Culturally relevant teaching in rural Indigenous communities:
An ethnographic case study of three international volunteer teachers in Ecuador

Julia Anne Rao

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts
Department of Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Abstract
This thesis explores how three international volunteers taught in rural Indigenous communities in Ecuador. It positions this exploration in the complexities and dilemmas of International aid education (IAE) projects and cross-cultural volunteer teaching. The study uses literature on anti-colonial theories, Indigenous knowledges and culturally relevant teaching (CRT) as a conceptual framework to understanding IVTs perceptions of and approaches towards cross-cultural teaching and its relationship with Indigenous students’ lived experiences. Onsite observations and interviews with international volunteer teachers’ (IVTs) and discussions with local teachers and volunteer program director are used in a cross-comparative analysis, which examines how their teaching was sensitive to and reflective of these Indigenous peoples’ ways of knowing and learning. The findings show that the three IVTs varied greatly in their understanding and enactment of CRT. The thesis concludes by exploring the implications of IAE and sets out recommendations for creating more culturally relevant education for Indigenous students.
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Abbreviations

ACT- Anti-colonial theory
CIE- Comparative International Education
CRT- Culturally Relevant Teaching
EFA- Education for All
IAE- International Aid Education
IK- Indigenous Knowledge
INGO- International Non-Governmental Organization
IVTs- International Volunteer Teachers
MDG- Millennium Development Goals
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Issue of International Aid Education

My thesis began from a concern over how international non-governmental organizations’ (INGO) exceptional strength and activity in the field of education were affecting students on the ground level. The growth of such activity stems from the now familiar notion of Education for All, which is not only an ideological stance but a global movement (Mundy & Murphy, 2001; Baker & Wiseman, 2000). The drive for universal education began over 40 years ago when most nations of the world accepted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which pronounced that everyone has a right to education. Since then, there have been specific initiatives to make that right a reality. In 1990, delegates from over 155 nations met at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand with a plan to universalize primary education and increase literacy before the year 2000 (Wiseman & Baker, 2005). In addition to the EFA’s goals, the United Nations also created Millennium Development goals (MDG) in the hope of ensuring equal access to education to children around the world by 2015 and the tools to allow them to complete primary school. This thrust from the international community has subsequently led to a worldwide growth in modern mass education (Wiseman & Baker, 2005). Moreover, this advocacy of “Education for All” has led to a considerable amount of power being afforded to INGO’s over national educational projects as well as to a rise in their involvement in global responses to educational crises worldwide (Mundy & Murphy, 2001; Baker, D & Wiseman, 2000). As such, this growth of INGO’s presence abroad has caused a subsequent rise in the amount of teachers working internationally. Therefore, this thesis is primarily concerned with how this influx of cross-cultural teachers may be affecting the relevance of formal education for Indigenous students’.

Debates over the Relevance of Education for All

The global expansion of schools being administered by international organizations has led to an increase of classes being taught by non-native teachers who may operate under Western notions and models of education. This has led to debates over the quality and utility of the education native students are receiving. Some argue that these educational pursuits give the opportunity for development and empowerment of the people because education helps to
equalize the playing field (Meyers & Ramirez, 2003; Robertson, 1992; Ramirez, Benavot, Cha, and Wong, 1991). Others argue that the growth of formal schooling run by Western modes of education are neo-imperialist in nature and 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” (Masemann, 2007, p 130). The field of comparative international education has presented much research that either supports or denounces the global export of education (Anderson-Lewitt, 2003; Carnoy, 1971; Farrell, 2008; Fuller & Clarke 1994; Leys, 1996; Masemann, 2007, Meyers & Ramirez, 2003; Roberston, 1992; Spring, 2008; Youngman, 2000). My research analyzes both sides of the debate in order to better understand the possible benefits and drawbacks of international educational aid. Furthermore, I examine the ways in which these oppositional perspectives pertain to the case study of international volunteer teachers in rural Ecuador.

**Research Context**

Rural poverty in Ecuador is mostly associated with lack of education, limited access to land, restricted access of market integration and lack of employment for non-farm sectors (Uquillas, Van Nieuwkoop, 2003). Indigenous areas still comprise the countries “highest poverty indexes, in terms of income and unsatisfied basic need, at a level of 85%.” (Uquillas, J.E., Van Nieuwkoop, M. 2003). The rural, mountainous Indigenous communities I worked in were all adversely affected by the economic problems described above as well as societal racism which restricts Indigenous people’s equitable access to resources. In terms of education, the main crux of the problem is their isolation from the urban centres. Since the communities are so high in the mountains, upkeep of roads is lacking which means delivery of supplies such as food and school resources are restricted. This is also an extreme burden on the teachers who have travel times of up to three hours just to arrive at these schools. These are the reasons why the INGO in this study decided to locate to Ecuador in 2003 in order to provide resources, services and teachers to these overburdened and under-supported schools. Consequently, over the past seven years they have established educational partnerships with three rural state schools that are affected by high levels of poverty and their isolation from urban centres.
The International Non-Governmental Organization

This international nongovernmental organization was formed in 1995 in England and is now involved with 150 project partners in over 40 countries all over the world. It is a non-political, non-religious organization that provides support and services to international charities and non-profit governmental agencies by granting direct funding and access to volunteers. In addition to providing support to already established projects it also directs and runs its own global projects. The project that I was researching was founded by the INGO itself and is part of a larger Latin American project that began in 1998 in Guatemala. All of the Latin America projects involve providing educational support to Indigenous community who have been adversely affected by historical oppression, modern racism\(^1\) and high levels of poverty. The educational supports the INGO offer range from providing resources and extra teachers in the state run schools to having school independently established by the INGO and run by international volunteer teachers.

The School Projects and the International Volunteer Teachers

The International non-governmental organization works in three state public schools in Indigenous villages in Northern Highland Ecuador. They provide international volunteer teachers and daily meals (morning dietary drink, full lunch, and afternoon fruit). This is in addition to the rations of food allotted by the government, class material and resources which are brought by volunteers. They provide transport for the local teachers up to the villages from the urban centre, which helps cut down their travel time. They also keep the school open during the summer to provide children with additional classes as well as the daily meals they rely on. Volunteer presence on the project changed almost weekly. I was there for two months. When I arrived there were three volunteers, then it grew to five, and at its peak the project had seventeen people in the schools. When I left eight volunteers were leaving with no replacements for their positions. The reason for this is, according to the project manager, is that because of global economic difficulties people are unable to volunteer for long periods of time. Therefore, they have been compelled to change the volunteer requirement from long term placements of six to nine months.

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\(^1\) Modern Racism occurs when the dominant cultures, in this case non-Indigenous Ecuadorians, values, norms and rules are imposed on diverse peoples in the name of integration. (Flecha, 1999, p 154)
to a mere two week mandatory stay. This has caused a lack of consistency and stability of the volunteer presence while at the same time sustaining a minimum presence of teachers and ongoing money for the schools. This is an issue that I will further explore in the analysis of the case study.

The educational project in Ecuador came into being because of the needs of local rural schools for extra educational assistance as well as monetary aid. The INGO, as well as the school, relies completely on international volunteers to meet both of these needs. Firstly, they are needed to teach in the schools so to keep the teacher student ratio at a functioning level. Secondly, it is their volunteer fees which help keep the project running. The project director of the Latin America education projects puts it as such,

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 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 their slogan, “You are the Difference”. Later this study will discuss how these sentiments from the organization may perpetuate the deficit concept IVTs have towards their contribution on the project.

The Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into eight chapters all of which contribute to our understanding of the how three international taught in rural indigenous communities in Ecuador and the implications this has for international aid education. They all in some way seek to help answer the research question, how do three international volunteer teachers teach in rural communities in Ecuador and are there possibilities for culturally relevant teaching to occur?

The proceeding chapter I give a review of literature which illustrates the links between theories on anti-colonial education, Indigenous knowledge/education, and culturally relevant teaching and how can each of these helped me understand the complexity and problematic nature
of the policies, issues, concepts, themes and practices related to my study ‘s questions and finding.

Chapter Three gives a detailed overview of the methodology guiding my ethnographic case study. It is here where I outline rationale, my purpose and my role as a qualitative research. It also outlines how the study was undertaken and how the data was analyzed and complied. Here I also speak of the challenges I faced while doing this research, including my positionality as a white privileged, female that initially arrived to teach English and now has become a researcher involved in a sort of meta-cognitive activity about teaching experience in a developing country context.

In Chapter Four, I give a descriptive narrative of the three international volunteer teachers I was working with. I profile these IVTs personal histories, the schools and classrooms they were working, and their perception on education and their roles as volunteers. After this, the reader is given an in-depth look at the IVTs and their circumstances I move on to the thematic finding section in Chapter Five. This chapter explores recurring trends as well as critical differences between the three IVTs and their respective schools and connects this to pertinent themes from the literature in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six explores how the thematic findings in the previous chapter can become an opportunity for praxis in my research. This chapter recommends four approaches could help the IVTs cross cultural educational interactions become more relevant to their students lives and environments. These recommendations focus on a) increasing teacher efficacy in untrained volunteer teachers b) enhancing IVTs and local teachers’ relationships c) exploring ways that IVTs can increase their cultural awareness and knowledge of their students d) cultivating CRT by engaging the differences between Indigenous students and foreign teachers.

Chapter Seven is a summary of the previous six chapters and presents a final conclusion. Here I examine how the findings and discussion of this study contribute to an understanding of global, cross-cultural and Indigenous education in the context of the literature on comparative international and development education. This chapter culminates by offering recommendations for future research that stem from this particular ethnographic case study. In the final Chapter Eight, I take a reflective approach to the journey that brought me to and through my academic
research. I offer insights in the changes that occurred within myself as an IVT as well as a researcher during this study. This section ends with my own ideal of what international aid education could look like if it was inclusive of Indigenous knowledges and alternative ways of learning and knowing.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review provides a conceptual understanding of the issues that surround my research. I will highlight how theories on anti-colonial education, Indigenous knowledge (IK) and culturally relevant teaching (CRT) are all interconnected. This review will also examine how these interconnected lines of thought inform my research and also how they will be operationalized in terms of my research. First, I set forth the arguments made by Anti-Colonial authors who assert that repressive colonial structures are still in place today, especially in the education system. It will outline how they contend that by reclaiming and maintaining Indigenous knowledge the decolonization process can finally begin. These arguments set the stage for explorations of Indigenous education systems and various notions of what exactly is local or Indigenous knowledge. It will begin with a brief history of the difficulties that have, and do face Indigenous peoples with respect to education. Next, this review will move on to include various perspectives of what exactly constitutes local indigenous knowledge and also how these systems of knowledge function within a highly Western world model of education. Lastly, it will discuss literature on what I refer to as “culturally relevant teaching” though it encompasses similar research on culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, culturally responsive classrooms, and inclusive schooling. The purpose of this will be to explore how ‘culturally relevant teaching’ is connected to Indigenous education and how these connection will be used in my analysis of international volunteer teachers as cultural workers. I explore the challenges that certain teachers face when teaching students of a different backgrounds, races and cultures in both domestic and international classrooms. Additionally, I will review the ways in which authors argue that CRT is a useful method in creating more equitable and supportive classrooms so that we may have a fuller understanding of what this theory may look like in practice.

Anti-Colonial Education

Anti-colonial theory argues our ‘post-colonial world’ is really just marking “the end of an epoch falsely by placing a break where none exists” (Wane, 2009, p 169). They argue that current oppression and domination stems from colonial structures and hierarchies that are reinforced by
capital industrialism, systemic discrimination and the status quo which normalize it (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Kempf, 2009). Therefore, anti-colonialists view colonialism as not an historical subject but a trans-historical phenomenon that pervades almost all facets of life (Kempf, 2006).

Due to this, these scholars assert that decolonization must take place in order to dismantle the internal and external oppression caused by colonialism that dominates “political and legal systems, governance, health and wellness, education, and the environment” (Simpson, 2004, p 373). As such, anti-colonial theorists want to introduce “holistic reading to domination and resistance, raising important questions about the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, racial, linguistic and religious based oppression” (Kempf, 2009, p14). However, ACT does not just want to intellectualize our understanding of colonialism but rather it attempts to build a discursive framework explicating the ways in which decolonization can be achieved. ACT asserts that decolonization is an individual and collective process that involves the colonized and the colonizers, which must take place in order for meaningful social change to occur (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Fanon, 1963). To achieve decolonization people must become critically conscious of the past and current colonial context so that they may reflect on what has been lost (physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, etc.) in order that it may be recovered and reclaimed (Smith, 2006). Furthermore, they argue that one must situate oneself within the colonial context to see where individuals may be implicated in reinforcing or promoting the continued cycle of colonialism (Kempf, 2009, p 20). This is why I have found it important to impart my history, background and positionality as a frame of reference for myself as well as the reader.

Anti-colonial theory critically examines spaces where imposition is occurring. They do this by challenging dominant voices that normalize and also devalue certain ways of knowing and living (Kempf, 2009; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000). It argues that by calling into question the current colonial condition we can begin to make connections between “what is and what ought to be...what is possible and what exists” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p 299). This dialogue of hope is meant to foster a transformative process that decentres taken-for-granted logic and certainty in order to open spaces where marginalized voices and forms of knowing can be reclaimed and legitimized. This is a transformative social theory that generally speaks to multiple
facets of human life. However, I look at ACT through an educational lens since it is the primary tool that can promote transforming this theory into practice. This theory perceives educational reform as a great means for addressing “social inequities, prejudice, discrimination and bias in schooling and to promote unity and togetherness” (Dei, 2004, 345). Therefore I will explore the ways in which anti-colonial theory can be applied to anti-colonial education.

**From anti-colonial theory to anti-colonial education**

In the study, “Building Anti-colonial spaces for Global Education: Challenges and Success”, Langdon and Harvey set forth a working framework for anti-colonial education (ACE). This anti-colonial criterion focuses on combining elements of theory and practice and how they complement each other so that praxis may occur. Also, it sets out an understandable guideline of anti-colonial education which I use to explicate how Indigenous knowledge may be connected to culturally relevant teaching.

In Langdon and Harvey’s study they examine “Global Education” and the tensions that stem from colonial roots. They claim that although global education originates as a Western ideology that it is still possible for education systems to be spring boards which disable normative values created and reinforced by Eurocentric discourses. They argue this can be done if the learning begins to challenge students to deconstruct how dominant epistemic borders become ingrained as universal, valid and absolute through the reading and validation of alternative discourses in the classroom (Langdon & Harvey, 2009, p 221).

Anti-colonial education provides a discourse that works to reclaim and strengthen multiple sites of knowledge. This will lead to what Molefi Kete Asante calls ‘the painful demise of Eurocentrism’, which harnesses oppressed modes of thought in order to subvert hegemonic Eurocentric knowledge systems that pervade almost all forms of formal education (Kempf, 2009; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). This action is not meant to create a false dichotomy between Western and alternative ways of knowing. ACT does acknowledge the interconnectivity as well as the dissimilarities within these knowledge systems. However, it still argues that Euro-centred ways of knowing and the idea of “valid knowledge” must be ruptured so that alternative ways of knowing may finally be reclaimed, highlighted, affirmed and legitimated (Dei, Hall &
Rosenburg, 2000, p 5). The central tenets of ACT offer the reasoning behind why Indigenous knowledge systems must be re-established and supported through education. It is only when we have an inclusive system that embraces alternative ways of knowing that we may broach the colonial discourse that pervades our minds, and local, national and global epistemologies (Langdon & Harvey, 2009, p 221). As such, this is the theory that supports my argument that Indigenous knowledge is an essential element in the schools in my case study. Now we will discuss the concepts behind the terms Indigenous Education and Indigenous Knowledge so we might begin to understand what it would look like in practice.

**Indigenous Knowledge and (Indigenous) Education**

Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous education have had a sordid history and at times have been antithetical in nature. In fact, many indigenous people regard Indigenous education as a critical component in their history of oppression and marginalization (Yazzie, 2000; Dei & Kempf, 2006, Smith, 1999; Wane, 2009). This history began with western colonial powers usurping their land and their autonomy followed by the new nation states imposing educational systems that left out their own systems of learning and knowing (Battiste, 2000). Now it is argued that we have moved on to a more discrete era of neo-colonialism (Yazzie, 2000). The overt pursuits of colonialism may be gone but the remnants remain in certain aspects of our social systems (Burgess, 2000).

School systems are one of the key institutions where we can see how the vestiges of former colonial domination are still divisive and oppressive (Altbach & Kelly, 1978). This is due, in part, to the universalization of Western European models of education into formalized school systems world-wide (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Wane, 2009). Furthermore, it is argued that a main reason why traditional ways of knowing are still excluded in mainstream education is due to globalizing forces from the Western world. More so than ever, ideas, technologies and global markets are constructed under western hegemonic conceptions, standards and value systems (Dei, & Kempt, 2006). Wane considers how these pressures to fit into the global political, economic and social strata caused many newly independent states to not develop their own distinct curriculum, one that could be accessible to their citizens’ own lives. She laments her own

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2 Western knowledge systems seek to produce “not local but trans-local knowledge”, which often ignore locality and silence its own origins (Semali & Kincheloe 1999, p 28, Rains, 1999).
experience with this and calls attention to the “fragmentations and dissonance created in a child’s psyche when there is a disconnect between what they are taught in school and their home experience” (Wane, 2009, pp160).

Therefore, non-industrialized societies are caught in a ‘catch 22’ situation. On the one hand, they are compelled to ‘speak the language’ of the industrialized West in order to gain access to becoming modern (Smith, 1999). On the other hand, is the challenge that by adopting the Western worldview many Indigenous peoples lose access to Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking and learning (Madjidi, & Restoule, 2008). For Erica-Irene Daes (2000), this loss leads to ‘spiritual death’ that is manifested by intellectual loneliness that comes from a lack of confidence and an apathy and fear of action to reclaim one’s voice and vision. Due to these issues some view Indigenous knowledge and formal education as incompatible. Saad and Champagne (2006) purport that this is because “Indigenous peoples carry cultures, values and epistemologies” that are incongruent with western worldviews and educational models. While most do not deny how the separation of school from its context subsequently alienates certain students, the prevailing attitude of many is that there is room “for improvement, not abolition, for reschooling not deschooling” (Porter, 1999, pp17).

**Indigenous Rights and Education**

Indigenous rights and education have been debated on the national and international level with Indigenous groups demanding sovereignty, self-determination and with international groups offering collaborated support and representation (Indigenous World, 2009). The growing awareness of Indigenous oppression and heightened concern over the growing poverty and disparities that plague Indigenous peoples worldwide has culminated in the United Nations General Assembly adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Yet thus far this has been more of a symbolic triumph rather than a practical act (Indigenous World, 2009). So far there has been no common agreement on how to manage the challenges of creating, administering and implementing a successful approach to indigenous education. There are many debates as to why developments for Indigenous education have been so difficult. George Sefa Dei (2000) argues that there is a lack of awareness, accountability and responsibility for past and current colonial oppression from nations and certain institutions such as schools. Dei
insists that colonized peoples must awaken to their history and current context in order to pursue an anticolonial struggle that is both political and academic. He focuses heavily on how Indigenous peoples should position their struggle through reclaiming their past ways of knowing as a way to challenge dominant worldviews. Cathryn McConaghy (2000) on the other hand seeks a collective solution to neo-colonialism and Indigenous peoples. She contends that we must find a common space between the paternalism, welfarism and assimilatory educational practices from the West and radical isolation, and refusal of non-Indigenous practices from weary Indigenous populations (2000). These contentions over how we can, and should, approach Indigenous education are implicated in the way we define Indigenous knowledge.

