandings and learning not just *what*, but also *how* and *why*. The point is to develop new knowledge, but not to permit it to be what Whitehead (cited in Hammerness, et al.) in 1929 called *inert knowledge*. That is, the knowledge needs to not just inform understanding, but also to guide praxis.

While there are multiple ways to cultivate expertise to work more effectively with Mexican newcomer students, the idea and practice of U.S. teachers going to Mexico for travel study/professional development can be one vehicle for this end. Whether such trips change classroom practice or student outcomes are important and largely unanswered questions, but even before such questions can be pursued it is useful to know: What do the participants in exchanges like this think they are doing/gaining? In other words, with what purpose/rationale do they participate? Teachers' answers to such questions can then be compared to the intentions and goals of those supporting such trips and they can even be compared to what the research literature suggests are helpful skill sets and dispositions for helping Latino students excel.

Methodology

This paper is derived from before and after samples of two small groups of U.S. educators one from Georgia (n=17) and one from Nebraska (n=9). Both groups were partially hosted by private Mexican universities, although U.S. institutions also played a role. One group had its full costs paid for by their school district, while in the other teachers needed to pay for the experience but were able to earn three graduate course credits by doing so (their U.S. university was the instigator of their trip). Both groups were composed entirely of female participants.

The Georgia group responded to six open-ended survey questions before travelling and six more questions afterward. The Nebraska group filled out a 'pre-travel knowledge assessment', kept journals during the visit, and filled out a post-travel knowledge assessment, as part of their graded coursework. The Georgia group generated, on average, four pages of hand-written responses (4 X 17 = 68 pages). The Nebraska group generated about 90 pages

of text. Both groups also knew their responses would be used for research. Like most university courses, however, once Nebraska participants' summer travel-study was completed (June 18, 2006) and written coursework was turned in (June 30, 2006), participants' experience was complete. There was no mechanism to keep participants in touch with each other (though many had exchanged contact information), nor to support attempts to incorporate summer learning back in the classroom.

The Georgia Case

The summer institute in Mexico that the Georgia educators attended in 1997 was the first of a still continuing tradition of sending Georgia educators to Mexico (although the district that sent the 17 teachers considered here stopped participating in these summer institutes in 2000). [See Zúñiga, this volume, for more about that same project.] Participants learned about Mexico and Mexican culture, improved their Spanish-language skills, studied bilingual education, reviewed the philosophy of communication in a multilingual classroom (their least favorite class), and made several visits to private and public schools in their northern Mexico host city and, during a short trip, in rural parts of the state of Zacatecas.

In earlier work (Hamann, 2003) describing the larger Georgia Project that the travel-study was part of, I identified that the educators who went to Mexico were motivated by the prospect of learning Spanish and better understanding where their growing populations of Mexican students "were coming from." In other words, the Georgia teachers felt a gap or need in their professional repertoire in relation to a particular student population—many described it as a "communication gap"—and felt that that gap could at least be partially filled by study in Mexico (although very few of the Mexican newcomers in Georgia came from this part of Mexico). For most, the program in Mexico was the first time in their lives that they had had to negotiate being in an environment where they did not know the dominant language very well. Only three had ever been to Mexico before, and one of these for just two days as part of a team that helped set up the larger Georgia Project. Upon return, they reported that they had learned to value those who were patient with their fumbling Spanish and their pantomime and they vowed to be more patient with the fumbling English of some Latino parents and students.

Several of the Georgia teachers were also interested in understanding (or perhaps 'confirming' is a better word) why families would leave Mexico, come to work in the United States, and enroll their children in U.S. schools. These teachers took note of the poverty, want, inequality, and scarcity that was visible in various places they visited. One wrote, for example,

> I have great memories. I would not care to live in Mexico but the experience has made me more aware of the needs of our students. The poverty was depressing and the fact that the poor do not receive an equal education [is] not fair and I understand now why our students face so many difficulties.