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

This notion of breaking down incompatible binaries between Western and Indigenous education also applies when attempting to define Indigenous knowledge. Kincheloe and Semali (1999) in “What is Indigenous Knowledge: Voices from the Academy” undertake the difficult task of defining Indigenous knowledge. From the onset they explain that by re-defining Indigenous knowledge we may actually break down the deep imperialist notions that mire many people’s understanding of it. They argue that we need a redefinition and re-understanding in order to come to a more valid and legitimate representation and a deeper comprehension of the complexity of Indigenous knowledge. Yet definitions are difficult, and ‘ready made’ notions of indigenous culture sometimes are used heedlessly perpetuating ideological regimes of “universalism, cultural racism and cultural incompatibility” (McConaghy, 2000, pp xi). In order to avoid divisive terms McConaghy suggests a post-culturalist approach that looks past overly simplistic representations that places people into reductive categories and homogenizes Indigenous peoples’ identities and subjectivities. She argues we must challenge epistemological assumptions that are limited by cultural biases and by doing so reformulate how we understand the conditions that would allow for a more comprehensible, legitimate form of Indigenous education.

This issue can be extended to how Indigenous people name themselves. Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2000) worries that labels can become self-fulfilling prophecies, which perpetuate subordination, oppression and inequalities between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. He argues that labels such as minority, exploited, oppressed and subordinate should be used
carefully and with a critical understanding of the connotations that they involve (Hingangaroa-Smith, 2000). That being said, there is still a need to define Indigenous knowledge as a discrete category to open up the opportunity for recognition, validation, awareness and subsequently decolonization of these ways of knowing (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Furthermore, it may encourage interactions between Indigenous worldview and Western world views that may allow access to new ways of learning and knowing. (Abdullah, & Stringer, 1999; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999)

Nevertheless, because this term includes millions of Indigenous peoples we must be careful not to focus on knowledge as fixed and specific but rather on the generation of knowledge, which continually develops knowledge that is relevant to local situations (Viergever, 1999). It is in this way that we can avoid the essentialism, romanticization and marginalization which has formerly been imposed by Western academia and scientists who viewed their ways of knowing as stagnant and ‘culturally grounded’ (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, pp 20-21) With all this said, it is important to recognize Marie Battiste and Youngblood Hendersons’ claim that we will never come to answer, ‘What is Indigenous Knowledge?’ if the question is posed within the modern Eurocentric epistemology of rationality and objectivity (2000). Thus in order to understand Indigenous knowledge we must come to accept that it is not a concept that can be fully known because it is a living system that resides within a clan, a tribe, a community and an individual that cannot be understood as separate from them (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). We must consider the limitations of defining Indigenous knowledge and the merits of utilizing the concept as an emancipatory tool for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous knowledge is a system that encompasses cultural traditions, values, belief system and worldviews and as such can never be fully defined as a knowable object (Battiste, 2000). Yet this worldview can be said contextual in so far as it is deeply connected to space as it springs from the everyday experience of daily life, which itself is generated by the characteristics of the people, environment and political and social history of the space (Mwadime, 1999). As such, Indigenous Knowledge can be considered as embedded in a local people’s commonsense ideas and cultural knowledges which are based on a holistic understanding of the social, natural, physical and metaphysical worlds (Dei, Rosenberg & Hall, 2000). Because this is an inherently flexible term I will be using my own experiences on the ground level and interviews with the local teachers in order to elaborate and localize what I
will be referring to as local or Indigenous knowledge. I will use the terms local and Indigenous interchangeable throughout my study. This is because I want elucidate to the reader that Indigenous knowledge is situated in a locality of time and space but that it also is connected to larger issues and concepts that I have outlined in this review section.

**Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Now that I have highlighted how education is integral to breaking down colonial boundaries and reclaiming and re-establishing Indigenous knowledge systems I will establish how culturally relevant teaching is connected to this process. As I have said, the term I will be using, ‘Culturally Relevant Teaching’, is actually an amalgamation of various studies on creating culturally successful classrooms through teachers’ development. I was first introduced to this concept through Gloria Ladson-Billing seminal article, ‘Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy’, which she examines the interactions between culture and teaching. Although much of the work in culturally relevant pedagogy looks at urban schools and ethnic minorities in North America, its basic goals are relevant to a global context, as teachers and students are more frequently working within ethnically and culturally diverse classroom. Also, it is pertinent to the goal of anti-colonial education in that culturally relevant teaching has been found, by many educational researchers, as an effective way to give enriching and equitable education to culturally diverse students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). Furthermore, since culturally relevant pedagogy does not view teachers’ race as a limiting factor to teaching this model can be applied to ethnically diverse international teachers in the study.

Culturally relevant teaching does not mean that teachers must relate to their students’ personal, ethnic or cultural backgrounds of students. Rather this mode of teaching requires a focus on the ethics of caring and personal accountability by the teacher for their students. In order for a teacher to truly teach ethically they must a) care about the implications that their work has on students lives, the welfare of the community and challenging social inequality and b) be personally accountable for the pedagogical methods they employ to do this. This approach is meant to have teachers become cultural workers that can elicit positive change by systematically including their students’ culture as a legitimated form of knowledge (Gay, 2000, Ladson-Billings, 1995).
Geneva Gay expands on Ladson-Billings’ study of culturally relevant pedagogy in her book “Culturally Responsive Teaching”, which argues that if teachers can understand their students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles, then learning becomes more appropriate and effective for them. In this study, I will examine the international volunteers’ perspectives on caring for and being personally responsible to their students. Also, I will be examining how they understand their students’ cultural knowledge or local knowledge, lived experiences and educational abilities. I use this definition because it allows the study of culturally relevant teaching to remain adaptable and contextual to the teachers’ and students’ particular contexts. In addition, this literature review will now address the ambiguous concept of culture that has been referenced in this section.

**Defining Culture**

I want to question and be conscious of how I am defining culture and how it will be operationalized in this study. This is because it is an ambiguous concept that has many meaning to many people, and is easily reified as an objective reality when it really is a subjective concept. Therefore this section will explore the issue of defining the ‘culture’ in CRT. Some argue that in some instances culture has been used to a) unjustly reify culture, b) delineate and divide between culture and c) cause relativism arguing that people can only understand their world on their own terms (Burtonwood, 1986). Therefore one must be careful not to speak of cultures as ‘islands unto themselves’ since this would destroy any movements towards a universal understanding of rationality (Burtonwood 1986, pp 15). For that reason it is argued that one must avoid simplistic notions of culture and accept an ‘all-embracing’ concept of culture (Elwyn T, 2000, pp22). In this way when I speak of the student or communities’ culture it comes from an interpretive process that is about individual meanings, as well as a particular context and the nature of human behaviour (Serpell & Hatano, 1997; Rohner, 1984; Brofenbrenner, 1970 as quoted in Elwyn T, 2000).

These loosely flowing ideas of culture are taken up in constructivist approaches to culturally relevant teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Constructivists looks to cultural education not as a fixed subject but as an overarching objective that should flow through the entire curriculum, whether it be content or pedagogy (Tabachnik & Zeicher, 1993, Larkin, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) Additionally, constructivist approaches develop culturally relevant
teaching because they respect all students by acknowledging how individual and cultural diversity factor into the learning processes. Subsequently this approach helps one to avoid compartmentalizing or delineating a person or community as wholly one thing or another. This is why I have chosen to take a constructivist approach when I refer to the culturally relevant teaching evident in my case studies. It is also why each school community in the case studies will be illustrated separately so that it highlights the differences between them.

Additional Strategies for Culturally Relevant Teaching

Here, I include other pedagogical strategies that are touched upon in the interpretation and analysis of the case studies. One idea that I refer to in my study is the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy through teacher reflection. Tyrone Howard asserts that critical reflection should be a foundational aspect of culturally relevant teaching strategies. The pedagogical strategy of critical reflection stems from P.J Palmers (1998) contentions that that ‘we teach who we are’. In this way, critical reflection becomes a way for teachers to understand their own lived experiences and positionality so that they understand how it is enacted in their teaching. Howard asserts that melding this method with culturally relevant pedagogy would create a mutually beneficial process that would cause “improving practice, rethinking philosophies, and becoming effective teachers… that requires them to put the needs of their students ahead of all other considerations” (2003, pp 200). This notion of teacher awareness is developed by Sherry Marx’s (2008) in her case study of successful White teachers. She argues that even if cross-cultural teaching occurs teachers still need to be conscious of systemic barriers and racial inequalities and deal with these issues in the classroom. She examines what she calls ‘colour blindness’ in the classroom and declares that teachers must be aware and honest about cultural differences and conflicts instead of avoiding them for the sake of harmony. This position is expanded by Peter Gorski who points to the fact that teachers must be aware of their own colonial positionality and history in order to challenge hegemony instead of reifying it. I found the idea of teacher awareness to be quite relevant in my research in that I had varying levels of what I would call a cultural consciousness of the cross-cultural context teachers were experiencing. As such, I will be broadly referring to CRT by incorporating these subsequent theories that enhance my notions of culturally relevant teaching. Therefore, CRT and teacher awareness will be used a part of the loose framework which examines the attitudes, understanding and pedagogy of international
volunteer teachers (IVT). This examination will allow me to assess the implications IVT’s have on the relevancy and the inclusivity of Indigenous students’ education.

**Summary of Literature**

This literature has reviewed on anti-colonial theory, Indigenous knowledge and culturally relevant teaching which influenced my investigations into how three international volunteer teachers taught in rural Indigenous classrooms and the possibilities for culturally relevant teaching to occur. Anti-colonial theory led me to this research study because it made me question how colonialism is implicated in global education processes and projects. It helped me reassess my own role as a volunteer teacher and how my positionality and background was implicated in how and what I taught my Indigenous students. By the end of my research on Anti-colonial theory and education I was not sure that my work overseas was as beneficial or benevolent as I had assumed. The literature on Indigenous knowledge further influenced my understanding of how power and epistemologies are interconnected. Admittedly, I was so involved in my own education that I did not realize that the education that benefited me so well actually disadvantages others. By learning about alternative ways of knowing and learning I realized that there is a great need for school systems to be more open and inclusive of different knowledges and learning processes.

This idea of inclusive education brought me to the topic of culturally relevant teaching that centred on the teachers as the vessel through which alternative ways of knowing and learning can be supported and fostered. Although the notion of culturally relevant teaching comes from a Western context, I found that it could be adapted to a rural, Indigenous context if it incorporated the ideals of anti-colonial theorists. ACT is more than just a theoretical guide because it clearly explicates to teachers how anti-colonial education can be implemented in their personal and professional lives for the betterment of their students’ lives. It does this by outlining the ways in which teachers can affect mental, emotional and intellectual openness as well as criticality in the classroom. I saw that anti-colonial theory explicitly targets what culturally relevant pedagogy intends to mend, which is the inequality and unfairness of our formal educational institutions towards minoritized students. This is because ACT is more than just a philosophical theory, it is also an instructive theory that guides and promotes social and political action (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p 298). Furthermore, the focus ACT has on Indigenous
knowledge helps to broaden the reach of culturally relevant pedagogy by taking it out of urban North American classrooms and making it applicable to the local, global and Indigenous contexts. This research then will utilize a version of culturally relevant Indigenous pedagogy is inclusive of anti-colonial strategies that seeks to reclaim and strengthen Indigenous knowledges. In this study this culturally relevant Indigenous pedagogy views the teacher as fostering their students’ own culture and ways of knowing as a means of re-establishing IK as a legitimate epistemology. Therefore, what will be viewed as culturally relevant is creating an anti-colonial classroom where teacher and student work together to create profound social change in their world (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Fanon, 1963). This following chapter will outline the research methodology that guided the research process, as well highlight the limitations of certain research aims and goals.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the reasons that led me to this field of research and this study in particular. It also sets out to situate myself as a researcher; I want the reader to be aware of my background and my positionality which I believe are relevant factors when doing research focused on or involving Indigenous peoples. With this in mind, I will outline how my research was conducted with a dedicated awareness of the ethical implications in undertaking Indigenous research. Next, it explains the methodical approaches and tools that allowed me to explore and analyze the relationships that international volunteer teachers (IVTs) have with Indigenous knowledge. Finally, it discusses the practical limitations and the ethical concerns when doing cross-cultural research specific to Indigenous communities.

My Rationale

I was afforded the opportunity to do my research at these schools because of my past volunteer and employment history with the INGO. This was also why I chose to do research on international volunteer teachers with this INGO.

I formerly volunteered for an International Non-Governmental Organization that established and directed a school for Indigenous Mayan students in a rural village in Guatemala. During this time I observed firsthand the diversities, interactions and tensions between Western knowledge systems and Indigenous knowledge systems. Local knowledge, which is a holistic understanding of the everyday realities of their environment and living (Semali, & Kincheloe, 1999; Madjidi, & Restoule, 2008; Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg; 2000; Mwadime, 1999), was most often excluded from my classroom lessons. Furthermore, I was unaware that my students had specific ways of knowing and learning that would be of value for their learning experiences. Nevertheless, my experience was not devoid of Indigenous knowledge. Outside the classroom, the students readily imparted their local knowledge to me so that I gained a better understanding of the environment I was teaching in. My sporadic encounters with Indigenous knowledge fuelled my interest in examining the cross-cultural relationship that other international teachers have with local knowledge systems and how this is manifested in the classroom.
There is an abundance of literature on comparative international education (CIE) which provides statistics on the rise in enrolment rates and literacy rates globally, as well as a range of theoretical debates that focus on the benefits and drawbacks of global education (Arnove, 1980; Marginson & Mollis, 2001; Fuller, 1991; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). However, international volunteers teachers’ experiences have been minimally accounted for in much of the research focused on the current state of global education. To this end, I wanted to conduct an ethnographic study that would be inclusive of teachers’ voices, perspectives and practices on the ground level. With this in mind, I set out to uncover the interactions of cross-cultural teaching and local knowledge and how these may affect students’ education. Therefore my purpose was to “experience, interpret, and represent culture and society” so that it is informed by and informs theoretical and disciplinary discussions (Pink, S, 2001 pp 18).

**My Role as Qualitative Researcher**

All researchers are linked to their epistemology and their own history of knowing which determines their positionality and role as a researcher (Sciarra, 1999). This is especially important to consider in a study that is conducted with human participants in a foreign setting. Therefore, I would like to situate myself to give the reader a better understanding of the lens though which the data is being conceptualized and filtered.

I would like to point out that I myself am not Indigenous, nor am I a visible minority in Canada. I was raised in a position of privilege, as a middle class second generation, White Canadian. Furthermore, I was taught under a Western Model of schooling. Both my upbringing and schooling has shaped my perspectives, biases and epistemologies, so much so that I acknowledge that I cannot speak as an authority on Indigenous knowledge. That being said, I can set forth to create an informed interpretation that is rooted in Indigenous knowledge literature and from the perspectives of the Indigenous peoples with whom I have worked.

In addition to situating myself, it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous groups have had a difficult history with research that has been implicated in propelling the project of colonialism forward (Smith, 2006). In consideration of my positionality and of Indigenous people’s history with research, my role as a researcher was less about control and authority and more about studying and learning actively (Sciarra, 1999). Therefore, my role as researcher was
to enter my participants’ worlds, “not as a person who knows everything, but as a person who has come to learn; not as a person who wants to be like them but as a person who wants to know what it is like to be like them” (Bogdan & Biklan, 1994, p 79). What I set out to learn then is simply what these teachers are teaching, how they are teaching, and why they teach what they do. I did this by investigating how their lived histories and ground level contexts contributed to their educational outlook and approaches and how this may have affected their student’s education.

Additionally, I studied anti-colonial theories in order to attempt to decolonize my own academic practices in order to speak more clearly about Indigenous issues (Dei, & Kempf, 2006; Wane, 2006; Wane, 2009; Yazzie, 2000). These theoretical frameworks allowed me challenge my practices as a Western researcher in order to make them more relevant to Indigenous research. To do this, I committed to adopting a role that was more attuned to “locally meaningful expectations and concerns” (Lomawaima, 2000 as quoted in Bishop, 2005). My role as a non-Indigenous researcher was to ensure my research with the indigenous community was “respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful” (Smith, 2006, pp9). Also, my purpose was to conduct research that is actively involved in investigating ways in which schooling can become more culturally relevant for the students in the communities. Therefore, the research does not just speak to the academy or disciplinary theory but is an informative tool that will be useful to the communities in my study (Lomawaima, 2000). To this end, my research implications and conclusions focus on recommendations for teachers to develop their pedagogical positions and approaches so that they better suit the cultural context in which they are teaching in.

**Epistemology**

The ontology directing this study is nominalistic in so far as I do not attempt to find one true meaning or absolute answer from my research (Cohen, & Manion, 1994). Rather, the nominalist approach to knowledge and comprehension has led me to a “softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of a unique and personal nature” (Cohen, & Manion, 1994, pg 6). Therefore, in my analysis I do not attempt to seek hard evidence as to the ‘type’ of teacher that volunteers abroad since I found that there are no absolutes, or facts that can be derived from the study of such a diverse array of people. However, I do give insight into the multi-faceted experiences that these three selected teachers have had. As such, I take an
idiographic approach that emphasizes the many realities of different individuals which itself allows for a broader understanding of the culture of schooling these teachers are creating (Cohen, & Manion, 1994). In order to do this, I explored my three principal participants’ own lived experiences and realities through observation, discussion and interviews during their time as international volunteer teachers. This idiographic approach to various individual understandings is an integral part of my analysis and understanding of the deeper issues that are occurring in international development education. I employed this methodological approach because it is able to go beyond “merely providing an experiential comfort blankets” by moving from the personal to the practical in an effort to “draw out appropriate implications from these stories” (Silverman, 2005, pg 17).

Ethnographic Case Study
Since objective reality can never be fully captured, I took a multi-method approach in order to locate various representations of international volunteer teachers’ experiences and the culture of education that they create (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This ethnographic approach has allowed me to look at both the individual teachers and the larger local context in order to detail a clearer picture of how the school itself is functioning. In order to achieve the multiple representations of reality to present a meaningful narrative of their stories, I employed multiple methods of inquiry that complemented one another (Mason, 1996). They ranged from day to day observations of classroom routines and practices, informal and formal discussions and semi structured interviews. Additionally, because of the need for substitute teachers, I worked sporadically in the schools as a teacher with students of my participants. This active participation was a positive addition to the research because it allowed me to obtain a clearer understanding of the teachers’ roles and duties and it helped break down the researcher and researched roles so we could have more candid ‘teacher to teacher’ conversations.

For this case study, the three primary participants were international volunteer teachers from the United States, Germany and Australia. Although this is a broad spectrum, they each have lived and been educated under what I would broadly call formal Western school systems. These three participants were the main focus of my study and my primary interviewees. Most of the field research was spent observing their classroom practices (Appendix B). Nonetheless, I also conducted informal interviews and had discussions (Appendix C) with secondary
participants in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the school, community and local knowledge systems. These secondary participants included the project manager, the volunteer coordinators, and the local teachers. In total there were two hour long interviews with each of my primary participants, at the beginning and end of my study. I had one interview with each of my secondary participants which was conducted at the beginning of the study (Appendix A) and the second interviews near the end of the two month study (Appendix D). In total I had seven in class observations with each of the primary participants. I logged at least twenty hours of classroom observations. During my time at the schools I also observed the local teachers practices on a more informal level during breaks, lunch and when we had group activities. Furthermore, I lived and worked with the project manager for six weeks and had a firsthand look at the daily activities and challenges she undertook.