The participants in the 1997 Summer Institute were unanimous in their claims that the Institute had been worthwhile. However, they were not unanimous regarding why it was so fulfilling, nor about which of their needs it addressed. Ten of the 17 participants from the district I focused on came from the same school, an innovative elementary school. That school had begun many multicultural, inclusive reforms as their principal pursued her doctorate and wrote a dissertation on the professional development needs of staff at schools with growing numbers of non-native speakers of English. Participants from that innovative elementary school reported a 'been there, done that' response to the portions of the Summer Institute that focused on the grounding philosophies of multicultural education. Yet, they had internalized more of the tenets of multicultural education than some other participants—e.g., teachers need to be responsive to students' cultures. Several participants from this school wondered whether other participants should have been better prepared or screened. (The district's policy that year was that any employee who wanted to go could, even paraprofessionals.)

After the summer of 1997, there was a visible continuation of the travel-study experience's energy at the innovative elementary school, not least because both the principal and assistant principal were among the ten travel-study participants. Other staff in this building learned from the experiences of those who had gone to Mexico. Curriculum materials picked up in Mexico were used in this school's classrooms in 1997-98, and in the summer of 1998, this school again sent the most participants for the 1998 Summer Institute, eight of the district's total contingent of ten, including the principal again and three other repeaters.

Considering this school, it seems like travel-study can be an exciting catalyst when matched by other strategies (e.g., a general embrace of multicultural education) and when championed by school leaders. It is instructive to remember that this school's principal noted in her dissertation research by Ambert (1991) and Carter and Chatfield (1986) that highlighted the importance of principal's leadership in determining staff attitudes towards language minority students and the related issues of staff development and practice.

Yet even at this school, the lessons learned in Mexico were limited in terms of how much they were allowed to transform teachers' practice. Although TV cameras and newspaper reporters welcomed the educators at the airport as they returned from Mexico and participants confidently anticipated 'next steps' which would follow their summer experience, the district never organized formal forums for participants to share their learnings with colleagues. Moreover, the district soon mandated Direct Instruction, a fully scripted phonics program, which took away teachers' discretion to organize classroom activities.

The Nebraska Case

The Nebraska educators' trip was led by a tenured school psychologist employed in a department of education psychology. That leader had contacts and friendships with psychology colleagues in Mexico that predated her creation of this summer course (indeed that also predated her work with educators from Nebraska). Unlike other summer travel-study programs for teachers in Mexico that are part of larger university-to-university partnership (e.g., the partnership connecting the University of Georgia and the Universidad Autónoma de Veracruz in Xalapa [McLaughlin & Allexsaht-Snyder, 2007]) or that were created without the involvement of a U.S. university and for which participants did not earn university course credits (e.g., the Georgia Project case just noted), this travel-study program was created at the individual volition of its U.S.-based creator. Not surprisingly, its Mexican university dimensions reflect her scholarly experience. So, this travel-study program included more of an emphasis on community and school psychology. Hence the travel-study course's first objective was addressed to participants as "to enrich your understanding of health and

human services in Mexico." Educational systems were included in the subsequent list of services, but so too were "health, governance, and social support."

As with the Georgia case, the host university in this instance was a private Catholic university. The activities organized for the Nebraska teachers on this travel study reflected the religious mission-inflected social service and outreach activities that are part of the host university's larger social mission. Although it is not a point of emphasis in the pages that follow, one can also detect some class dimensions in operation between those affiliated with the Mexican university and those in schools and low-income communities that the Mexican university personnel brought the Nebraska teachers to see. In other words, the Nebraska teachers were shown a middle-class university world and a lower-income Mexican working-class world. About the former, one participant explained, "On previous trips to Mexico, I have never seen a middle class. In [the visited city], I lived in a middle-class home and neighborhood. [The Mexican host university] is a prep school and private college that costs a lot of money."