The multitude of interviews and observations with my various participants facilitated a better understanding how the schools functioned and of the particular challenges and opportunities within a diverse cross-cultural educational setting such as this. Close work within the school as a researcher, as well as a teacher, gave me better insights into what types of knowledge and ways of knowing could be deemed Indigenous or local as well as how the school itself is perceived and administered. Moreover, the perspectives from my secondary participants allowed me to compare and contrast with the responses of the international volunteer teachers.

Selection of Participants

Principal Participants

The primary focus of my study was to explore three international volunteer teachers’ perspectives, understanding and approaches to teaching and how they were relevant to their Indigenous students’ lives and environments. Therefore, the international volunteer teachers are the principal participants in my case study. Selection of my participants was based on two main criteria; they must be non-Native and reside in another country. Also I preferred teachers who had been at the school the longest and where possible were different genders and ages and nationalities to provide variance. I had to keep my criteria open because of the continual rotation of volunteer teachers. The difficulty of finding a long term volunteer is indicative of the
fluctuations that also occurred in this project. Furthermore, volunteer illness factored into my choice of participant. When I arrived, there was low volunteer placement and there were only 3 volunteers at the time, ranging from three to six month placements. Unfortunately, one of the volunteers was frequently sick and as such I was unable to rely on her for classroom observations. Illness was a common occurrence among volunteers who often had a difficult time adjusting to the climate, food and sanitary conditions in Ecuador. This factored into why I was often needed as a substitute teacher, while I was researching.

Because of the long term placement volunteer’s illness, I chose the next volunteer to arrive who was on a six week placement. Although I initially only wanted long term volunteers, I now see having a short term volunteer as a important addition to the study since short term placements are becoming more of the norm and as such a reality that must also be considered and analyzed.

Secondary Participants

This second component of the study was to gain insights into local knowledge systems and the philosophy of the school itself. I chose a multiple perspective approach that gives the study a greater and broader perspective of the school and the community in which these international volunteer teachers (IVT) are working in. The inclusion of the secondary participants permitted me to compare and contrast the experiences that the IVT’s have with the local teachers and the members of the community. The secondary participants included three local teachers, and the project manager. In total, the secondary participants included four people. These subjects are included as part of the supplementary data that supports the comparative analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection focused on a multi-method approach to research to enhance my presentation of the experiences of these teachers, as well as strengthen the credibility and validity of my findings (Golafshani, N., 2003). This multiple method approach involved classroom observations, formalized discussions, and semi structured interviews. These varying research tools allowed me to triangulate my research so that I had an interconnected, in depth understanding of the phenomena in question (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p 5). However, I also knew I had to limit the types of data collected. The reason for this was to avoid overextended and superficial data
collection which can cause an under analysis of the material collected (Silverman, 2005). As Silverman (2005) puts it, “it is far better to celebrate the particularity of your data and delight in the particular phenomena that it allows you to inspect” (p 122).

**Observations**

This study is an attempt to enhance our understanding of how international volunteer teachers’ experience local knowledge. One way I learned about this was through a participant-observer role (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I considered myself an active participant since the low ratio of teachers to students made my help in teaching and preparing for class necessary. From time to time I was in the teachers’ classrooms as an assistant to them as well as an observer. This dual relationship was complementary because I was working under their direction and thus was offered a firsthand sense of their pedagogy as well as the challenges they faced. For the most part, I was able to passively observe using my observation guide (Appendix B). During this time took I field notes that included thick descriptions, conducted preliminary data analysis, and made personal reflections (Cohen & Manion, Morrison, 2003). Because I was in three different schools during week I was able to take observations of the three teachers once or twice each week. I tried to rotate classroom observations between teacher participants equally. And in the end, in just over seven weeks, at least seven full day classroom observations for each teacher were conducted, totalling twenty-one full day teacher observations.

**Formalized Discussions**

The formalized discussion with primary and secondary participants gave me a fuller understanding of the environment as well as the subjects themselves. The discussions as a research method were included because I think it would be careless to disregard the immense contribution that the daily discussions made to my perceptions, opinions and analytic processes that have surely influenced the final data analysis. The purposeful discussions allowed me to clarify questions about the school, their experiences with education and their thoughts about the IVTs (Appendix C).
**Semi Structured Interviews with Principal Participants**

The semi-structured interviews were used as a way to allow my primary participants the freedom to express themselves openly and without the pressure of feeling they had to give ‘correct’ answers to my questions. I wanted to maintain a flow similar to a discussion since I assert that it maintained the cordial relationship that I had already established with my participants. I saw this mode of interview as most conducive to an open, candid and personal account of their lives and experiences. On the other hand I wanted to have a set of questions in order to provide enough uniformity of thought that would allow for a later comparative analysis. Therefore, having semi-structured interviews provided a way for a general direction for my participants to guide me through issues that were most relevant and significant to them.

During my time on the project I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant to gain insight into their educational background and experiences, their comprehension and conceptualization of Indigenous knowledge, their perceptions of the value and utility of Indigenous knowledge to their students and the extent to which they felt they are able to translate these beliefs into practice.

My first interviews were at the beginning of my research. The pre-observation interview allowed a relatively formal introduction to my research ideas and to their own history as educators as well as to their attitudes, understandings and approaches to indigenous knowledge (Appendix A).

These interviews were useful as a contrast to my second interviews that were conducted after two months of close contact where relationships, biases and assumptions may be more settled in. Questions for these interviews were a combination of my initial guiding inquiries as well as new questions that emerged from my observations in the class and my discussions with both primary and secondary participants (Appendix D). These questions sought to clarify any uncertainties or issues related to certain discussions we had or incidents that occurred in the classroom. The primary aim of these interviews was first: to have the teachers share their experiences as foreigners and as educators, and second, to explore the perceived challenges they face as non-native teachers and discuss with them possible solutions to improve the relevance, effectiveness and the usefulness of their practices as international volunteer teachers.
Data Compilation and Analysis

Data collection and data analysis of the qualitative research was conducted as a simultaneous, iterative process (Creswell, 2007). Since I was living in situ for two months I took this time to analyze my weekly data collections. This was done by making daily notes on interesting observations, discussion topics or any anomalous incidents. This continual reflection allowed me to be more conscious of the certain aspects of the individual teacher’s perceptions and experiences and as such also allowed further interviews and observations to be more reflective, grounded and analytical in light of former situations presented.

Also, during my time on the project I read and analyzed the data from the interviews with my principal and secondary participants (Appendix A and C). I used this raw data from both these interviews and drew connections between IVT experiences with local knowledge with the local teachers understanding of local knowledge. The continual review of data helped me assess how well my primary research questions were being engaged and helped me to organize and prepare for the larger analysis when I returned from the field.

Upon completing my primary research, I used the raw and partially analyzed data to begin a more comprehensive system of pragmatic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). I used a coding process that looks at primary participants individually and as a group in order to search for units of data. These units include repeated or meaningful words, clustering similar phases or topics, highlighting anecdotal narratives and major issues, which relate to my research questions. This coding process was influenced and organized by my preliminary literature review of Indigenous knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy. I use decisive terms and concepts within this literature to sort and categorize the units of analysis into a situated conceptual framework.

The point of this was to find an interrelationship between the data collected, the literary texts and certain educational themes that came from my preliminary and field research. The final result of the coding process allowed me to have organized units of analysis/comparison between the principal participants’ experiences and those of the secondary participants. This allowed for a cross-comparison of each participant that identified common patterns or dissimilar concepts within each individual case, thereby allowing me to gain deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of the culture of schooling being created.
Research Limitations and Ethical Considerations

There are some considerations I would like to address before we enter into the central part of the paper. The first is confidentiality of my study. The second is the notion of coercion since I have previous ties to the organization. The third is the consideration of linguistic limitations. My last and greatest concern is my voice as a researcher and how I will speak to others’ lived experiences, due to the epistemological, cultural and linguistic divide between myself and the Indigenous community.

I entered this study openly as a researcher, and as such was unable to conceal the identities of the primary participants from the others’ working on the project and at the schools. This did not end up being a large issue, because none of my principal participants seemed to mind that others knew of their participation in this project. Furthermore, they enjoyed sharing their stories during our interviews and having an extra person in their room during my observations.

My secondary participants, on the other hand, had more say in the terms of when and where the informal interviews took place. They determined when and where they would like to have discussions and were able to keep their participation in this study confidential if they chose.

In terms of research confidentiality I assured all participants in writing that any information shared and any observations I made would remain strictly confidential (Appendix G, Appendix I, Appendix J). All names would remain anonymous and research data would not be shared with fellow participants, school associates or community members.

Coercion was a consideration because of my previous connections with the INGO and the director of the Latin America projects. I began volunteering with the organization in 2006 and in 2007-2008 I worked as a project manager of an English school in Costa Rica. As a result there was some concern related to my previous relationships with the members of the schools I would research. However, I had not worked at this particular school nor did I know the project manager in advance. I actually think that my previous work as a volunteer assuaged certain apprehensions that one may have when facing the prospect of being ‘studied’. Furthermore, it was known from the outset that potential participants would experience no repercussions or consequences if they chose not participate.
Though I consider myself proficient in Spanish, it is not my native language; therefore, errors and misunderstandings occurred from time to time. In order to address this issue I gave all participants the opportunity to review the transcripts in both English and Spanish in order to ensure the best translation and interpretation of their ideas. Every effort was made to avoid miscommunications by thoroughly reviewing my non-English data for inconsistencies and probing participants for further clarification if necessary. Also, all of my written questions were reviewed by my bi-lingual Spanish tutor to ensure nothing was lost in translation. Also I audio recorded all Spanish interview in order to ensure that I had a record to refer to when translating the data. That being said, I recognize that there is an inherent difficulty in translating from one language to another and acknowledge this as a limitation to my research.

My last and most important consideration stems from the troubled role that research has played in Indigenous history (Tuwani-Smith, 2006). I wanted to ensure that this community from the onset was fully aware, on board and involved in the research process. Since the community I worked with is based on an oral traditional and many members cannot read, I felt that email correspondence or letters were inappropriate. However, I wanted to ensure them of the purposes and objectives as well as the perimeters of my research and make sure that this was acceptable. Therefore, the project manager, who has the closest relationship with the community, explained to them my purpose on the project and obtained permission before my arrival for this research to be conducted (Appendix J).

In terms of academic sensitivity and accountability I chose to place my research in an anti-colonial frame which requires the researcher to situate his/her positionality in the social and academic field. This also means that my research drew attention to the situation that subordinated peoples’ knowledges, histories and experiences, which have been “left out of the academic texts, discourses and classroom pedagogies, or have been erased from them” (Dei, Hall, Rosenberg, 2000, pp 3). It is because of this that my central purpose of my research findings is to develop recommendations on how to increase CRT that enacts, recognizes, and reinforces local knowledge within cross-cultural educational settings such as these. However, in this next chapter will begin with a narrative profile of each of my principal participants so to give insights into the human complexities that are inherent in my ethnographic research.
Chapter 4: Principal Participant Profiles

Introduction

This chapter presents the profiles of the three international volunteer teachers in my study. I have decided to illustrate each teacher’s profile individually because of the great differences among the three teachers: Susan, Greta and Monica. I have chosen to highlight them separately as individuals, instead of grouping them into an overall analysis of a prototypical international volunteer teacher. The reason for this is because I do not intend to make generalizations about the type of people who volunteer internationally as teachers. Rather, I intend to show the nuances as well as the substantial differences that occur between individual teachers in these globalized contexts. Each profile will look at the participants’ personal history, her own educational experiences and the schools and classroom in which she was working. Having illustrated their lived histories and school contexts, I present their attitudes and perspectives on their roles as volunteers and why they came to volunteer, followed by my own comments on my participants as I knew them. I have chosen to write their stories as a narrative because I contend that narratives allow for a more encompassing understanding of each teacher’s lived histories, schools and their classroom contexts. As Bruner proposes, “people do not deal with the world event by event or with texts sentence by sentence. They frame events in larger structures” (1990, pg 60). Therefore, I have chosen to frame my thesis with a narrative representation of all that I learned about my participants during my two months living and working with them. I wanted to share clear and in-depth descriptions of my experiences with the participants because I believe this allows for a deeper understanding of how these teachers lived- histories influenced and shaped their perceptions and actions as volunteer teachers. In creating a narrative from my own experience as a researcher I am better able to capture “richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs” that “cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of facts or abstract propositions” (Carter, 1993, 6). Through these descriptive profiles, I hope the reader will better comprehend the subsequent analysis section on these teachers’ perceptions, understanding of local knowledge and how it affects the relevance of their pedagogy.

3 These are all pseudonyms that I chose to help conceal the identities of my three participants. All subsequent names of secondary participants and names of the school are also pseudonyms.
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 taken an unpaid leave from work as a career counsellor to pursue new opportunities. She came from a large family; she is the fifth of ten children, she now has two children of her own and is soon to be a grandmother. She grew up in a remote, rural North-western state and still lives there today. Of the three volunteers, her upbringing and proximity to farm life and nature is closest to that of the students on the projects. She is a jovial woman with short, gray hair and a contagious laugh. Susan seemed to laugh no matter what the situation, even when she was telling me about missing keys or mischievous children. Susan began travelling later in life and had never travelled overseas without an organized tour or volunteer agency. This has left her feeling both uncomfortable as well as enthusiastic about living in vastly different places such as Ecuador. Her first travel experience outside of the United States was to Mexico for a vacation and then twice with a volunteer group organized through her rotary club. This was an educational project but was less about teaching and more about providing supplies and resources to schools in the area. The only time Susan had ever taught was a year earlier on a two week volunteer English teaching program in Hungary where she received a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA). She really liked Hungary and felt that her volunteer group was really well received by the community. This is very different from her situation at this school since it is very isolated with little interaction between the teachers and the community. Susan has never learned another language formally until she began this project three months ago. She says Spanish is the first language she has studied extensively and she was finding it very difficult to learn,

In some cases I still can’t understand anything”. She laments that she was finding it difficult to break “my preconceived notions of language based on my knowledge of English and applying it to another language, like oh they sound like they are mumbling, but no, it’s just the way the D is pronounced.

It wasn’t until I got into her classroom that I realized the enormity of her problem understanding and speaking the Spanish language.
Susan’s Education

Susan attended a private Catholic school during her early primary years but then moved, half way through, into the public system. She said that this had been “the first time I realized the difference of education in different places” and she found it hard to keep up. Susan told me she never really enjoyed school especially because of the “structures, arbitrary subject matter, deadlines and teachers who really didn’t care”. She admits, “I’m not real good with authority”. Her distaste for formal education caused her to leave school in pursuit of finding an alternative way to graduate outside of the formal school system. Fortunately, she beams, “I was able to gain extra credit by working on an environmental studies program at a children’s camp for grade six students”, which allowed her to graduate without returning to high school. When probed further on this, Susan divulges that she felt a lot of her schooling was not being done for a ‘life purpose’. She said once she left the school walls she realized how applicable education could be to life. Susan recalls the importance of relevant education in school, “as opposed to sitting in class and having a debate about euthanasia, when some of the class thinks we are talking about youth in Asia”. For Susan, school needs to be relevant to students’ current and future life experience. Susan stated that “education is just so important and I think it should be available, that is why I have done these education projects. Yet she sees a lot of schooling as being “education for education’s sake” with not enough emphasis put on where the students want to be in the future. Susan believed the “ultimate goal when you complete school is work”. She lamented that

Sometimes education is too structured, and there is not a realization or incorporation into formal education of useful (pause), of recognizing that education can happen in many ways and not just inside the classroom.

In Susan’s classroom, I observed the loosely structured classes and lack of routine. However, at times the lack or structure and flexibility translated into disorganization and disorder, as I will demonstrate later in the analysis section.
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! The view is breathtaking. Before I actually went up to the school, Susan told me enthusiastically that they are above the clouds and that she actually had had clouds roll into her classroom on occasion. However, being at this altitude can also make things difficult. Waorani meaning gateway to the winds in Kichwa is aptly named. One day when I was at school I thought the roof was about to blow off and it was difficult to think, let alone speak, over the loud gusts of winds. Furthermore, because she was not accustomed to the limited oxygen at that altitude, Susan found it difficult to partake in any physical activity with the kids. Also, Waorani was the most isolated and poorest of the communities I was researching in. The poverty here was staggering at times. There were little children barely able to walk, teetering around the school yard with no shoes or pants while the Susan and I were wearing layers upon layers of Gortex and Fleece; the sight sent chills through my bones. Also, witnessing children taking their hot lunches back up to their homes to share with their younger brothers and sisters made me realize the severity of the food shortages at Waorani.

Waorani was the smallest of the three schools; there are only twenty students in total, fifteen students with a local teacher Luzane and five students’ ages four to six, with Susan. Of all the schools, it was the least organized. During my observation there, school never once started on time and lunches often extended well beyond the thirty minutes allotted. This disorganization was further exacerbated by the fact that 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 ready to deal with the all problems in their classroom as well as with the school. What’s more, Susan was the only volunteer at this school, which made the isolation more noticeable and the lack of support more apparent.

Susan had the lowest grade at the school. She had five students, in total three girls and two boys. She told me that her students should all be five or six but she tells me she thinks one of her students its eight. She admitted she was “not sure if this is her (Susan’s student) first or second year at school”. From the beginning I noticed that Susan did not seem aware of her students as individuals or as products of their environment. For example, she lamented to me that
her students had a lack of respect for property; “I have established my space and they are not to touch it”. She wanted to teach them to respect her property which was problematic given that the children live in a communal setting where community sharing is of the utmost importance. Susan promoting values such as property and ownership showed me there is a lack of deep understanding about the community context and what is valued there. So although Susan was conscious of her outsider status at times she placed partial judgements on the community based on her North American assumptions and ways of life.

When I asked her about the subjects she teaches she told me of her difficulties;

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 books (Ecuadorian textbooks) that shows 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.

The three subject areas in these books are language arts, mathematics and social science. However she acknowledged her limitations;

I realized early on with my limitations with Spanish that I was going to not focus too much on the social. Not only that but when I realized the kids that should be doing basic mathematics, adding and subtracting, did not recognize their numbers, the forms and could not identify that five sticks would go with the figure five. So that's what I've been focusing on as well as with the alphabet.

Susan was trying to work 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 for 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.

**Reasons for becoming a volunteer teacher: An Opportunity for Change**

When I asked her why Susan chose to become a volunteer teacher she initially laughed and told me, “one, I am not a teacher”. She said the reason she chose this project was because she was in the process of looking for a potential second career that would allow her to travel and live in
other places. She wanted something “that would enhance my skills, especially if I wanted to continue to find a way not to return to my same work”. Susan was actually enrolled in the volunteer program that included training as an intern; which meant she had over 70 hours of Spanish lessons and was mentored by the project manager about the administrative side of the project as well. She said that she searched a lot of different programs before choosing this one. She realized what she needed was “a second language and work experience in a developing country, if I can call Ecuador developing”. She told me that working in a developing country would “help give her a broader experience if she wants to continue working internationally, and also exposure to poverty and dealing with that in terms of education”. She said she thought this program offered her all those opportunities. Susan thought that she probably will end up in the administration side of things but insists that she “really enjoys being with the kids”.

**Perceptions of her role as volunteer teacher: Helping Hand**

Susan saw herself in many helper roles; she told me that her being at the school “provides the regular teacher with a smaller classroom, fifteen kids over fewer grades.” She also felt that by being a foreigner she was providing “them also with the opportunity, a view in 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.” This statement is one example of the assumed deficit notions that the three IVTs sometimes held of their students. Her last notion about her role as a teacher is providing and preparing the food for the children. It is telling that she did not refer directly to her role as a teacher inside the classroom. This is mostly 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 ‘Plan Cow’ and ‘Plan Trout’ which the INGO set up to provide cows and trout to certain families into order to help them subsidize their children’s future high school education. By the time she left Ecuador for Peru she has raised over one thousand dollars for the INGO.