Yet there was also mediated access to a working-class world. As another U.S. participant observed:

> While visiting [a low-income village near the Mexican city where we were staying], we met with a nun from the local Catholic parish and a psychology professor from [the Mexican university] and his students, all of whom are the two major providers of services to the community. The services they provided included mental health services, social services, and general health services. In speaking with the nun and the psychology professor and his students, we learned about the communities [sic] multiple needs and different ways these services met these needs. We also learned of many barriers this community faces in acquiring basic needs, such as access to clean water and affordable housing, and how the nun and the [others] work to overcome these barriers.

The Nebraska educators' 16-day visit included home-stays with Mexican families, classwork led by Mexican university personnel on the topics of immigration and Mexican culture, and local and overnight fieldtrips to schools, community agencies, and even the beach. This collectively lent a hybrid student/tourist quality to the whole trip, which meant that Nebraska teachers were as much guests as students, and that the Mexican nationals they worked with were as much hosts as educators.

The travel-study formally had four course objectives. According to the syllabus, "Upon completion of the course, students will:

1. Enrich their understanding of health and human services in Mexico including but not limited to educational, health, governance, and social support systems; and better recognize ways in which cultural values are reflected in these systems;
2. Deepen their understanding of the cultural background of families of Mexican origin, including gaining familiarity with individual and cross-cultural differences in the values, lifestyles, contributions and history of immigrant families of Mexican origin;
3. Better recognize biases including sexism, racism, biases related to national origin, prejudice and discrimination, and the expression of these biases in programs, practices, instructional materials, and policies;
4. Understand how their present and future professional practice must accommodate cultural differences, defend against biases, and respect diversity so that they can provide effective services to children and families of diverse cultural backgrounds."

In each of these four one can locate a problem diagnosis related to Latino education. For example, the first suggests that participants need to know more about health and human services in Mexico or, phrased another way, it was presumed that participants' pre-trip knowledge on this dimension was inadequate.[ii] The second objective suggests a problem diagnosis that would be familiar to the *funds of knowledge* promoters noted earlier, that the education of Mexican newcomer students suffers from teachers' inadequately understanding the cultural heritage and background that newcomer students bring with them to school. The objective assumes that once teachers have such knowledge they can and will deploy it and that what teachers witness in Mexico overlaps with what Latino newcomers to Nebraska bring with them. With all four objectives, there is a theory in use that acquisition of understanding in each of these domains will ameliorate limitations that participants might have had prior to travel.

[ii] 'Inadequate' may seem like a harsh or judgmental word. It is not intended that way. Indeed, almost any time a student registers for a course (particularly one that is not otherwise required), it seems that the student herself is identifying that her knowledge area in the course's topic area is inadequate or below the threshold that she would like to develop it to. After all, that why she is enrolling in the course.

With the important caveat that the data to be examined were centrally shaped by the questions that prompted them, there are some hints regarding participants' dispositions and motivations from their journal entries and pre-travel questionnaire responses. There is also a chance to see what understandings/stereotypes the educators had about Mexico and about the experience in Nebraska of students from Mexico. (Part of the course's pedagogical design was to bring stereotypes to explicit consciousness so they could be overtly considered and changed/ discarded if found wanting.) For example, one participant wrote before her trip:

> Based on what I have heard about Mexican schools, they are very different than schools in the United States. I believe it is required by the government that children attend school, but if it is, I don't think it is strictly enforced. I have heard families do not often encourage their children to stay in school and/or pursue higher education, such as secondary school or college, because they believe they do not need an education to get a job and make a living. I have heard that families will often teach their children skills they can use to get a job, such as making ceramics, housekeeping skills, etc.

Later in the pre-trip questionnaire, when asked about "the pressing needs of families of Mexican origin when they are living in Nebraska communities," the same participant wrote:

> Although some immigrant families may have other family members or friends they could live with, at least temporarily, others may not have a place to live and may not have resources to find adequate housing. Finding a job in Nebraska may be more difficult than other states, such as California. Perhaps health care would be a pressing need as well, as many families who have recently migrated may not know how to access health care services when needed.