Although she did not see herself as a teacher she did view her additional roles as volunteer and financial contributions as compensation for her lack of accredited teaching skills. Furthermore, she held a deficit view that her presence in the classroom is better than the alternative, “… 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, that having volunteer teachers is better than “nothing”, is a frequent sentiment shared by the three volunteers in this study and is a theme I will examine later.

*Comments:*

Susan was placed in the most isolated of schools with no other volunteers to boost her morale or give her help with her Spanish. Consequently her lack of confidence as a teacher and her low level of Spanish became even more of a barrier to teaching her students. Also, because she was in a separate building communication was inhibited and she was also unable to observe the local teacher’s routine and methods. She told me it is a challenge that “I really can’t compare, or say oh this is different”. That being said, Susan told me she just follows Luzane’s lead, “I don’t think I’m here to tell the teacher what to do or what should be done.” This approach became problematic in that she had little contact with Luzane and as such it became a situation where there was little leadership which contributed to a lack of cohesion at the school. Susan seemed more comfortable with avoiding the linguistic and cultural divides rather than dealing with them. The reasons for Susan’s disconnectedness may be because she felt these challenges were too large to deal with during her relatively short three month stay on the project.

The sentiment I felt from Susan was that this would be over soon enough and that she was eager to leave this project because it was more work than she had expected. Furthermore, her lack of independent travel experience made it difficult to adjust to the linguistic and cultural differences at the school. Because of these barriers, she had a hard time understanding the socio-political context of the families she was working for. She only really had a surface understanding their hardships and could not really contextualize why her children had difficulty concentrating or why the school sometimes seemed chaotic. “It’s like no matter how much you prepare there’s always something everyday”. I found that although Susan was aware that her students’ lives were different from hers, she found it hard to comprehend in what ways they might be different. Had Susan had a grasp of the contextual hardships of her students’ lives, she may have been more attuned to their personal and academic needs, which is an essential part of culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Even though Susan was passionate about having school be meaningful, because of her lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge, this
limited her ability to hold the students’ attention or have her lessons resonate with their lives. Also, because Susan came to the school, mainly to enhance her Curriculum Vitae for an administration position and not out of a primary interest in teaching she did not invest a lot of time or effort into improving her teaching lessons or practices during her time on the project.

**Greta:**

**Six month volunteer placement in Ecuador**

**Personal History**

Greta was born in Berlin the day the Berlin Wall fell. A special birthday for a special child, Greta was the first of a new generation to live in a united Germany. Greta has wild brown hair that she pulled back in a pony tail and wore baggy clothing that hangs off her thin body. It took me awhile adjust to Greta’s quirks; at times she was shy and reserved while at other times she was completely candid and open, unaware and unconcerned about what others thought of what she said or did. The transition from our first interview at the beginning of the study to our second at the end was huge. During our first interview, Greta generally did not to look me in the eye and doodled while she spoke, while at our second interview she sat close to me on the couch, cracked jokes and even made me a cup of tea.

Although Greta had been exposed to a lot of different European cultures on family vacations coming to Ecuador was one of her first experiences with independent travel. This was apparent in her timidity when meeting the new volunteers and her difficulties with homesickness. She was young for a volunteer, having just graduated high school, yet she was eager to learn as much as possible about the new people and places she visited. Greta speaks four languages at an advanced level, German, English, French and Spanish all of which she learned formally. For her, studying language:

makes your mind wider, your horizons and also you get to learn about the culture, we also learned about the country where the language is spoken. And it’s just I don’t know somehow you can just think more, think in more varieties if you know more languages.
People on the project jokingly said she speaks four and a half languages because she was learning Kichwa while volunteering. She confides in me it’s actually “four and a quarter”. Nonetheless, she was one of the few volunteers to ever study the Indigenous language of her students, Kichwa, and by the end of my stay she was actually proficient in speaking it. She made friends with her Indigenous housemaid Anabelle, and had social plans with her on occasion. She also forged a friendship with the local teaching assistant Carlos at her school. She was the only volunteer to have made a personal friend with a teacher at any of the schools. Of my three participants Greta was the only one with no prior teaching experience. In regards to her lack of 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 works somehow. I wasn’t prepared. I have never taught before I was only a student.

Regardless, her almost flawless grasp of the Spanish language was a great advantage that she had over most volunteers, who as Cathy the project Manager stated; generally only had from intermediate to basic Spanish.

**School and Classroom: Special Needs Classroom**

Greta taught at Manay, the medium sized school that is further down the mountain from Waorani. Although it is closer to the city of Otavalo, it is still a tough thirty five minute hike up and down a winding mountain path to get to the school. The physical exertion to do this is at times invigorating (catching your breath to take in the view of horses grazing) and at other times completely taxing (panting, staring at the back of the volunteers neck in front of you). At Manay, there were thirty one students. There was one local teacher Esmeralda, and an assistant teacher Carlos who is the community president’s son. Esmeralda was considered an intimidating school director by the students as well as the volunteers. And although 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. Cathy told me that although Esmeralda does not go out of her way to guide and mentor the volunteers that 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 are siblings. She told me “they have difficulties learning and especially with concentration I think probably because their mom drank when she was pregnant or something.” She told me she is unsure if this is true but has heard it as gossip. The students in her class are specifically targeted by the other students as outcasts because of their special needs status and because of animosity that the community had with their family. Greta was unsure where this stemmed from but told me the children in her class “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 do sums. After that she was pretty much free to teach whatever she wants and she does. She told me:

Normally I am quite flexible, I have different things to do and I see how fast they 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 even varied the test for them to their levels. The subjects that she taught were Language, Math, and Science to her students and has group English, Arts and Music classes with the older students a few times during the week.

Of all the three classrooms I observed, Greta’s class was the most unruly. This may be because previously they were overlooked as students with serious potential and as such were not held to the same standards as the other students at the school. It was difficult for Greta to hold their attention for any long periods of time and her students would often walk out of class without asking, sing during the lessons, or sleep on the desks instead of working. Nonetheless, Greta had a good rapport with her students and this behaviour was not being done out of disrespect for Greta but was a result of not being accustomed to a structured classroom setting. Furthermore, Greta respected her students’ needs as well, 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.

_Greta’s Education: I never enjoyed school and never wanted to become a teacher_

Greta told me very candidly that she never enjoyed being at school. She admitted that she’s never really liked any of her teachers and never had a stand out teacher that she connected with.
She acknowledged that school is an important tool for socialization but had a very negative view of the teaching profession; she declared that “you don’t get much respect, you don’t get much money and you spend all your time on just preparing and teaching”. For Greta, a love for learning did not stem from teachers’ inspiration but came from a curiosity she was born with that was fostered by her family. Growing up she yearned for explanations of everything around her and would annoy her parents for the answers. She said it got to a point where her parents had to restrict what they taught her so she wouldn’t be too ahead when she entered primary school. She said when they wouldn’t give her the answers she would then go to her grandparents. For Greta it was very much a communal commitment of the family to teach and foster an enthusiasm of learning from an early age. Greta’s negative view of teaching also reflects her view on her choice to become a volunteer teacher as I will show below.

**Reasons for becoming a volunteer teacher: Last Option**

When I asked this question Greta quickly admitted that it was never her intention to volunteer as a teacher. She revealed that she:

> searched for something else, I wanted to do volunteer work also with children or young people but I don’t know I wanted to have, more like maybe even helping with homework and enforcing things but not doing every step of teaching.

She said when she arrived she was hoping for more of a role as an assistant with the children but not to take on a complete teaching role. This sentiment was echoed by other volunteers who said that their expectations of their role as volunteer was as an assistant not a teacher with a full class and daily lesson planning. She said the reason she wanted to volunteer was because:

> I wanted to come to South America definitely and wanted to learn mainly about other cultures. I want to improve my Spanish and I want to help, of course, I want to also be a volunteer not just as a tourist. I want to get into the culture more.

Yet, she surprisingly admits that “I ended up here because nothing else worked out”.

**Perceptions of her role as volunteer teacher: Trying to teach without experience**
When I asked Greta about her role as a volunteer she spoke generally about what volunteers bring to the project.

We provide quite much money, that we spend beforehand (she is referring to 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.

When asked about her role in the classroom she bemoaned:

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.” She says she puts it on herself, “you ask yourself or you wonder why it doesn’t happen or it doesn’t work.

She was worried that, “I may want to go forward to quickly and I should repeat more or maybe they are just having a bad day”. Greta’s lack of training made it difficult for her to gauge between what are normal classroom speed bumps and what may be missing from her lessons and pedagogy.

**Comments:**

Greta’s love of learning and curiosity about different cultures has helped her learn a lot about her students personally, and about their local and home life. She often spoke of broadening her mind and expanding her horizons and this is why she chose to learn the Indigenous language which gave her greater access and insight into the community she was working in. Of all the volunteers on the project, Greta had a desire to experience new people and places and seemed to do so without having any deep assumptions or biases about who they were or what they might be like. Greta created culturally relevant lessons unconsciously because of her natural inclination towards learning about Indigenous culture and the personal relationships she had forged with her students. Her understanding of her students Indigenous culture was reflected in her ability to incorporate individualized classroom lessons that were often focused their personal and local context. Examples of this were found in her outdoor science classes, her art activities, and creative writing lessons that drew from her students own lived experiences. Though, she enacted culturally relevant practices out of her own interest to learn from her students, it did not come from a conscious awareness of the importance of creating culturally relevant pedagogy.
Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether or not she would continue to teach using the students’ own lived experiences to enhance their learning experiences.

Furthermore, Greta’s ambivalence towards being a teacher coupled with her lack of teaching experience and uncertainty about her teaching abilities made her frustrated at times and unsure of her capacity to teach. I found that Greta’s scepticism about the impacts teachers can have on their students caused her to limit her enforcement of boundaries and encouragement of classroom learning.

Although Greta could have gone to Esmeralda for help with her classroom, she did not because she thought Esmeralda didn’t care about her special needs students and also because she felt she was doing okay without extra assistance. Greta, thus, was limited by her pessimistic perspectives on teachers, her own doubt of her ability to teach and her opinion that she could not ask for extra help. Greta was, at times felt defeated in her teaching role while at other times was she enthusiastic about her class and her lessons. These oscillations in morale highlight the variance that can occur even within an individual volunteer. However, Greta is also demonstrates how sincere interest in one’s students can promote culturally relevant practices.

**Monica:**

**Six week volunteer placement in Ecuador**

**Personal History**

Monica was a statuesque young woman with easy going personality that made her evidently popular with the volunteers on the project. She was also a perfectionist and admittedly meticulously organized while on the project. She grew up in Perth, Australia, in a semi rural country side but has familial ties to upper-class New England America. This left Monica with a muted Australian accent which made it difficult to tell where she was from. Monica has lived between two cultures her whole life spending summers in the States with her family on her Mother’s side. She told me that she often hears negative things about America from people she knows that are unaware that she herself associates with being American. This dual association made her comfortable to interchange between cultures but has also made her sensitive to
prejudices about other cultures. This particular combination helped her ease into teaching students of another culture, and to be sensitive to making assumptions about the ‘other’.

Although she was young she has done a lot of travelling with her family abroad and quite a bit of independent travel throughout the United States and Central America. Monica not only knows many different places in the world, but of the three volunteers, had done the most extensive volunteer work abroad. In her gap year between high school and university she worked in at an enrichment centre in a run down, dangerous neighbourhood in South Boston, sometimes known as “Southie”. There, she helped mentor and tutor marginalized, high risk students who had been deemed unfit for the mainstream school system. Of this experience she said that being a foreigner was never a problem with the kids and that “the biggest issue was that I was White, blatantly, but most of the kids once they realized I had good intentions and once they realized I was a volunteer, they respected me a lot more.” After this she went to Nicaragua with a different INGO for a community and environmental program in an isolated, rural community with no electricity or running water. The program ended with a personal fitness goal of travelling across Costa Rica on foot.

Of the three volunteers 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.” Her level of Spanish is very high. She first learned it in an informal setting while volunteering in Nicaragua but “fell in love with the language” and at the time of this research was taking it formally as a second major in University.

School and Classroom: A school with an Indigenous Vision

Monica taught at Atahualpa, the largest and least isolated of the three schools. It is also the most prosperous of the three communities. Because it was closest to the main town Otavalo, roadways were more developed and this physical access enabled more money to be invested by development projects from the government as well as foreign organizations. Also, because the school exceeds forty, students it was divided between two local teachers, Sisa and Mirabelle. Mirabelle had only been at the school just over a year. She was hired as part of the new government’s education plan to supply overpopulated schools with at least two teachers per forty students. Sisa was the head teacher of the school; she of all the teachers on the projects had the
most consistent contact with the IVTs. She and Monica had a good rapport; Monica told me 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 was very interested in the well being of the students and the advancement of the school. She had even been involved in community classes for the mothers who cannot read or write. Sisa held weekly meetings with the volunteers as well as Mirabelle, to make sure there were no problems and that everyone was prepared with lesson guidelines for the next week’s classes. Atahualpa, of the three schools, was also the most organized and formally structured. Every morning there was a bell and students would stand at attention in lines according to grade. They all sang the national anthem either in Kichwa or Spanish and listened to the rules of the school outlined by either Sisa or Mirabelle. Furthermore, Sisa used an Indigenous curriculum separate from the national curriculum called “Red de Chinchinca” which was created by Indigenous educators for the larger Indigenous region in Ecuador, called Chinchinca. The other schools have this curriculum resource but did not often use it or share its contents with the volunteers. Sisa worked from the “Red de Chinchinca” curriculum when she assigned lesson guidelines to the IVTs.

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. She says her four students should be six years of age “but it’s tough to know sometimes because a lot of these kids don’t know what year they are born in”. She told me that “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 she was asked to teach from Sisa, which was language, mathematics, social and life sciences, with a bit of art and sport. She also did a weekly group English class with the older students. Of all the volunteers, she was the only one that 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.

**Monica’s Education: Learning to Love School and making Friends with Teachers**

Monica’s experiences with education had been mostly very positive. She moved from a public school to a private one, after grade four because, “I was bored out of my mind because the education was pretty basic. I was in a class of thirty five kids so I wasn’t getting the attention that I needed to push through”. When she began her private school education in grade five, she said
she quickly realized the benefits that low student teacher ratio, better quality teachers, and availability of resources offered her as a student. When asked what she means by ‘quality teaching’ she said it comes from the ability of the teacher “to be aware of individual differences and abilities and weaknesses”, teaching things that are interesting, that appeal to me definitely”. She said her only criticism of the private school was that it was too formal:

   It was very regimented; it was that way or the highway. And in terms of change, if I wanted to change anything, I would have made it more flexible, much more sit in a circle and discuss something instead of sitting in lines, work in silence and copy off the board.

   Her best experience with education happened on exchange to a smaller liberal arts high school in Maine. She was in a class of seven students, with a teacher who she called by her first name, “There were no uniforms, no rules, you could come and go as you please, the standard of education was probably the best I’ve ever seen”. Monica most appreciated the informality of education and the ability to have a friendship with her teachers. For Monica, this was the first time she loved going to school. Inspired by this example, Monica tried to forge a relationship with her students from her first day at school. She dedicated her first day of classes to getting to know each of her students and letting them get to know her as well. Her first activity was about family, where they were asked to draw a family portrait, which included animals, and she encouraged them to talk about their families. She did this activity alongside of them. Also, she took pictures of the students and gave them outlines of frames which they were supposed to decorate with their favourite things. Throughout her time at school she really got to know her students as people, with their own personalities and histories.

   **Reasons for becoming a volunteer teacher: In Search of a Challenge**

Monica said that she chose an education project because she had previous experience on a community and environment project but wanted to work specifically with kids and education, “because I love kids but also because I can speak Spanish at a decent level, so I thought I could utilize my skills most productively in a classroom setting”. Monica admitted, “I wanted a challenge, something that would force me to communicate, *selfishly*, to enhance my Spanish skills”. This idea of self fulfillment and self improvement is a recurring theme with almost all of the volunteers on the project and will be explored in further depth later.
**Perceptions of their role as volunteer teacher: Teacher Inside the Classroom and Protector Outside**

Monica defined her roles as a teacher inside and a protector outside of the classroom. She told me that 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”. In terms of outside of the classroom she said she is:

> making sure the kids are safe, making sure they have proper clothes on, that they have shoes to stay warm and healthy, making sure they are eating, making sure the food’s been cooked on time, that a mother is there. Last week we had an incident where the mother didn’t show up to cook⁴. But I think our biggest responsibility would be making sure these kids are fed every day.

This idea of volunteer as provider is also a recurring theme that I will develop later in the analysis.

**Comments:**

Monica seemed very comfortable with unfamiliar cultures she encountered as an IVT in Ecuador. Therefore, she eased into her teaching role quite quickly and comfortably. That being said, Monica also had an advantage of being in an organized school where she received an orientation, weekly consultations, and in which the students had a lot more experience with foreign teachers. Perhaps Monica’s life experience with travel and work abroad allowed her to be more culturally sensitive and adaptive. On the project she was aware of cultural differences and her role as an outsider, but was also open to learning through differences. Monica displayed a keen awareness of the socio-political context of her cross-cultural teaching experience. She was able to maintain a realistic outlook about her students, as illustrated by this quote, “the school is only one element of many in these students lives, so as much as I want them to do well in school it also is about their families and staying clothed. So I try to keep it all in perspective.”

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⁴ In all of the school a family is assigned to cook lunch for each day of the week. On this particular day no Mother or family member came to the school. This caused the IVTs to rearrange their classes so they could each help prepare the lunch for all the students at the school.
Furthermore, Monica was quite conscious of her positionality and repeatedly told me that she did not want to impose her culture on her students. Monica personally invested in the welfare of her students and felt accountable for their academic success. This care and responsibility was indicative in her meticulous class structure and routine and the attention she gave to her lessons that pertained to her students’ daily lives and environment.

Monica readily admitted that she “selfishly” came to the project to enhance her Spanish. However I found that her strong desire to improve her Spanish seemed to benefit her students in the classroom and to also push her into a leadership role with the other volunteers at Atahualpa. Because of her drive to improve her Spanish, Monica actually became one of the most effective and confident IVTs on the project. Nonetheless, with all of these personal qualities and situational advantages that helped her gain and produce culturally relevant materials she was only on a short term 6 week volunteer placements, unlike Susan and Greta who had three and six month placements. And as such, she was not bogged down by the difficulties and frustrations that the two other volunteers accumulated over a longer period of time. It could be argued that Monica was still in the ‘honeymoon stage’, which meant she had few frustrations and a lot of patience that the other two ITVs no longer seemed to have.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined various aspects of the three principal participants’ personal histories, views of education, teaching, and their roles as volunteer teachers. It also illustrated their relationships with the local teachers and the school environment they were working in. This chapter gives an overview of the significant differences among my three principal participants. I wanted to highlight their diversity because I viewed these three IVT’s as a micro example of some of the potential differences in ITV’s that I encountered in general on the project. When I arrived, I was surprised not only to find how diverse their views on education and teaching were but also how greatly they varied as teachers in the classroom. Whilst on the project, as a researcher and intern, I met over 20 volunteers who also had equally divergent views, language capacities as well as teaching abilities and styles. This is why I thought it essential to highlight these three ITV’s as individuals. This chapter underlines just how much a teacher’s personal experiences and world views resonate in their classrooms. The teachers’ biographies played a crucial role in their development of their views on teaching and volunteering. Positive life
experiences with education led to an optimistic view of their abilities as ITV’s and on the educability of their students. Negative experiences, however, led to scepticism over how much they could accomplish as ITV’s, and how much, if at all, their students could succeed. Teachers’ beliefs in their students’ abilities to learn and to progress are an essential stepping block for CRT to occur. Without the belief in the educability of their students it hinders the teacher from acknowledging his/her own responsibility to develop students academically while nurturing and supporting his/her cultural competence (Ladson-Billing, 1999).

Another crucial aspect that I discovered was how the local teachers and the school environments influenced the capacities of ITV’s to create culturally relevant classrooms. Since Susan, Greta and Monica were at three different schools, I was able to analyze separately the affects of external inputs, such as location, school structure and the local teacher had on ITV’s. This is an important aspect of the study because it takes some of the focus off the ITV’s as individuals and contextualizes how extenuating circumstances can govern classroom outcomes.

The schools locations and levels of poverty influenced the dynamics and atmosphere of the schools. The distance of the school from the main town Otavalo, determined the access the school had to materials and food stuffs. Poverty levels influenced how alert and prepared the students were for school. In the poorest school, Waorani, students were often lethargic because of lack of food in the mornings and at times were absent due to illness or familial obligations. This made the classroom atmosphere less consistent and harder to manage for ITV’s like Susan. Also, the level of structure and organization at the three schools varied greatly and this had subsequent affects on the students’ attitudes towards classroom work and respect for their teachers. Schools that started late and had little academic routine were more chaotic and as such the students were less willing to do their work and listen to their teacher. Meanwhile, students at more effectively run school, like Atahualpa, were calmer in the classroom, more likely to listen and were more eager to work.

Lastly, greatest variable in creating culturally relevant classrooms seemed to be in how much time and assistance the local teacher could provide each ITV. In my study I saw the adverse effects of poor communication and lack of guidance for one ITV in particular. The case of Susan illustrates how a weak relationship with the local teacher can diminish an ITV’s impetus and capacity to become cultural workers that can elicit positive change by systematically
including their students’ culture as a legitimated form of knowledge (Gay, 2000). The three ITVs, as outsiders, needed direction from the local teachers about what they should be teaching and why they should be teaching it. They should also be able to draw on the local teachers to substantiate and ameliorate the materials and lessons they were presenting to their students. I observed these benefits of such opportunities having been offered to Monica by Sisa the local teacher at her school. Sisa’s support gave Monica access to local knowledge or the guidance to carry out consistent lessons that included cultural referents that imparted knowledge skills and attitudes which empowered students with respect to their community life (Ladson Billings, 1994).

These three narrative profiles are meant to enhance the reader’s overall understanding of who these three teachers were, how they taught, and the school environment in which they were teaching and how these matters interacted and influenced each other. By understanding the IVTs personally and professionally I hope this will allow the reader to have a deeper understanding of the overarching thematics that I will now move on to explore.
Chapter 5: Thematic Findings

Introduction

Now that there has been a detailed overview of the international volunteer teachers’ perceptions of and attitudes towards education, teaching and their role as volunteers, I want to delve deeper into recurring themes pertinent to this study. This findings section will look at five specific themes involving the ITVs, which most significantly represented their classroom relationships and pedagogy. This section will draw from the two semi-structured interviews, the informal discussions and the seven in-class observations I had with each ITV. In addition, it will engage, compare and problematize these themes with the data gathered from my secondary participants, as well as from my own observations as a researcher and teacher, in order to have a more comprehensive analysis of the overarching thematic findings.

The data collected has been organized into five themes which I found to be most relevant to the study of three international volunteer teachers in rural Indigenous communities. Themes were chosen based on their significance to the overall research objectives, questions and experiences at the three school projects in Ecuador. These themes are most pertinent to the ethnographic case study yet also have larger implications for research on comparative international and development education. These themes were developed through an inductive coding process where I identified similarities and differences expressed by participants in the interviews (these interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed). I also took systematic notes of our discussions and observations of their classrooms to similarly codify how their sentiments, opinions and actions related to my research on local knowledge and culturally relevant teaching.

This chapter will draw from the three participants’ profiles to develop the larger issues that are linked to the schools they were working in. It will cross-compare these themes through the primary and secondary participants that underscore the issue best. Therefore, the analysis of each theme will not necessarily include all three IVTs or secondary participant in each theme. Despite the fact, all of the themes encountered were significant to the outcomes of intercultural classrooms, not all the ITVs illustrated these themes and as such I decided to focus on those ITV’s that best exemplify these themes.
The five themes I will investigate look at IVT perceptions, relationships, attitudes and pedagogy and their implications to culturally relevant classrooms. The first theme will examine how each IVTs perception of the teachers’ role affected their views on the educability of their students. It will look at the notion of educability as one of the key components that foster culturally relevant teaching. I will demonstrate how Greta and Monica’s opposing perceptions on teaching influenced how they perceived themselves as teacher and their students. This should illuminate how these perceptions are related to their motivations to teach and ultimately to how culturally relevant their classes were.

The second theme is linked to how each teacher perceived their role, as volunteer, and how this related to their personal accountability to their students. Teacher profiles outlined how each IVTs understanding of their role as a volunteer was much larger than their understanding of their teaching role alone. This section will develop how their notion of ‘volunteer’ can lead to a deficit view of their roles as teachers. The idea that their work at the schools is “better than nothing” is a noteworthy opinion that all three IVTs shared. As such, I will do an analysis of each IVT and flesh out the ways in which these outlooks manifested themselves in their classrooms and how it influenced their potential for culturally relevant teaching.

The third theme will be looking at how the IVTs relationships with the local teachers affected their ability to create culturally relevant classrooms. This section will look at all three IVTs and their respective schools. Also, it will take from interviews and time spent with local teachers to develop a more in depth understanding of the personal and professional relationships that the IVTs had with the local teachers at their schools.

The fourth theme that will be investigated is how IVTs cultural sensitivity and awareness towards their students did not necessarily translate into culturally inclusive classrooms. Here I draw on Susan’s and Greta’s experiences as IVTs to investigate the barriers and challenges to creating culturally relevant classrooms. I chose Susan and Greta as examples because they demonstrate two very different approaches to teaching as well as two very different challenges in developing culturally inclusive classrooms.

The final theme examines how the cross-cultural context the IVTs coming from abroad manifested into an unexpected form of culturally relevant teaching. It’s what I refer to as reverse
learning, where the teacher learns from the student and where the student thus learns from teaching their teacher. It is a reciprocal learning process in that the teacher, by learning from their students, is eventually able to better teach their students. This occurrence is particular to these schools because many students are taught by international volunteer teachers. As such, for many of these foreign teachers, there is much to be learned from their students. I look at Monica and Greta to illustrate the varying ways reverse learning occurred and the varying outcomes it had on their students.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Education and the Educability of their Students**

All three international volunteer teachers (IVTs) varied widely in their perceptions of education and its ability to create positive change. These views greatly affected the variance of their attitudes regarding the educability of the students and in turn their approaches to culturally relevant teaching. Their approaches to teaching differed based on their perception of a teacher. I found that negative views of the teacher translated into more lax practices and at times scepticism about the educability of their students. Meanwhile, positive views on the role of teacher translated into a determined focus for relevant learning and an optimistic view on the ability of their students to learn. As Ladson-Billing’s (1994) argues, any teacher regardless of their race, can practice good teaching if they believe in the educability of their students and are investing in making their students succeed academically, culturally and socially. Therefore, the confidence and belief in oneself as a teacher and the impacts one might have on the students are extremely important factors in the study of culturally relevant teaching. I will cross-compare Greta and Monica who had polarized views on teachers and teachers’ abilities in order to illustrate this point.

Greta expressed uncertainty about teaching as a profession and worried about her abilities as a teacher. For Greta, her lack of experience made it more difficult to teach. She also found it hard to have faith that her students could and would learn in time. She lamented on several occasions their lack of progress, “it’s hard because you really want to teach them, you want them to learn something and become better and when you don’t see change or when you see they suddenly step back then it’s quite frustrating”. Without the belief that her students could learn and that she herself could be the conduit for that learning, Greta became more disheartened in her role as a teacher and this came out in her teaching efforts. She reduced her preparation for
classes and in class did not seem to encourage her students’ effort to complete their assignments. She said she planned more in the beginning but she stopped because she said it hadn’t made a difference:

Well it’s just easier because you don’t have to plan so much,…and I saw that it was never working as you think it should…when I planned it was the same. If it was low we just wouldn’t finish. Now I just see what happens. I don’t have any routines but I try to be a bit more, repeat things more often like math’s and language.

That being said, Greta was never apathetic towards her students’ education; she was just overwhelmed by having a special needs classroom, and the fact that she was untrained to teach to their special needs. 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.

Greta admittedly stopped using the school’s or INGO resources to create lessons because they never worked out for her. However, because of this she began to make her own individualized lessons for her students which used their lives as a ‘base reference’. By avoiding using the INGO’s and school’s materials her lessons actually turned out to be more culturally relevant for the students because she said she just “sticks to the basic things that they (her students) would know…what surrounds them”. However, because she stopped preparing for school, her classes lacked routine and structure which in turn made teaching those lessons all the more difficult. Greta possessed the knowledge to create culturally relevant classes; however her lack of confidence in her teaching abilities and faith in her students’ educability caused her to invest less time in cultivating a proper learning environment. Furthermore, her lack of training and experience with teaching made it difficult to monitor and assess whether her kids were in fact learning. This made Greta feel as though she was making very little difference in her students’ education which unfortunately manifested itself as decreased motivation to teach.

One day after a rather difficult lesson, that was left uncompleted, she asked me if I thought she didn’t care about her class. She was worried it that it might have appeared as if she was not putting in an effort to make them learn. My response was that I knew she cared but saw that she was losing motivation because of the great difficulties her special needs class presented her. I sympathized with Greta’s predicament because I also experienced the difficulties with
teaching her students who had short attentions spans and problems retaining and understanding new ideas. Furthermore, I observed Greta making sporadic efforts to create engaging and personalized lessons though I saw how easily this was counteracted by her lack of experience and outside support for a class with major behavioural and educational needs.

Monica is a useful cross-comparison because she had very positive perspectives on the potential of teachers’ to have influence and on her own abilities as a teacher. Monica was the only IVT who had really enjoyed formal schooling. She had many great teachers and felt that good teaching was an important part of the learning process. She told me that her best teachers were aware of their students’ histories and abilities and she emulated this in her classroom. Also, Monica had the most experience in a classroom setting and as a result felt most confident in the classroom. On her first day she settled the kids down by doing physical activities that she had done with her students in South Boston. She told me that she expected that her students would be better off academically after she left. She believed that her students are “particularly bright in comparison to other kids going through these remote community schools systems”. She attributed this to the fact that the volunteer prior to her was a trained teacher who she said “developed a lot of their skills” in the classroom. This reveals Monica’s positive view towards education and to the belief that teachers can be purveyors of great change.

This belief in the power of education as well as the abilities of her students to learn translated into a deep effort on Monica’s part to have a successful classroom. Monica prepared structured daily lesson plans that she said ‘move progressionally’ alongside Sisa’s curriculum: She combined this with a daily routine to keep her students on track. She told me:

I know it’s a different lifestyle (referring to her students’ lives) but I think it’s the best strategy in terms of education to have structure and routine. And I think they enjoy having a routine, for example the exercises in the morning…and once they see order and control they are calmer; if it’s unstructured and chaotic then the kids are going to be like this person doesn’t care.

The most important outcome in Monica’s belief in the educability of her students was that it translated into an ethic of care and personal accountability for her classroom, a crucial component that needs to be present in order for CRT to occur.
How their thoughts on being a volunteer affected their sense of efficacy as teachers

A common theme not only with my three participants was that regardless of the quality of their contributions at least it was better than nothing. This ‘better than nothing’ mentality is one I would like to explore in further depth because I consider it to be a prevalent outlook that can have serious repercussions for projects run by volunteers. Earlier I spoke about the role of the volunteers’ role being larger than just teaching. All three IVT’s thought of themselves as providers of food, resources, amenities, and views from the outside world. This idea of being more than just a teacher also can have an adverse affect on the importance and focus ITVs place on their role as teacher. I found that when IVTs shifted their focus from their role as teacher to their role as saviour it contributed to a lack of teacher motivation and self reflection on the effect their teaching might be having on their students’ education and lives. A cross-comparison between Susan, Greta and Monica will show how this shared perception manifested itself in their practices in order to gauge the varying implications that this deficit notion had on the schools they were working in.

Susan did not consider herself a teacher and generally felt a sense of disorder and ill-preparedness in her classroom, often citing ‘if it’s not one thing it’s another’. She had many difficulties at the school. One day when the two of us had the entire school for the day, she admitted that she didn’t realize how flawed her classes had been until she saw how positively the students reacted to me as a more experienced teacher with a higher level of Spanish. She felt that it was her lack of Spanish that made it so difficult for her to be attuned to her students’ abilities. Overall, Susan was not confident as a teacher. Because of this, one would assume that she might pursue extra help to better prepare for her classes. This was not so and I actually saw Susan become less and less prepared for classes as time went on. On several of my observation days she told me that I either had “come on a bad day” or that “she was completely unprepared” for school. I consider one of the reasons for this was because she held the deficit view that any help is better than nothing and that as long as she was there it was benefitting the school. She told me one of her roles was that “I provide the regular teacher with a smaller classroom, fifteen kids over fewer grades”. She said “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”.
Overtime, this sentiment seemed to manifest into a lack of personal accountability for her students. Susan felt less motivation to teach and less responsible for her class. This adversely affected her potential to foster a culturally relevant classroom. This is not the only reason Susan lost her motivation to teach. As I have already described, her school was difficult to teach at; she was isolated, had little support from the local teacher and her Spanish became such a barrier that it was a daily frustration to teach. Moreover, Susan was not interested in teaching per se, but more interested in work experience in a developing country”. It is my opinion that Susan is an example of how this ‘better than nothing’ attitude can contribute to low levels of motivation and effort when difficulties arise on volunteer projects.

Greta was also influenced by the idea that her work at the school was ‘better than nothing’. For her, 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”. However, Greta admitted that she did not know how much she could change them but felt that her work was better than nothing. “And um I think I dunno, I don’t know how much I change in what they know or teach them but I think it’s better than nothing”. This indicates that Greta was torn between her ‘big responsibility’ and the fact that she felt whatever she did in the classroom was better than nothing, in other words, of little value. This ambivalence is significant because Greta declares that their only input is their education at the school; but conversely takes a deficit view about what she may be inputting. This attitude did not seem to come from a lack of caring but more out of Greta’s uncertainty about her teaching abilities. Greta held this ‘better than nothing’ perspective so that she could feel that she was positively contributing, when at times she admittedly was unsure of the effects of her teaching on her students. Nonetheless, I argue that this deficit perspective is not wholly negative. Since these schools are reliant on untrained volunteers for support and at times this deficit view is often used to assure the IVTs that their contributions are useful and that they are having a significant impact. This was evident in Monica’s outlook. However, as we have seen in Susan’s case, this deficit view may allow volunteers to become complacent in their efforts to make a significant impact during their time on the project. It appears, there needs to be more of a balanced perspective as to why they are volunteering and the purpose of their role as teacher.
Monica provides an example of how the deficit view could actually work in more positive ways. Monica held a similar deficit view to Susan and Greta. Her outlook was that without her there the kids would not be getting the attention and care she could provide and that her work is 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”. However, 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 while she was there. The reason for this is because Monica thought not only about her teaching support while she was on the project but what would happen after she left. She was worried that if she did not raise her students up while she was there she would be disadvantaging their success in subsequent grades. She told me she wanted to keep her academic standards high for them; she wanted “to give them the best shot in third grade and being ready for that which is when they have the best teacher [Sisa] before they go to fourth grade where the teacher [Mirabelle] is not as good”. Therefore, this deficit view was not necessarily a detriment to her volunteer teachers’ practices. Sometimes, as is the case with Monica, the deficit view may inspire them to work harder to make up for when they will not be there. However, INGO’s cannot just rely on the hope that the inspiration to work hard will come from the individual personalities of the volunteers. The INGO should be involved in positively reinforcing the IVTs work and their purpose on the project so that IVTs do not succumb to the self destructive ideology that their contributions need only be ‘better than nothing’. I will return to these finding and implications later in the study to explain how this should and can occur in projects such as these.

**Local Teacher and International Volunteer Teachers Relationships**

The international volunteer teachers’ (IVT) relationships with local teachers were related to the amount and quality of culturally relevant teaching occurring in the classroom. Susan, who had the least contact with the local teachers’ classes, had not received guidance and the tools that could have helped her to create a classroom that was culturally relevant to her students’ lives. Monica, the IVT with the most contact and support, had more comprehensive and consistent classes that had lessons centered around their students’ lives. There are three main factors that play into the IVT local teacher relationship. First was language; the greater ability to speak
Spanish simply meant the greater ability to communicate with the local teacher and vice versa. The second factor was teaching proximity; those working closer to the local teachers felt more comfortable teaching because they were able to observe their teaching style which allowed them to draw upon workable methods. And lastly, the guidance and support the IVTs received from the local teachers greatly influenced the depth and breadth of cultural relevance in their classrooms. Those IVTs that had more frequent contact with the local teachers had both moral and guided teaching supports which contributed to more successful classrooms. I will now look at all three IVTs to cross-compare their distinct relationships with the local teachers at their respective schools.

**Susan and Luzane**

Susan seemed to have been afflicted by all three barriers: language, teaching proximity and lack of guidance from the local teacher. First, Susan’s language skills were very basic; she only knew a few select words and phrases and was not at a level where she could carry on a conversation with Luzane. Unfortunately, she was the only volunteer at the school, so if there was no project manager or intern up there to support her, she was at a serious disadvantage. That is not to say she was completely without support. She told me that Luzane was available as an authority and that she went to her a couple of times during her stay to deal with disturbances in her classroom. “Well, I’ve gone to her for a few things, one was social, because I have three girls and it was disrupting the class where I couldn’t teach anymore” Notwithstanding, without clear lines of communication Susan was not able to voice her frustrations with the school. Susan voiced many concerns to me yet she did not feel that she should say anything about it, “sometimes the kids take a long time to come back from lunch break but I don’t think I’m there to tell the teacher what to do or what should be done”. She also lamented late start times and Luzane’s poor attendance. This sense of voicelessness contributed to an overall sense of lack of control and disorder at the school, which I experienced during my seven observations at this school.

Another aspect that led to the dissonance between Susan and Luzane was locational. Susan was put in a second classroom that was in a separate building from Luzane’s. This physical barrier meant that Luzane was unaware of Susan’s difficulties in the classroom, and Susan was unable to observe Luzane’s teaching methods. Susan spoke about this challenge in our interview, “one situation is that I am in a room by myself, and so I’m not observing another
teaching method or style at all. So I really can’t compare, or say, oh this is different”. Being able to observe Luzane’s teaching methods might have helped Susan especially since she felt inexperienced because of her “lack of education in elementary education or even preschool education”.

Lastly, and what I think disadvantaged Susan the most was that Luzane was not involved in preparing or guiding the IVTs to teach their students. Luzane told me in our interview that she did not think the volunteers were prepared, and felt that she was at fault for this as well. She told me that Susan never received an orientation from her when she arrived. Susan told me, “I have twice gone over with her what it is I’ve been doing, to make sure I’m in line”. I was surprised to hear they had only spoken twice, since at the time of this interview Susan had been on the project for over two months. For someone who was experiencing so many linguistic and classroom difficulties, the need for greater input and support from the local teacher was imperative. Unfortunately, this was not offered. This lack of communication between the two teachers hindered Susan’s ability to create a purposeful and meaningful curriculum for her students.