Prior to the trip, this participant was not considering that other obstacles than 'know how' might be impediments to accessing needed health care services.

Most of the participants made reference to the fact that they expected Mexican schools to be materially poorer and many indicated an understanding that compulsory attendance rules were less well adhered to in Mexico than in the United States. For several, this impression seemed related to previous Mexico travel experiences in Cuernavaca, Juárez, and elsewhere where one can encounter child-age beggars. None seemed aware that according to Mexican government statistics, in 2003-04 93.0% of eligible Mexican children nationally were attending primary school (grades 1-6) and 87.0% were attending secondary school (grades 7-9). In other words, if government statistics were accurate than school

participation rates are pretty high. In the Mexican state that the Nebraska educators were visiting, the numbers were slightly below national average, but more than 90% of eligible children were described as enrolled in primary school and more than 84% at the secondary level (INEE, 2004). Clearly there was an interest in Mexico among the participants and a desire to be helpful, but there were also shades of the developed North's stereotypes of the developing South.

With the Midwestern university's course objectives explicit to participants, known to the Mexican university partners, and frequently asked about in course materials, it is not surprising that all the participants indicated they had gained understandings and competence relevant to each of the four objectives. A post-trip reflection by one Nebraska educator was typical:

> In visiting the community [just outside the city where we were staying], we had the opportunity to see first hand what different organizations and outreach groups were doing to help the citizens in this area and what educational, social, and governmental programs were in place and how citizens could access and benefit from these organizations as a result. We also learned a great deal about the service organizations and their connections to the citizens of Mexico by attending lectures presented by [Mexican university] faculty members. These individuals presented us with a wealth of information with regard to what it is like to be a citizen in Mexico and what the needs in this area might consist of. These presentations allowed us to gain a greater sense of understanding for the people of Mexico, their needs, and what government or social service programs are currently in place in order to address their concerns as they arise.

The four tables below suggest which of the summer activities eight of the 11 participants thought were most germane to realizing various objectives. They remind us of the intense variety of activities that were part of the summer travel-study.

As one might expect, most Nebraska participants felt that the tasks they engaged that most directly focused on learning about social service provision in Mexico were the ones that seemed to help them generate the greatest understanding of such services (e.g., attending lectures on the topic and visiting schools and a clinic in a village where the Mexican university was a major service provider). Perhaps somewhat less expectedly, seven of the eight respondents also identified their home-stay as a vehicle for learning about Mexican health and human services. Journal entries reference long and involved conversations with host families. Although we never asked this question directly, given that

participants knew before they began their travel that understanding in this arena was a course objective, it seems plausible or even likely that that is why they sometimes steered conversations with their host families to this topic.

Table 1b (below) shows which of the various activities were, in participants' minds, most useful for deepening their understanding of the cultural background of Mexican families. Unanimous choices included home-stays and the multiple days of visiting the various service activities that the Mexican university led in a nearby village. Intriguingly, two participants dissented from the claim that a discussion of the cultural competence needed to work with transnational families helped them with this objective. Perhaps that only reflects the inefficacy for them of a particular lecture. It is intriguing that Spanish instruction was not viewed by most as a means through which they learned about the cultural backgrounds of Mexican families, given that in U.S. discussions of English as a second language, there is sometimes acknowledgment of families' first language as the language of intimacy and the domestic, and of English as the public language for interacting with the world. Likely that means that language lessons had a kind of instrumental quality—here's how you say 'X'—without attention drawn to bilingual pragmatics.

One rationale for the third course objective was a belief that improving the U.S. education of Latino newcomers requires positioning teachers to recognize and contest bias and discrimination. But Table 1c suggests that participants were only confident that they were learning about bias when they were being directly lectured on that topic by university professors or were having it explicitly drawn to their attention as they witnessed both the poverty of the village just outside their city and/or the have/have not resource disparity between private and public schools. In other words, bias and inequality were recognized as unfortunate and visible conditions of many of the places the Nebraska teachers witnessed in Mexico. One wrote:

> We also saw how students in different schools, with relative proximity to one another, receive supplemental programs, services, and school supplies that are not available to other children in schools just down the road. While it was often difficult to see the way that citizens were treated by those in their community, these experiences showed us the impact that prejudices and discrimination have on the people in this community and how it is dealt with day after day.

But participants seemed less sure of identifying their interaction with their middle-class host families as a means of learning about bias and they seemed less confident about drawing a connection between the inequality and bias they were witnessing and the discussion of the cultural competence needed to work with transnational families. By one interpretation of the responses in Table 1c, participants seemed more ready to identify the presence of bias than to engage with or challenge it.

Yet Table 1d (below) suggests that the discussion of the cultural competence needed to work with families who were transnationally mobile did give 7 out of 8 responding participants a sense that they had expanded their understanding of how in their U.S. practice to accommodate difference. The discrepancy between recognizing bias and accommodating difference suggests that some see it as possible to accommodate difference without recognizing bias. Lest we let speculation about a 5:3 vs. 7:1 split get us too far off track, it is also intriguing to note that only three of the responding participants saw their learning of Spanish as a tool for their future accommodation of difference, also suggesting an instrumental orientation in the Spanish classes.

Looking across the responses summarized in tables 1a–1d, one can see that none of the responding participants felt they had not made substantive progress in relation to each of the four core objectives. Phrasing that positively rather than as a double negative, all of the responding participants felt they had made progress on each of the course objectives. Also, few had additional examples of activities that had helped them with the objectives, which suggests the course helped teachers realize objectives through expected rather than unexpected ways.

Journal narratives and post-travel questionnaire responses both seem to further corroborate that participants felt they had gained a lot from their travel-study including making progress on all four objectives. But one can also identify other themes, some conscious others less so, in these narratives that are worth identifying. First, although it seems that knowing one location in Mexico better positions one to know about Mexico than would knowing no place in Mexico, some participants seemed to risk over-generalizing from their specific experiences to make claims about what they felt was generally true in Mexico. After introducing her response by noting that she visited several schools in the small community outside of the city where the university is, one participant wrote in her

comparison of similarities and difference between schools in Mexico and schools in Nebraska that:

> I noticed more of a difference at the elementary school level. One administrative difference is that grades in Mexico are based on how much you know as opposed to how old you are. I think that this could be very difficult for a student who had not passed the second grade but was already 10 or 11. It would be embarrassing to remain in a class with younger children and impossible to do well in a class that fit your age.

Yet, reminding us that even if the data pool was necessarily small (as the trip was short) there were efforts to triangulate, to provide some grounding for generalization. Another participant wrote, "By visiting the town [outside of the city] and attending lectures presented by [Mexican university] faculty members, we learned about different health and human services in Mexico and what these services entail for families of Mexican origin."

A second dynamic worth noting from the written narratives was the regular habit of Nebraska teachers to reference their Mexican university professors by their first names. At the Midwestern university, it is more typical for students to refer to professors as 'Dr. [last name]' than by their first name in written comments, although first names are sometimes used. 'Dr. [last name]' is also a common convention in Mexico among Mexican students and their professors. Does this discrepancy suggest that the participants were not a representative sample of their university's graduate and undergraduate populations? (It is likely they were not.) That the U.S. professor who led the trip had successfully built an environment of adult-to-adult informality? That Mexican professors sought a healthy informality? Or does it suggest inadvertent expression of internalized North-South hierarchies?

Quotes below from three Nebraska participants give hint of a possible unwitting sense of hierarchy—that the United States is more progressive or advanced than Mexico, that working class Mexico is more authentic than the middle class, and that Mexico has institutionally reinforced prejudices (that, by implication, are absent in the United States).

> Gender is an obvious distinction as important as class distinction. In observations of interactions, men are the machismo, but they are really guided and structured by the work of the female. I think that women are gaining power in the society through the work they do and the activism that they show. They are just about 30-40 years behind the United States.