**Monica and Sisa**

For Monica, Spanish was not an issue for her communication with Sisa. In fact, during their weekly meeting Sisa looked to Monica to translate for the other volunteers. Sisa held weekly meetings to give out instructions on the next week’s lessons and also to make sure all the volunteers were not having problems in the classroom. In addition to having weekly meetings, Monica was fortunate to be in the same room as Sisa, so she could observe her teaching style and methods. She said “the thing I noticed is that Sisa never raises her voice with the kids and that’s amazing to me because it’s chaos [their shared classroom]”. Monica was not accustomed to this environment and said “I am used to talking to kids who are quiet and that definitely doesn’t happen here so I'm just trying to roll with it.” Having Sisa in the room to observe allowed her to better understand the classroom culture instead of enforcing what she considered to be normal classroom behaviour on to her students. That being said, being in a small room with three different classes going on can be difficult. She described her biggest challenge at the school as “the noise level from teaching in one classroom with three grades”. Sometimes she couldn’t hear herself think, “It’s chaotic. Sometimes I take them outside but I can’t do that all the time especially when it’s cold”. Therefore, although close proximity to the local teacher is helpful in
some ways it can be disadvantageous in other. These tensions are indicative of the ongoing difficulties in incorporating IVTs in the local school system.

Regardless of this difficulty, Monica, as an ITV, benefitted most from having a head teacher who was highly involved in the welfare of the school and the children. Sisa had been at the school for eighteen years, even before it had windows and a door. She told me that:

In the beginning when I arrived here this school did not exist as it is. There was nothing. There was a tiny house, made of wood and boards. We didn’t have a door, windows or benches or seats to sit on.

Over the years Sisa became involved in the enrichment of the local community and even gave lessons to mothers after day school was finished. Sisa was very involved in the community; she was also interested in reviving and maintaining Indigenous culture through education. She lamented that much has been lost from the community’s culture but said through the help of the school they are recovering what has been lost. She said of regaining lost customs, “that the youth are the pupils of this, they now know this, little by little we teach. They are growing, getting better than before; they are more organized, with more knowledge.”

Sisa’s passion for and emphasis on the Indigenous curriculum influenced Monica to be conscious of the importance of IK. Sisa also gave her explicit direction on what should be taught. Although Monica abided by these directions she still felt that she should be able to explore outside the curriculum as well. For example, she was told to teach the three food groups that the community uses but for Monica she is accustomed to learning the five food groups. I asked her how she felt about this direction; she said “I am fine with sticking to the curriculum, but at the same time I think these kids don’t just need to stick to these”. She says at lunch she see them “eating a lot of sugar and having lollipops and felt that some awareness of healthy eating needs to be brought in as well”. Even so, Monica still stayed within the instructions of what she was given for this lesson, even going so far as asking Sisa for a list of the names of local crops in Kichwa. Monica was fortunate to have a close working relationship with Sisa that she could comfortably ask for extra input. The cultural depth and breadth of Monica’s teaching would not have been possible without Sisa’s support, both by example and through direct and purposeful curricular guidance.
Greta and Esmeralda

Greta is an interesting case because of the three IVTs she had the highest level of Spanish and also shared a classroom with Carlos, the local assistant teacher. Her Spanish helped her in so far as she would be able to discuss complex issues she was having with Esmeralda. However, Greta never did this. The reason for this is mainly because she did not have a close working relationship with Esmeralda. She once confessed that she wasn’t sure if Esmeralda liked her or if the lack of cordiality was just based on the fact that she saw so many volunteers come and go. Since I never developed closeness with Esmeralda I am not going to speculate why she came across as formal and detached to the volunteers. Nonetheless, Greta’s perceptions caused an unseen barrier between the two teachers which kept personal and professional conversations to a minimum.

Another anomaly is that although Greta was in close proximity to another local teacher she did not seem to think it helped her. In fact she thought that Carlos was benefiting from seeing her teach. She told me that she thinks Carlos copied some of her lessons because he himself was unsure of how to teach. Greta felt this way because Carlos was also not a trained teacher. He was the son of the president of the community and was there helping as part of his duty to his community. She felt more assured about her teaching abilities because she said she had experienced many more teaching styles from her years at school in Germany:

Mainly what I did was take things from how I learned or what we did at school, taking ideas from there. And when I see Carlos, for example, has quite a lot of problems because he never had an education like we did, with many different teachers and many different methods. Because he was also in this school with one pretty bad teacher I think. I think it’s already good when you can refer to what you’ve experienced.

Greta told me that she rather take from the teaching examples she observed as a student in Germany than to look to her colleague Carlos for assistance. The reason she told me she borrows from her German teachers was, “I think because we are all human, so we all learn in a similar way. And yeah, individuals have different ways of how they learn best”; yet she felt the variety of teaching styles she had experienced, as a student herself, could help deal with these learning differences.
Although Greta did not seek advice from Carlos, she still had a friendship with him that provided her with deep insights into the community. This helped her create culturally relevant lessons for her students. Furthermore, Esmeralda, although not seemingly approachable, still put a strong emphasis on schooling and led by example. Her classes were very organized and she enforced good behaviour from the students. Also, she made up a timetable based on subject areas that the whole school was supposed to follow. Therefore, Greta at least knew the subjects she was supposed to teach and when she was supposed to teach them. However, she still was given the freedom to teach these subjects in any way she thought appropriate. She felt conflicted about this responsibility:

I suppose, I guess it’s a bit hard when you are not told what to do, so you have to search for things. So how does Esmeralda direct you tell you? No, she doesn’t tell me anything. I have a timetable for each day but it can be a bit hard because it’s easier when somebody tells you a theme. But at the same time, it’s quite nice to be able to choose what you think is important, even if it is a bigger responsibility, you choose what they learn.

Greta enjoyed choosing what to teach and frequently made lessons that pertained to their lives and social context. Nevertheless, it would be imprudent for any untrained IVT to be given such a large responsibility and remiss to assume that they should have the wherewithal to generate a culturally and academically appropriate curriculum for their students. The final conclusions will take a more focused look at the implications of the varying degrees of educational freedom these IVTs had and how this affected the possibilities for culturally relevant teaching to occur. This concept of cross-cultural learning, of how much and what should be included by the outsider is also another point to be addressed later in the thesis.

**Cultural Sensitivity vs. Cultural Inclusivity: Why good intentions are not enough**

All three IVTs stated that they wanted to have a curriculum that was inclusive of their students’ cultural context- i.e. rural-community based. Yet they varied in how deeply they understood inclusivity and also in their abilities to make their classroom inclusive. Even if a teacher was aware of notions of cultural imposition and cultural relevance it did not necessarily translate into a culturally relevant pedagogy. Susan is a good example of how her good intentions were limited by time, resources and cultural competency. Before Susan arrived on the project, she was prepared to be more culturally inclusive; “I think I thought more about it before I came, before I started, than I am on a day to day basis”. This all boiled down to how much time she had to find
and prepare relevant materials. For Susan, she sees the quality of her lessons being contingent on
“what I can find in the INGO’s house or online. And not only what I am able to find but what I
have time to prepare”. She told me that she had:

made a real point of not bringing Disney things or TV culture things, for coloring and
what not. It’s an effort to avoid that. I don’t know if there has been a real effort to include some
of their culture.

In a later interview, she admitted that although she has tried to avoid Western cultural symbols
she has not been able to be inclusive of her students’ own culture; “I can’t because I don’t
know”.

When asked if she felt that some preparation would have helped her to acculturate to the
community she was doubtful:

So I don’t know if there is anything else that could have been done to prepare me more,
that is I think one of the, um what I want to say, not attribute I don’t want to say barrier, one of
the characteristics of having a teacher from an outside culture. So is cultural unfamiliarity
inevitable? I think so.

This pessimistic attitude towards IVTs abilities to be culturally capable contributes to
Susan’s disengagement from learning about her students and their community. This disconnect
may be why Susan found it difficult to answer questions pertaining to Indigenous ways of
knowing and learning. Susan believed these IK existed but said “I haven’t been here long
enough; I don’t know the culture well enough” to be able to conceptualize it in terms of the
students’ lives. There are many factors that could have caused Susan to feel disconnected. Her
grasp of the Spanish language and the lack of relationship with the local teacher affected her
opportunities to develop her own cultural comprehension. Nonetheless, she did not see her
students as resources to enhance her own cultural competence and as a result lost out on learning
from a direct source of Indigenous knowledge. I argue that this lack of searching for cultural
knowledge came from the fatalistic notion that she as an outsider was incapable of creating a
culturally relevant pedagogy for her students. This in turn contributed to the minimal relevance
of her teaching to the local context.

Susan’s view, that cultural differences will inevitably present barriers against cultural
relevance in the classroom, is interesting to compare with Greta’s who felt she could learn
culture. She admitted that one of her main reasons for volunteering was “to help her get into the culture more”. For Greta, getting to know another culture was important because:

on the one hand [it] helps you broaden your horizons of what is possible and what exists. And also yeah, gives you more ideas for yourself because the more you know the more you can make up your opinion about things.

Greta said she acculturated herself to the community through observation.

I mean you can watch what they do, if someone has been here longer, like Cathy (the project manager), tells about the customs, than you can listen. In general, you just get to know it by being here and watching it all the time.

Greta’s eagerness and openness to learning about the local culture allowed her to increase her cultural competency. The relationships she forged with Carlos, the assistant teacher and all the students at school gave her insights to which most volunteers did not have access to, this combined with her knowledge of Kichwa, helped enhance Greta’s ability to create culturally attuned lessons for her classroom. Greta, of all the three teachers, had the greatest ability to create lessons that were pertinent to her students’ lives.

Despite this, Greta still felt she had a lot more to learn, “well I know a lot about how they live (the families in the community). But I don’t know much about like their festivals, traditions, customs, not much”. This indicates that one’s attitude towards cross-cultural learning and teaching can only go so far in increasing the IVTs cultural capital. Training and resources from the INGO as well as the support from the local teachers are necessary in order to increase their IVT cultural comprehension of the communities they are working in. Greta agrees with this. She says that:

In general it would have been cool to have some kind of help. If they would have taught us something about their culture we could have given it to them. I would have also liked just to know about it, how they live.

Greta attempted to learn about the culture she was in and acculturated herself to an extent. However without frequent guidance by the local teacher and to an extent the INGO, on the curriculum, pedagogical approaches and local knowledge, her cultural competency as a teacher did not develop to its full potential.
When Students become Teachers- How reciprocal learning may occur between Students and ITVs

The idea of reverse learning was an unexpected outcome of cross-cultural relationships that I found in Monica’s classroom and to a lesser degree in Greta’s classroom. What I observed as reverse learning (or reverse teaching) was when students were able to act as teachers and the teachers to act as learners, which created a reciprocal act of learning that was beneficial to both parties in different ways. For me this illustrated Paulo Freire’s ideal of teacher-student relationships being dialectic and reciprocal. He describes this educative action as “learners become thinking subjects who recognize that they are as much thinking subjects as are the teacher” (1998, p90). Freire believes that “it is in this dialectic movement that teaching and learning become knowing and reknowing. The learners gradually know what they did not yet know, and the educators reknow what they knew before” (Freire, 1998, 90). What I observed was that this give and take relationship allowed the teachers to become more acculturated and knowledgeable about their student’s environment, community and personal lives. As for the students, this allowance to teach challenged them to think about their own environment, community and lives in new ways as they presented it to the teachers, which I saw occurring during Monica’s field trips and in Greta’s interactive classroom lessons. Furthermore, the students as teacher role helped build the students’ confidence, since they saw themselves not only capable of learning but of teaching as well. This type of learning connected the students to their teacher in more meaningful ways and was the most profound form of culturally relevant learning about local knowledge that I saw at the schools. Throughout my classroom observations I always noted that the most engaging, successful, and relevant classes were the ones were the ITVs gave their students time and encouragement to explore their own worlds by teaching it to them. Examples of this were the field trips Monica took with her class, where her students introduced her to the uses of plants, flowers and berries. And in Greta’s class, the students taught her about their home lives, traditions and language through everyday dialogue as well as arts and crafts and creative writing assignments. When students were engaged with
teaching and their teachers with learning it allowed them to explore their own lived experience which is a foundational step towards Freire’s notion of cultural action for freedom\(^5\).

That being said, creating a dialectical relationship between learning and teaching was not an explicit teaching approach that either Monica or Greta consciously adopted. Reverse learning sprang from their openness to learn about new cultures and from their close relationships with their students. Regardless, Monica quickly became aware of the benefits reverse learning had on her students:

I feel like they’ve probably taught me a lot. Having said that, at the same time I think that them, 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 comes from both Monica and Greta’s eagerness to learn about the country and community they are in. They both told me that they try to keep what they teach connected to their students’ lives and the environment they are in. Both IVTs expressed dislike with the Ecuadorian textbook which Monica describes as “urban and non-indigenous” and Greta says that it excludes her students and “sometimes seems to really refer to Mestizo\(^6\) and also to more city children”. She says she doesn’t like to use these materials because the children “really wouldn’t know what to do with it”. Neither, ITVs liked working with Ecuadorian textbooks. Yet because it was the only mandated curriculum they had to work with, it prompted them to create more specific lessons aimed at involving their students.

Also because both IVTs came to this project to experience a new culture and enhance their Spanish they were receptive to their students as a conduit learn more about where they were. Their curiosity in their students’ lives combined with the openness in their curriculum allowed them to engage their students through personal friendships, outdoor lessons and field trips.

Reverse learning was most visible to me in Monica’s classroom. Monica incorporated field trips in her natural science classes; she told me “for sciences I keep things very Atahualpa

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\(^5\) Freire’s concept of cultural action for freedom is when a person learns to “look critically at the cultural which has shaped him, and to move towards reflection and positive action upon his world”. (Freire, 1983, p 5)

\(^6\) Metizo, is a common Latin American word an term referring to mixed ancestry. Greta is referring in particular to Ecuadorians who are half European descent and half Indigenous descent.
based”. It was on these field trips that she reveals that her students took on the teacher role. Her
description of their first field trip illustrates these reverse roles:

I took my kids on a field trip and they only knew the names [of plants] in Kichwa, 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.

Nearing the end of her six week placement Monica confided that “I definitely think my kids have
taught me a lot”.

In Greta’s case reverse learning occurred because of the friendships she forged with her
students. Since Greta was a younger volunteer she still shared an innocent and playful
personality with her students. She noted this dynamic to me in our interview:

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 managed to create a
two way relationship where she could teach them and they could teach her. Often she had her
students teach her words in Kichwa, she also learned a lot about the different families and knew
who every student was related to at school. Greta could even point out which horse belonged to
which family on our walk to and from school. When Greta wrote individual lessons in her
students’ notebooks, she made specific reference to the people in her students’ lives and past
experiences they had had. And when they did their lesson on values and rules she asked her
students to create their own lists of classroom values and rules, which they posted on the wall. In
seeking to learn from her students, Greta was able to incorporate what she had learned into her
lessons that were relevant to her students’ environment, and their lived experiences.
Chapter Discussion

This study began with the purpose of discovering how international volunteer teachers taught in rural Indigenous schools in Ecuador. I wanted to explore whether or not this North American concept of cultural relevance could be applied to cross-cultural settings where teachers were entering classrooms as visible outsiders. What I found in this study was that while CRT could be found in two of the three teachers’ classrooms, there were many variables that had to be accounted. This chapter presented varied examples of the successes and challenges to culturally relevant teaching when Indigenous students are being taught by foreign volunteer teachers.

The purpose of my analysis was to illustrate and explore the personal, as well as mitigating factors that hinder and/or facilitate teaching by these three international volunteer teachers, which thereby affected CRT to their Indigenous students. This exploration highlighted the some specific ways that CRT occurs so that later I might recommend ways to further foster CRT in globalized contexts such as these. In contrast, I also presented many barriers to CRT in these 3 IVTs classrooms, in order to discuss possible solutions for these obstacles. I will now give a synopsis of these findings.

Since none of the three volunteer teachers were actually certified teachers and because of differences in their background and experience with education, I found that their perceptions of the purpose, role and capabilities as educators varied greatly. I uncovered the ways in which volunteering, as untrained teacher seemed to be related to their views of teacher efficacy and the student educability. Since, teacher efficacy and student educability are two essential components of CRT; without a belief in one’s own ability to make change coupled with the belief that students can achieve change, CRT can never be achieved (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997).

Another aspect affecting teachers’ efficacy and belief about student educability was how the three IVTs own conceptions of their roles as volunteers related to their responsibilities in the classroom. I found that a pervasive view from the volunteers was that their efforts on the project were “better than nothing”. I found this came from a deficit notion about the helplessness of the communities that led them to regard contributions that they made, regardless of its effectiveness,
as a benefit to the community. I want to reflect on the impacts of this outlook, since it has been shown in the history of international developmental work, that if careful and thoughtful preparation is not made, more harm can be done than good (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Dei & Kempf, 2006; Smith, 1999; Wane, 2009; Yazzie, 2000). Furthermore, when teachers lack accountability for creating relevant and empowering classrooms it becomes easy for colonial patterns and Eurocentric knowledge to become normalized. I argue that without conscientious accountability, the process of decolonizing education, which seeks to reclaim Indigenous ways of learning and knowing as a way to challenge dominant worldview, will be impeded (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Fanon, 1963).

These deficit concepts are also related to why the three volunteers viewed themselves not solely as teachers, but also as providers, caregivers and assistants. They tended to view the money they provided for food and resources and the extra hands they brought to the schools as a large component of their volunteer contribution. And because of this, they were able to justify their limitations as teachers instead feeling personally accountable for working towards solutions. Since teacher accountability is a crucial component in student achievement and classroom effectiveness it is important that we investigate how we can encourage this sentiment among IVT’s (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, Pang and Sablan, 1998).

With this said, it was found in some cases that the feeling of being a saviour translated into enhanced levels of personal commitment and motivation to create empowering spaces for their students to learn. The implications of the notion of volunteerism will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Teacher efficacy and accountability is also connected to cultural competence as I discovered when analyzing the relationship IVTs had with the local teachers. In my study, I found, not unexpectedly, that open communication and consistent support and guidance actually built teachers confidence in the classroom, which, in turn, supported their capacity to be culturally relevant teachers. However I found this level of communication did not always occur, due to many mitigating factors, the most important of which were language barriers, and the fact that the local teachers were not formally instructed to guide the IVTs. This analysis took the focus off the IVTs as individuals and looked at how situational contexts were restricting their
access to academic goals and cultural knowledge. As a result, this next chapter will explore how we must alter and improve contextual conditions so that communication can increase and enhance the relationships between the IVTs and the local teachers.

Next, I looked at the divide between the IVTs desire to create culturally relevant classrooms and the barriers that limited their ability to do so. I found that although IVTs felt they wanted to be inclusive of the students’ local contexts they had limited access to sources that would help them learn and address cultural values and local knowledge. My interviews with the IVTs showed their restricted amount of time to research and prepare lessons, and to be in communities learning the local customs and culture, as a major barriers to their effectiveness as a teacher. Another factor limiting cultural comprehension was their personal doubt that preparation could help them to acculturate within the community. This will be explored in further depth in the following chapter.