> The culture class was excellent in making me aware of what new immigrants experience when first entering the United States. I also learned a lot from visiting the crazy marketplace with three levels. Here the people were more "real" to me than in the stores or nicer parts of [this city].
>
> Our morning with Sister [O.] opened my eyes to the problems of sexism, prejudice, and discrimination because of the stories she told related to the people she tries to help everyday in the community who suffer from these biases. I was able to see how these people suffer from biases that are embedded in the programs and national policies, and how the history of Mexico in recent years has not successfully overcome these biases."

Conclusion

Practically all the teachers on both trips returned to the United States saying they had enjoyed their experience and learned a lot. Their post-program writing in particular is thick with details and enthusiasm, suggesting that they were doing a lot of processing of impressions and memories. Practically all categorically identified Mexicans as warm and friendly. Not surprisingly, this was a more common theme among those who had stayed in homes (the Nebraska group) than those at the hotel (the Georgia group), but even the 'hotel-stayers' described their summer teachers as warm and gracious. A few from both groups noted exceptions to this trend—e.g., not liking being whistled at by men in a passing car, frustration at a teacher who seemed unwilling to adapt her syllabus even though the themes she was raising were already familiar to her students, and an odd encounter with some young boys who called two of the teachers 'nigger' (both of the teachers to whom this was directed identify as white; one is blonde). But these exceptions were understood as exceptional. In other words, they did not seem to detract from teachers' generalized favorable comments about Mexicans.

Practically all claimed to have greatly increased their Spanish skills (a goal many identified prior to the trip). Even more common than claiming to have become much more proficient in Spanish, however, were claims that they had new-found respect and empathy for students in their classrooms who were struggling sometimes with English as a second language.

Most appeared to process their summer experiences through lenses of previous experience. Two for example referenced how their Mexican training trip reminded them of previous travel experiences to Japan, another referenced a previous visit to Spain. One graduate student who was on leave from her former teaching duties, used memories of her site visit to a fast changing, majority Latino district in Nebraska to make sense of what she was seeing in Mexico. She also used her own deeply felt Protestant spirituality to empathize with the Catholic spirituality she found so prevalent in Mexico. That student responded to the prompt, "Given your experiences on this trip, how will you ensure that your practice with children and families of Mexican origin in Nebraska is culturally sensitive?" by writing:

> I would work to develop a trusting relationship with the child and the family…I would let them now that support services are available to them, I would work to get them involved with the local Catholic parish and its activities beyond attending church. I would work to speak the language as best I can to help the children and their families see that I am willing to communicate with them in a manner that feels comfortable to them. I've become very disillusioned with the fact that students are essentially forced to assimilate to the Eurocentric way of thinking about education in many of our public schools, rather than focusing on what is best for the individual child. I would try to integrate topics of interest and topics about their culture into my classroom….I'm interested in pursuing topics of social justice with students of Mexican origin.

This teacher, like several others, predicted that she would be more attention to news about Mexico once she returned to the United States. The trip had made real topics and issues that had previously seemed distant and abstract.

The teachers who came with their school district were much more detailed about how they hoped to apply what they had learned in their classrooms, but even they were relatively vague. Promising more multiculturalism, more tolerance for use of Spanish, and so on. Within the group from the school district, were a cluster of teachers, a paraprofessional, the principal, and an assistant principal. Teachers from this sub-group noted the importance of the presence of their principal to (a) why they were participating on the trip themselves and (b) why they were enthusiastic about applying lessons from their trip in the classroom. They were the only ones who even hinted at seeing their summer learning as applying to prospectively broader reform efforts than just changes in their own classroom practice and a few additions to their curriculum.