The last finding in my analysis came as a surprise to me. I had begun my research expecting to observe the ways in which culturally relevant teaching was enacted by international volunteer teachers. I was amazed to find that in two of the three schools, the students were eager to teach their teachers about their ways of life and their surroundings. This is what I referred to as Reverse Teaching but it could also be called Reverse Learning and is the main way I saw culturally relevant learning being infused into their classrooms. This reciprocal act of teacher learning through students and students learning through teaching made it an integrated act of learning, which was rooted in personal history and local knowledge. This type of reciprocal learning is a Freirean (1998) concept, which I explore further in the implications section in order to tease out the unintended and often unseen benefits of having IVTs at schools such as these. I will highlight how this unexpected approach to learning counterbalanced some of the difficulties I saw the IVTs encountering in terms of the possibilities for culturally relevant teaching. I will also expand this discussion to include perspectives from the local teachers, ITV and project managers on the ways in which foreign teachers can contribute to these students’ academic, as well as personal development.
Chapter 6: Praxis\textsuperscript{7}: Exploring opportunities for Culturally Relevant Teaching by International Volunteer Teachers?

This ethnographic case study examined the perspective and practices of three international volunteer teachers at their respective schools in rural highland Ecuador. The purpose of this study was to understand how these international volunteer teachers understand and enact culturally relevant teaching for their indigenous students. In the previous two chapters, I contextualized my participants’ life histories and how these related to their educational views and practices and discussed the broader themes that arose from my interviews and observations. In this chapter I build on these findings in order to explore the opportunities to make international aid education more relevant to its student’s lives and environment.

**Major Findings**

The aim of this study was to answer the central question, how is culturally relevant teaching understood and enacted by three international volunteer teachers in rural highland Ecuador?

Responses to this question were rendered in the thematic findings section. I discovered that IVTs perceptions and enactment of culturally relevant teaching were connected to their own personal life histories and experiences as well as external mitigating factors such as time restrictions, language barriers, the culture of the schools and the local teachers’ relationships to the volunteers. I identified various barriers as well as opportunities for culturally relevant teaching in a cross-cultural educational context. The underlying motivation in this chapter is to utilize the thematic findings to discuss and develop ways to enhance and expand IVTs capacity to be culturally responsive teachers.

Therefore, from these themes I developed four suggestions that problematize and discuss how culturally relevant teaching can be developed in global cross-cultural settings. They are as follows:

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\textsuperscript{7} Praxis is the process by which theory and research is enacted or practiced, realized for the benefit of the researched(Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K, 2000)
1. Increasing teacher efficacy in untrained volunteer teachers.

2. Enhancing IVTs and local teachers’ relationships so that culturally relevant teaching can be encouraged and fostered.

3. Exploring ways that IVTs can increase their cultural awareness and knowledge of their students.

4. Cultivating CRT by engaging the differences between Indigenous students and foreign teachers.

**Increasing Teacher Efficacy in untrained Volunteer Teachers**

An important aspect to keep in mind in a volunteer setting is that most IVTs are untrained as teachers. Many have experience teaching but their formal training is typically minimal. Therefore, it is not surprising that the IVT’s confidence in their ability to organize and accomplish actions relevant to the students’ success was considerably low. The reason I want to focus on increase teacher efficacy is because it is found to be correlated to integral students’ success (Bandura, 2003). This is because teachers who believe they have the capacity to positively encourage student learning and achievement are more likely to implement plans to help achieve their goals with students (Bruce and Ross, 2008).

Individuals who feel that they will be successful on a given task are more likely to be so because they adopt challenging goals, try harder to achieve them, persist despite setbacks, and develop coping mechanisms for managing their emotional states” (Bruce and Ross, 2008, p 347).

Furthermore, increasing efficacy could expand culturally relevant teaching as teachers begin to see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about changes that could make schools more equitable for marginalized students (Villegas and Lucas, 2002).

In my study I observed how teacher efficacy was related to the levels of students’ achievement in my three participants’ classrooms. Greta and Susan, were unsure about their capacity to teach and this was evident in their diminished motivation to teach, inconsistencies in their lesson planning and lax enforcement of classroom learning. The reason for this is because teachers with a low sense of efficacy are less inclined to take on tasks because they are unsure that they will succeed. This lower sense of teacher efficacy seemed to stem from their deficit
views of volunteer teaching and their subsequent lack of training that often comes with being a volunteer.

So the question now is how teacher efficacy be promoted within international aid projects which rely on untrained volunteers?

The most difficult aspect of increasing teacher efficacy is the fact that most of these volunteers are not certified or trained teachers. I found because it was a voluntary context it was difficult managing the “tension between informal, loosely organized operations and formal, carefully routinized procedures” (Wolf, 1985, p 424). A large reason for these tensions has to do with how the volunteers perceived themselves and their roles on such projects. What I encountered during my field research was that the volunteers tended view that their contribution as only ‘better than nothing’. I found that a pervasive outlook from all three volunteers was that their work on the project was better than the alternative, which they perceived to be very little. They held the view that the communities would be much worse off without their teaching and monetary contributions. And to a point this view was affirmed by the local teachers and the project manager, who were grateful to have extra hands to unburden them from the many grades they were expected to teach. Esmeralda, the teacher at Manay, outlined this perspective when she spoke of the challenges and obstacles the schools face:

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 idea of gratitude for the presence of the IVTs was reinforced by Cathy, the project manager, who told me that one way she manages the difficulties the volunteers face 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 directly involved with the school seemed grateful for the extra help, this gratitude may have perpetuated the notion that the volunteers’ mere presence at school was sufficient. In my study I observed how the deficit concept the volunteers held of their roles sometimes lead to a lack of personal 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 states 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. So it’s very much for the volunteers to use it, so when they say they’re not doing it, they’re not using it, all we can do is just recommend that they do. 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. The level of commitment they give and the quality of work they put in is entirely due to their personal makeup.

In the following section, I outline suggestions to deal with the difficulties of managing and motivating people who are for the most part untrained and unpaid volunteers. I contend that by professionalizing IVTs attitudes and perceptions of volunteering this will help to counterbalance the deficit notion of their contribution and increase teacher efficacy.

**Redefining the ‘Professional’**

Some would argue that the professional and the volunteer are antithetical by nature. And in some ways this is true if you examine them through the lens of traditional characteristics that define a profession, “such as remuneration, social status, autonomous or authoritative power, and a recognized knowledge base” (Pratte & Rury, 1991). Nonetheless, work identity is a subjective psychology and teacher professionalism is a socially constructed term that is continually being redefined by theory, policy and practices in education (Olesen, 2001, Hilfery, 2008). Because professionalism is a personal and subjective concept, this opens the possibility that volunteers’ can adapt their attitudes and their work so that they would be more likely to feel a sense of professionalism in their role as volunteer teachers.

By examining aspects of professionalism broadly we can incorporate these into the sphere of volunteerism to enhance the level of professionalism volunteer teachers feel about their practices. Firstly, I will explore how the IVTs position could be transformed from a more amorphous role as volunteer to a well-defined role as teacher, through professional guidelines and consistent workplace supports and services. Secondly, I will examine how creating a collegial culture can sustain and enhance this newly professionalized identity which will allow them to see themselves more as teachers than volunteers.
**Redefining the Volunteer**

The view that volunteer work is better than nothing is a common thought to all 3 IVT participants in this study and was reaffirmed by the local teachers and the INGO staff. What I suggest here is to work with these stakeholders to reframe this viewpoint into a positive sentiment that could motivate volunteers’ goals as teachers. For example, Monica held this view but understood it as the reason why she had to make the most of her time on the project. Monica was cognizant of her temporary role and subsequently set out to learn about her students, organize what needed to be taught and track their progress so she could properly hand over the class to the incoming volunteer. This is an example of a personal commitment by Monica professionalism as a volunteer teacher and is not an outcome of the structure of the project. Therefore, I recommend that there be systems put in place from the onset that reinforce the responsibilities of the IVTs for their students’ academic and social well being, while they are on the project and after they leave.

In order to encourage professionalism and promote efficacy there needs to be a formal introduction. Guidelines for the volunteers’ roles as teachers before they even enter the project should be mandatory. A large concern from many of the volunteers was that they did not know what to expect before they arrived and as such some thought that their teaching responsibilities were too onerous and they were not qualified to undertake them. This is problematic because when volunteers feel overwhelmed and under qualified it becomes easy to default to the deficit attitude that they only need to do ‘better than nothing’. Therefore, clearly guideline of the expectations, duties and goals of the volunteer as a teacher should be outlined and accepted formally by the IVTs before they arrive on the project. By formally notifying the IVTs of their exact duties and role as teachers it may better help the IVTs be aware and prepared to take on a teaching position. Furthermore, it would deal with the levels of unpredictability that Cathy lamented, in that it would reduce those volunteers who are not willing or able to commit to becoming full time teachers.

The next step in professionalizing the volunteer process would be to organize a system that ensures all the IVTs are planning and documenting their daily lessons and weekly progress
report of their students. This would help with the issue of classroom organization and consistency amongst IVTs. Greta highlights this difficulty when she stated “It’s hard when you come here and you don’t know what they know or know what they should know, or what the teacher wants them to know.”

This idea of implementing a teaching planner for each classroom comes out of the teacher workshop training that is already in place on this project. Monica was one of the IVTs who took up this planning system; keeping track of her lesson plans and the students work and progress in a format that was given to her by Cathy. I observed how this not only helped Monica in her classroom but allowed her to successfully hand over her class to the incoming IVT. It was successful because the new IVT had documentation of what the students had done, where they had difficulties, where they excelled and the direction in which they were headed. It also gave the new IVT an idea of the routine and structure of Monica’s classes. This detailed handover helped to maintain a level of classroom consistency which is difficult to uphold when IVTs are coming from different backgrounds and levels of experience, and for differing lengths of time. Therefore, I suggest that a classroom planner not just be a recommendation for the IVT but rather a requirement that they are informed of prior to their arrival. Implementing and organizing a system where IVTs are accountable for their classroom work and responsible for preparing the incoming IVT to begin where they left off is essential if we hope to professionalize IVTs conception of their role as teachers.

Creating a Culture of Colleagues

Another step in professionalizing the IVT role and increasing their efficacy as teachers is to put functions in place that would encourage and support a culture of colleagues. Collegial sharing and support is an important aspect of professionalism in that it builds teacher confidence, efficacy and accountability which allows for a greater commitment amongst teachers to pursue educational development at their schools (Hargreaves, 1994). Promoting open dialogue about teaching and education should set the stage for IVTs to talk about their varying levels of experience. This could allow teachers who feel inexperienced to know that they are not alone and it would also allow IVTs to network with other IVTs who may have more experience in the field. The purpose of creating a community of peers would be to allow an open space where IVTs
could come and discuss the issues and dilemmas they encounter in the classroom so that they can problem solve as a community. Also it creates a space where they can come together to set specific educational goals, discuss sought after outcomes and their plans to achieve them. This opportunity would allow teachers to better articulate exactly what they want to accomplish and how they intend to do it. This is paramount in that I found that my three participants, because of their temporary status and inexperience as teachers, did not define what they wanted to achieve or how they wanted to achieve it. This can become a detriment to teacher efficacy because without a plan of action teachers can lose the sense of direction and become unsure of the outcomes they want to see from the students. This not only adversely affects teachers but also the students because they are not given goals to meet or strategies to get there and as a result lack a sense of accomplishment which is needed in order to foster a desire for learning.

Therefore, what I suggest is that IVTs keep daily logs of their classroom plans and aims, how they executed them and the challenges and successes they faced when trying to achieve these goals. This way, at the end of the week, all the IVTs could get together in order to openly discuss the details of their week, how they are feeling about themselves as teachers and the progress their students are making. This open dialogue should also include IVTs trading techniques that worked, lessons that were successful and sharing resources and ideas that are helpful in the classroom. Fostering collegiality between teachers not only helps to boost their efficacy as teachers but it also opens up the possibility for teachers to begin to help one another, outside as well as inside the classroom.

This open space for teacher learning is integral if collaboration amongst peers is to occur. However, in order to create a culture of collegiality within the realm of volunteership guidelines and procedures, collaboration and collegiality must be formalized. In order to create a culture of collegiality there must be consistent practices that develop the relationships between the current IVTs at their respective schools and as a group. Because there are three schools that the IVTs are assigned to, it produces a disjunction between the IVTs as a whole, since they generally look to the teachers at their particular schools as colleagues but not to the other IVTs. Therefore, I suggest that in order to create a culture of collegiality among all the IVTs there be weekly meetings to debrief and update one another about the weekly successes and challenges at all the schools. Furthermore, these weekly meetings can be used to discuss how they can collaborate as
a team of teachers; by sharing and developing new lessons and techniques, planning for collaborative teaching or brainstorming innovative ideas that would benefit the schools as a whole. Group meetings would not only foster a sense of camaraderie but would create a forum to bridge ideas between teacher development and school improvement (Hargreaves, 1994, p 187). That being said, these meetings, though formally required, should not be too regimented since overly formalized and mandated teacher requirements often have a negative effect towards creating sincere and profound collegial ties (Hargreaves, 1994, p 190). It is my contention that these meetings should be viewed as a starting point for collegiality that would also be voluntary and spontaneous on the IVT part. For this to occur, the IVT have to see value in these meetings and the subsequent work that comes out of them. I argue that this will happen organically in that it has been shown that as collaboration and collegiality so too does increase teacher effectiveness making teaching a more gratifying and fruitful endeavour (Hargreaves, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1985). Nonetheless, a culture of collegiality cannot only be amongst the international volunteer teachers themselves. As outsiders, they require guidance and support as to what to teach and how to teach to their Indigenous students. As I found in my study, an invaluable resource for this is the local teachers, in so far as they can provide educational and cultural insights that temporary foreign teachers are not privy to. Therefore, in the next section I will look at the way we can enhance IVTs and local teachers’ relationships so that culturally relevant teaching can be encouraged and fostered.

**Enhancing IVT’s and Local Teachers’ Relationships**

The local teachers can play a significant role in guiding and supporting the IVTs in their roles as cross-cultural teachers. The field work was in three separate local schools and as such I was able to observe the impacts of the varying IVT-local teacher relationships at each respective school. What I witnessed was that support and guidance from the local teacher was connected to Monica, Susan and Greta’s abilities to carry out culturally relevant teaching. Firstly, this is because the local teachers had access to a supplementary curriculum guide, “Red de Chinchicha”, which was crafted by Indigenous leaders from the community. This curriculum focused on community based learning, which they referred to as productive technology. Secondly, because the teachers

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8 Productive Technology is focused on land based and artisanal education. It was described to me by Sisa as “our curriculum, the curriculum of the indigenous, of the bilingual education. Therefore, Productive Technology is for
lived near the communities, were Indigenous themselves or spoke the native language Kichwa, they were better attuned to their students’ abilities and needs. Nonetheless, of the three local teachers, only one teacher offered weekly meetings and shared the Red de Chinchicha resource with the IVTs. The reason this one teacher had shared her expertise and resources with the IVTs, was not because she cared more than the others about the school, but simply because different people take different approaches to running and managing schools. Since none of the local teachers were given explicit instructions from the INGO to supervise and direct the IVTs, it was left to the local teachers to decide how they wanted to work with them. Furthermore, there was no protocol to assist local teachers in orienting and guiding the IVTs that came to their school. Without guidance and support from the local teachers this left some IVTs feeling disconnected from the teachers and the school itself. This disconnect hindered the IVTs capacity to be culturally relevant teachers, in so far as they were not given an insider insight that could have helped them better adapt to the culture of the school and the community.

According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), an integral part of culturally relevant teaching is that teachers become cultural workers who seek to create positive change by systematically including their students’ culture as a legitimate form of knowledge. However, to fully become cultural workers, foreign teachers need allies on the inside who can inform and enhance their awareness and knowledge of their students’ cultures. Looking at Sisa, the head teacher at Monica’s school, I found that this type of alliance was possible. Sisa facilitated a community of teachers who were directed to teach a culturally relevant curriculum but who were comfortable to ask just how to accomplish this. That being said this was a personal choice made by Sisa. Therefore, further research investigating how this type of direction and alliance could be consciously enacted and sustained at these schools would be valuable. I argue that, in order for this to occur, the INGO needs to promote and facilitate communication between the local teachers and the IVTs coming to their schools.

those boys that want to work with the earth that is very important for our sustenance. And for the girls, in the older grades, 5th, 6th and 7th, we need for them to learn a lot of artisan work, they want to tailor these shirt (points to her blouse) because it’s very important and valued by them. Because if they leave school and don’t know how to tend the land or don’t know how to work with clothes then more poverty will come, they will need to buy and buy and buy and this is a problem”.
Building Bridges between the local teacher, community and the IVT’s.

The purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to be inclusive of students of all backgrounds and cultures so that they are validated and legitimated (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1993; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). The communities and families within them are important sources for the identification and integration of cultural knowledge (Dei, Wilson and Zine, 2002). However, the IVTs did not have direct contact with the people communities for these sources of cultural competency. The reason for this is that these are, as Cathy puts it “closed communities”, and she feels a strong responsibility to respect their privacy:

...one reason we don’t live in the communities is so we don’t disrupt the balance...And I am quite comfortable that there is stuff that goes on that I don’t know about, that I m not a part of and that we’re not a part of. And I am comfortable that as Westerners we are outside of it, that we are not in their faces or in their lives for everything. I quite like that it’s preserving the balance. My concern is that anywhere that I’ve seen us get involved in things, as in Westerners, The western way comes out. And I guess I would really want to protect as far as possible their culture and their way of life from us.

This is an important outlook because as much as it is important to learn about other cultures there must be awareness of the difference between learning from and imposing on these communities. Nonetheless, the IVTs as outsiders should learn about the communities they are in so they can be inclusive of their ways of knowing and learning. The best source for that is the schools and the local teachers in them, since they are “products and reflection of their societies, and are inextricably linked to the communities where they are situated” (Dei, Wilson Zine, 2002, p 27).

Therefore, to foster cultural awareness and competency on the part of foreign teachers, greater access and communication must be made with the local teachers. To build these bridges of communication there should be an intermediary link, such as the project manager, who has close relationships with both the local teachers and the IVTs.

The first step towards creating a bridge of communication that I recommend based on my research finding is for the INGO and the project manager to ask the local teachers to provide an orientation that outlines the purpose and goals of the school for the incoming IVTs. An orientation is essential to help them learn about the school and community they are entering and also to create a sense of collegiality within the school. When the IVTs feel as though they are an
important part of the school system this knowledge helps increase their sense of personal accountability for their classrooms. And when they have clear aims and goals for the school they have a better sense of purpose and direction.

The next component of building these bridges could be to encourage a time and space where weekly meetings may held, to facilitate structured and consistent two-way communication, feedback and guidance for the IVTs. These meetings might also build a rapport between the local teachers and the IVTs so they can better learn on a micro level, the politics, obstacles, achievements and culture of the community (Dei, Wilson and Zine, 2002).

With all this said, language will always come up as a barrier to communication, if the IVTs do not have a proficient level of Spanish. I observed the extreme difficulties that Susan faced, being in a school with no other volunteer or intern to help with her Spanish. The language barrier was such that even if the local teacher, Luzane, had offered an orientation and weekly meeting it would have been ineffective without a translator. If the IVT is unable to communicate clearly with the local teachers or to the students because of a language barrier there should to be someone available to assist with this. As such there must be an intern or IVT fluent in Spanish available for the schools that have IVTs with only basic Spanish skills. It is the responsibility of the INGO to ensure that lines of communication are open in every respect and this includes ensuring that language difficulties are managed properly.