Other teachers from the same school district who were the lone representatives from their schools pessimistically predicted some of their actions informed by this summer trip would be used by less enlightened colleagues as grounds for the travelling teacher's further marginalization, such as changes in pedagogy and curriculum and their anticipated occasional use of Spanish turns of phrase with some parents and students. If this observation proved true regarding subsequent practice (and I do not have a way of directly knowing whether it was) it suggests that some of the teachers participating in the summer travel saw themselves as mavericks, as different from most of their colleagues in their willingness to embrace Latino newcomer students and their families and to adapt their practice accordingly. In other words, they did not see their new learning and promised change in practice as being part of any broader response.

Several of the participants seemed to confirm negative as well as positive stereotypes about Mexico. They noted for example that they had heard that there was a lot of trash in Mexico and that their visit confirmed this. Several noted the severe poverty claiming that, given the poverty they had seen there was little wonder why families were leaving for the United States. Both trips included visits to rural schools for which there is some evidence that Mexican planners of the visits had hoped to highlight how devoted to learning and purpose Mexican teachers and students are even when laboring under very spartan material conditions. This goal seems to have been lost on many of the teacher participants, however. They instead viewed these rural classrooms as places where they thought little academic learning was possible. Perhaps intrinsic to the *helping* nature of the teaching profession, there is a hint of paternalism in the voice of several participants. It is not clear if the programs attempted to address this issue.

Summer travel participants insisted that their travel and study in Mexico was valuable and enlightening. Less clear, however, was how this learning would later matter. While several identified a disquiet with American imperiousness (as both a macro-dynamic and something sometimes manifest in their schools), how they would confront this imperiousness and its possible disabling consequences for Latino newcomers remained fuzzy. Few participants were well positioned to answer 'What next?' What problem(s) had their new learning solved?

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Table 1a
Which of the following course activities were important in helping you achieve objective 1 [enriching understanding of health and human services]?

Factor	Not important	Important
Room with local [Mexican city] families	1	7
Discuss the cultural competence needed to work with families who have moved between Mexico and the United States	3	5
Visit [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	1	7
Observe in schools [at Mexican university] and [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	2	6
Tour cultural centers of [Mexican city] and the surrounding state	2	6
Attend lectures by [Mexican university] faculty on migration and the culture of Mexico	0	8
Participate in instruction in Spanish	7	1
Something else?	7	1
None of these	8	0

Table 1b
Which of the following course activities were important in helping you achieve objective 2 [deepen understanding of cultural background of Mexican families]?

Factor	Not important	Important
Room with local [Mexican city] families	0	8
Discuss the cultural competence needed to work with families who have moved between Mexico and the United States	2	6
Visit [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	0	8
Observe in schools [at Mexican university] and [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	1	7
Tour cultural centers of [Mexican city] and the surrounding state	1	7
Attend lectures by [Mexican university] faculty on migration and the culture of Mexico	1	7
Participate in instruction in Spanish	6	2
Something else?	6	2
None of these	8	0

Table 1c
Which of the following course activities were important in helping you achieve objective 3 [better recognize biases]?

Factor	Not important	Important
Room with local [Mexican city] families	3	5
Discuss the cultural competence needed to work with families who have moved between Mexico and the United States	3	5
Visit [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	0	8
Observe in schools [at Mexican university] and [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	1	7
Tour cultural centers of [Mexican city] and the surrounding state	4	4
Attend lectures by [Mexican university] faculty on migration and the culture of Mexico	1	7
Participate in instruction in Spanish	7	1
Something else?	7	1
None of these	8	0

Table 1d
Which of the following course activities were important in helping you achieve objective 4 [understand how your present and future practice must accommodate difference]?

Factor	Not important	Important
Room with local [Mexican city] families	1	7
Discuss the cultural competence needed to work with families who have moved between Mexico and the United States	1	7
Visit [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	0	8
Observe in schools [at Mexican university] and [low-income village on the edge of the Mexican city]	0	8
Tour cultural centers of [Mexican city] and the surrounding state	4	4
Attend lectures by [Mexican university] faculty on migration and the culture of Mexico	0	8
Participate in instruction in Spanish	5	3
Something else?	7	1
None of these	8	0