Making communication accessible and consistent is necessary in order to forge and enhance the local teachers’ and IVTs relationships. For this to occur, the INGO may want to request that the local teachers participate in formal orientations and weekly meetings with IVTs. They should broach this subject by explaining to the local teachers the benefits that coherent communication would bring to the school. The INGO should explain that the orientation would outline the expectations and goals of the local teachers and that the weekly meetings would assist the IVTs in meeting these aims and goals. To prevent language being such an impediment the INGO should ensure that assistance from other IVTs, interns, or the project manager, will be readily available for IVTs who have low levels of Spanish comprehension. In this way they would be demonstrating that this is a collaborative effort to keep lines of communication flowing and open. This could help create a sense of cohesiveness and collegiality at the school so that cross-cultural learning can occur between local teachers and the IVTs.
Exploring ways that IVTs can increase their cultural awareness and knowledge about their students.

Fostering and supporting the relationships between the local teachers and the IVTs is a necessary aspect of creating culturally relevant schools. However, there are other facets that we should explore so that the IVTs have a more expansive, nuanced and in depth understanding of their students’ cultural backgrounds and lived histories. I will address the orientation and guidance that might help IVTs foster critical consciousness and personal accountability to enhance their role as culturally relevant teachers.

As previously discuss the main difficulties with enacting culturally relevant teaching by international volunteer teachers are that they are from very different backgrounds and are not all certified teachers. Therefore, the variance in levels of performance and commitment are unpredictable. Cathy, the project manager, tells me she sees great variance between IVTs which can lead to inconsistency and incoherence in the classroom. However, she equates this variance to their maturity levels, regardless of age, gender, nationality or professional experience:

The difference for me is maturity and this drives how effective they are, as to whether they are just playmates or whether they have structured classes that bring the child through an item to a conclusion at the end.

This statement points to the fact that there are many unknowns with volunteers, of varying ages and varying personal and professional backgrounds, flying in from all over the world. So it is integral to the success of this project to increase consistency and maturity to create a group of colleagues who are working towards a uniform goal of culturally relevant teaching.

Beyond Respect

When I spoke to the IVTs about what they learned about the schools and communities before they entered them, they told me how the notion of respect for the communities was emphasized. Susan described what she felt she was taught by the INGO, before she entered the schools,

I don’t know what I don’t know and um, I was told of course to be very respectful of the families or the parents, we always call them senor or senorita etcetera. And that kind of goes
without saying but it was nice to have that reiterated, there was really nothing beyond that I think. There was a lot of respect emphasized.

Respect is extremely important and the first stepping stone in cross-cultural learning. However, critical awareness of students’ personal and social context varied widely and this came across in the three IVTs abilities to understand their students’ needs. IVTs that had a better awareness and understanding of their students as individuals as well as socio-political beings were more apt to enact culturally relevant teaching practices. Yet those that knew little about their students’ personal and community life were not as consciously attuned to their students’ personal and academic needs. Therefore the INGO should adopt a guiding philosophy that deals with the many differences and variances between the IVTs who arrive to a new project. I argue that the orientations for new IVTs need to move beyond making respect the ultimate goal. The IVTs need to be better informed of the micro and macro context of the communities they are working in, in order for them to become critically conscious of the personal, academic and cultural needs of their students. This type of teaching reinforces the notion that culturally relevant teaching is not simply about understanding of one culture but rather the power, politics and diversities within the community and the world (Langdon & Harvey, 2009, p 221).

To begin with, the INGO should try to collaborate with each school to find out what the goals of the communities are. Cathy, the project manager, stated that she already does this:

Our goals, from my point of view, my goal is to have a close enough working relationship with the communities, so that we’re doing what they need. So if they turn around and say, in two months time, ‘you need to teach computing’, then we teach computing.

The lines of communication with the communities, whether directly or indirectly, need to be opened up so that the volunteers feel involved and a part of the community’s needs and wants. I found that because respect was so heavily emphasized from the outset it caused the IVTs to foster their identities as outsiders. Although it is important to respect the fact that they are outsiders who are guests in these communities, IVTs also should feel that their status as outsider is not too limiting. This is because they as teachers need to be a ‘cultural liaison’, linking the students’ culture to the culture of the school (Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997, pg 19). With all this said, these communities are private and it is not feasible or even helpful to have temporary IVTs expect to be accepted into the community circle of communication. Therefore, I suggest that
Cathy acts as the liaison between the community and the IVTs in order for them to feel a part of the process and also for them to be more attuned to the wants and needs the community has for their children. This way, it is possible for IVTs to move beyond notions of respect to a more integrated understanding of their relationship with the community. This is a complex process because it would not involve direct communication between the community and the IVTs but would involve helping the IVTs from the onset to learn and develop their own critical consciousness of the school and the communities.

**Promoting Critical Consciousness in International Volunteer Teachers**

To move beyond respect and to create a relationship between the IVTs and the community, the IVTs should be better informed about the cultural and social world they are being invited into. It would be helpful if the volunteers received information packages explaining the histories of the communities and the schools they are working in, the current political and social context of Indigenous peoples in Ecuador and how education is important in their lives. This way they not only have an understanding of what Osborne (1996) calls, “the socio-historico-political realities” of their students’ lives but they would have a deeper understanding of how education may impact their lives for the better. This would minimize the variance between the volunteers in that they would all have an opportunity to develop a level of awareness of the communities, which they can share and discuss with one another. Furthermore, by highlighting the potential education can have on the students’ lives can help to increase the IVTs own sense of personal accountability as teachers. Focusing on increasing the IVTs level of personal responsibility is crucial in preparing IVTs to become culturally relevant teachers. When teachers feel accountable for their students they (a) care about the implications that their work has on students’ lives, the welfare of the community and challenging social inequality and (b) feel personally accountable for the pedagogical methods they employ to do this. These two perspectives are the foundations that maintain and sustain culturally relevant teaching practices.

Giving teachers direct information about the students’ and communities’ realities and the impacts the project is making in their lives has a twofold effect. First, it gives them certain insider insights which allow them to become more conscious and knowledgeable about their students’ particular context. Second and more importantly, by learning about their socio-historico-political realities, it helps to foster a sense of concern and accountability for their work.
on the project. The sense of accountability is an integral part of culturally relevant teaching because it motivates teachers to become invested in the personal well being as well as the academic success of all their students.

**Cultivating CRT by learning through the cultural differences between Foreign Teachers and Indigenous students.**

Previous discussions looked at managing the difficulties’ inherent in cross-cultural teaching so that IVTs can be better prepared to teach to their Indigenous students. This discussion in contrast, will look at the benefits of having foreign teachers and how engaging with their cultural differences can cultivate culturally relevant teaching. During my field research I found alternative modes of CRT due to the cross-cultural dynamics within their classrooms.

An integral part of cross-cultural learning and culturally relevant teaching comes from the fact that these volunteers came to these projects out of a desire to teach students from a different culture. Moreover, remuneration was not a factor in their choice to teach and they actually paid a fee to volunteer at these school. In this way, I found that the IVTs on the project were in a very different situation than salaried, certified teachers in formal school who teach to minority students in that they had purposefully come to teach and to learn in a cross-cultural setting. The issue with CRT in a North American context is that White, middle class teachers are often unprepared and unaware that they must teach to the diversity in their classroom, whereas these IVTs come prepared and aware that they are outsiders at the schools.

Since they were aware of their outsider status there is, for the most part, a desire to acculturate to their new environment. Examples of would include that the IVT’s pay for Spanish lessons, board with a home stay, and relish their invitations to cultural events in the community, such as the Day of the Dead festival⁹. By and large, I found that the IVTs came to immerse themselves in a foreign language, land and culture, and as such had a shared appreciation for diversity and difference.

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⁹ The day of the dead “dia de los muertos” festival, is an indigenous tradition of the celebration of those who have died. While I was on the project the INGO was preparing to provide food and drinks for the community. It was a weekend celebration and all the volunteers were invited up to the communities for a rare after school gathering.
This sense of appreciation is an important component of the ‘affective domain’ of culturally relevant teaching which comes out of the teachers’ passion to teach their students (Rios, McDaniel, Stowell, 1998). Affective teaching considers teachers’ worldviews and passion for their students and how this has an impact on their pedagogy. This is different from looking at the effectiveness of classroom pedagogy and content knowledge because it includes aspects such as “commitment to the community, teacher warmth, positive expectations and a balance between task and relationship orientation” (Rios, McDaniel, Stowell, 1998, p 161). As such, when looking at the affective domain of teaching we are referring to the value teachers place on their students’ attitudes, feelings and beliefs and how this encourages students to discuss and pursue their personal interests and goals (Shechtman, Z. & Leichtentritt, J. 2004, p 323).

This affective domain was an invaluable asset that the IVTs could bring to a project. In my interviews with the local teachers they all agreed that the love and care that the IVTs provide is an invaluable asset to the students’ education. Esmeralda outlines this sentiment when she speaks of the IVTs role at the schools:

The form of their behaviour; being very friendly, very respectful, very caring. Especially with the children they constitute a second parent because for majority of students, they are not being abandoned, but the families have up to 9-10 children, so they prefer the eldest or the youngest. So they volunteers give care, love, they give respect and teach them many things. The children come happy to school.

Luzane affirms this with this description of the IVTs,

Before the (INGO) the students didn’t receive much tenderness, this is much on the part of the parents. But now it is different. The volunteers embrace the kids. They give them confidence and the kids are very happy with the volunteers.

What I will now focus on is how the IVT’s love and care for their students can be translated into an approach that cultivates culturally relevant teaching.

*The Affective Domain and Culturally Relevant Teaching.*

What I found in my study was that the view of student and teacher was flexible in that IVTs were there at the school to teach but also to learn. I found that the three participants wanted to expose their students to other cultures so that they would have a better understanding of the outside world and be more open and prepared if they wanted to leave their communities. Conversely, I
found that these IVTs also wanted to be exposed to their students’ culture so they would have a better understanding of their world which was so foreign to them. This attitude was mutually beneficial because it allowed their students to learn about the globalizing world but also gave their students the opportunity to teach about their environment and their world. The local teachers were aware of striking this balance between a global education and a local education, espousing, what Esmeralda called an “educacion integral”, which translates to integrated or holistic education. On a practical level she saw this education as an introduction to the world of technological and societal changes, but which also focused on the community and the land.

In my study I found that much of this student-teacher learning came naturally out of both the students’ and the IVTs curiosity to learn about one other. Even so, this natural curiosity should be harnessed and drawn upon so that it becomes an explicit component of culturally relevant teaching. That being said, making this type of learning a specific subject may take away from the spontaneous nature of cross-cultural learning. Therefore, IVT should be directed by suggestions, examples and opportunities, which could encourage them to learn from their students and illustrate how this could be achieved. As a result, they are both introduced to cross-cultural learning as an important part of their teaching role and given direction to utilize it as a part of culturally relevant teaching.

**Place based Learning**

What I learned from the local teachers was that the land was an integral part of their students’ educational development. All three local teachers told me how important teaching their students about their land and their culture was to them. They viewed their schools as the centre of the communities and adopted one form or another of place based education, such as teaching the names and uses of crops indigenous to the area or teaching the students to grow and tend to plants as part of a reforestation project. This place based education came from the indigenous curriculum ‘Red de Chinchicha’, which was taught as an addition to the Ecuadorian curriculum mandated by the federal government. The reason the local teachers felt that it was important to teach the students placed based education was because of diminishing inter-generational learning

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10 A critical pedagogy of place aims to a) indentify recover and creat material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments and b) indentify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places.” (Grunewald, 2003, p9)
and traditional customs, partly because the parents often left the communities to work in the nearby cities. This issue was illustrated by Sisa, who told me,

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, grains in order to have a lot of nourishment. This is very important.

The three local teachers felt that one way to achieve this was through artisan workshops and environmental projects that taught the students traditional modes of artisanship and agriculture. Needless to say, the IVTs would not be able to teach these students the traditional modes of production. However, the volunteers could show support and interest in learning and knowing about their students lived traditions and culture. One way to do this would be if IVTs were encouraged to learn from their students’ knowledge by asking about their customs, traditions, and ways of life. With that said, IVT must respect of the boundaries of what their students wish them to know and be aware of the power differential, which they possess as teachers, and as the privileged other (Kempf, 2009; Langdon & Harvey, 2009).

There are two ways I envision that culturally relevant teaching through cross-cultural learning could occur. The first is through explicit instruction on how to facilitate learning environments where the students would feel comfortable to teach their teachers about their personal and community lives. Second, implicit structures could mandate that IVT to become actively involved in their students cultural traditions and way of living. These systems would help resist impositions of Western worldviews and allow for an acknowledgment and valuing of their students own epistemologies (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001).

The Explicit and Implicit aspects of CRT

What I propose is that the INGO prepare the IVT’s so that they are aware from the outset that they are on the project not only to teach but to learn from their students. The IVTs could be given instructions on the many ways cross-cultural learning can be achieved. This could be done through the lesson planning workshop that all IVT’s attend during their first week on the project. These workshops could detail how regular lessons can be transformed into opportunities for cross-cultural teaching and learning. Pedagogical examples include lessons that ask the students
to share their own lived experiences through art, creative writing, and drama or even through play. As well, the students could do group presentations on certain customs or traditions that they share, allowing them to learn from one another while expanding their teachers comprehension of their community life. Furthermore, allowing time for outdoor activities and field trips where the students would take on the role of teachers allows for a more tactile way for cross-cultural learning to occur (Riggs, 2003). Therefore, I suggest that the IVT’s work with the local teachers to prepare outdoor lessons that would allow the students to teach and direct the teacher but that would also be relevant to their own learning. The learning process then would be supported by the local teacher, enacted by the students and enhances the cultural competence of the IVT. This reciprocal and integrated form of teaching and learning through cross cultural difference would be a key benefit to culturally relevant teaching.

The next step in fostering and integrating cross-cultural teaching and learning as a means of culturally relevant teaching could be to embrace structural changes which could facilitate place based learning. When I was on the project, certain structures already existed which connected the students to their land and culture. At all three schools, there were plant projects that were funded by various international and local charitable organization that provided plants for the school to cultivate. The students were required to water and tend to these plants. Also at Waorani, they had sewing lessons for the students to practice their needle work. It is these types of projects that help connect the children to their land and cultural customs. One way to enhance these projects would be if the students could use these projects as an opportunity not only to learn but also to teach the IVT on how to cultivate the land or sew a traditional pattern. However, for this to happen more consistently and frequently place based projects that would benefit the community while teaching the students about their surroundings, should be supported by the INGO (Ebersole & Worster, 2007; Smith, 2002). For ideas on what projects to sponsor they could go to the local teachers and the community members to ask what they think the students could do to help the community thrive and develop. Fortunately, Cathy makes 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...Because 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 the local teachers and the community, a necessity if land based projects are going to be successful. Therefore, facilitating a concerted effort among the IVTs, local teachers, the project manager and the community members to establish and enact specific land based projects should be able to help the students learn the culture, histories and traditions of their land and their people.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter extended my research beyond the realm of academia and disciplinary theory so that it might also be an informative tool that can be useful to the communities in my study (Lomawaima, 2000). In this chapter I moved from the academic to the practical in an effort to “draw out appropriate implications from these stories” so that praxis may be developed (Silverman, 2005, pg 17). I made four suggestions for ways in which cross-cultural educational projects such as these could become culturally relevant, personally empowering and academically fulfilling for the students. These were:

1. Promoting the professionalization and collegiality amongst the volunteers

2. Building bridges of communication (increasing access and promoting consistency) between local teachers and IVT.

3. Moving beyond respect to a critical consciousness of their students and the community’s socio-historio-political realities.

4. Increasing opportunities for place based education: Allowing the students to teach the IVT’s

I found that different modes of culturally relevant teaching can be possible if we seriously consider the limitations, barriers and opportunities that exist within this cross-cultural context. The suggestions outlined above are small steps towards greater strides in developing better teacher training, educational models, and pedagogical approaches that better suit the cultural context of global cross-cultural development education. In the next chapter, I will examine how
this study can and should lead to further research that focuses on discussing, improving and expanding on my arguments for promoting Indigenous education in cross-cultural contexts.
Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have been looking at three international volunteer teachers’ attitudes, perceptions, and pedagogies in selected cross-cultural classrooms in rural Ecuador. My research question focused on looking at the IVTs as individual and as teachers in order to determine how and if their classrooms could be culturally relevant to their Indigenous students’ lives. In the following pages, I will conclude this inquiry by providing an overall summary of this research projects and its findings. I will also examine how the findings and discussion of this study contribute to an understanding of global, cross-cultural and Indigenous education in the context of the literature on comparative international and development education. Finally, I offer recommendations for future research that stem from this particular ethnographic case study.

Summary of Research Project

The thesis stemmed from an interest in international non-governmental organizations (INGO) increasing focus and activity in the field of education. My frame of reference was the realm of international aid education and how this has an impact on Indigenous students. The main purpose of this thesis was to investigate the selected international volunteer teacher’s views on their role and impact on students’ education at the ground level. Specifically, I wanted to learn how these IVTs perceived and enacted teaching that might be culturally relevant to their students’ lives. To achieve this objective, I interviewed three international volunteer teachers regarding their worldviews on education, learning and cross cultural teaching and observed their classroom practices. Subsequently, I interviewed the local teachers and the project manager to get a fuller, more in-depth understanding of the IVTs purpose, context and contributions at the schools. I used this data to analyze the limitations, barriers and opportunities for culturally relevant teaching by the IVTs. Through my analysis, I have shown that there is a high level variability among the ways IVTs perceived and enacted culturally relevant teaching. This study provided a close-up look at the similarities and differences among three IVTs in similar context and how they taught in a cross-cultural setting. My analysis underscored the ways in which IVTs could be culturally relevant in their practices, as well, it outlined the internal and external barriers that made culturally relevant teaching difficult to achieve. Since my research was informed by anti-
colonial theories, and because I was working within an Indigenous community, I centered on the ways in which the limitations and barriers to CRT were or were not surmounted. Based on these findings I made detailed recommendations to enhance and cultivate CRT within the school and through the IVTs. In my review of my findings, I illustrate the path that led me to these recommendations and summarize the list of recommendations that came from my findings.

**Review of Findings**

Chapter four profiled my three principal participants through narrative descriptions of their personal histories, their schools and classrooms and their worldviews on education. The great level of diversity amongst the IVTs, as well as the schools they were teaching in was the first major finding of my research. This illuminated how variability among the IVTs perceptions and practices challenged their enactment of culturally relevant teaching. This ground level contextualization of the IVTs, as people and as teachers, set the stage for the following chapter in which I examined repeated themes related to the enactment of culturally relevant teaching in this cross-cultural setting.

In Chapter five there was an examination of the principal participants’ perceptions, relationships, and pedagogies in order to highlight certain issues pertinent to this study. Specifically, how culturally relevant teaching was or was not enacted by each IVT, and the reasons behind this. Three analytical themes focused on the barriers to culturally relevant teaching. These were a) low teacher efficacy as a consequence of their perception of their role as volunteer teachers, b) uncertainty of the educability of their students, and c) limited cultural competence. These barriers seemed to derive from internal factors, such as the IVTs perceptions of their abilities and of their volunteer role as teacher. Other barriers were presented by external factors, such as their relationship with their local teacher and with the structure and organization of the school.

The last theme in my findings was the benefits how the cross-cultural nature of this teaching and learning context has allowed for some culturally relevant teaching to occur. I explored how the cross-cultural dynamic between the IVTs and their students allowed for reverse teaching/learning between the teachers’ and the students. This type of learning enacted Freire’s concept of teachers as learners in his book aptly titled, “Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to
those who Dare to Teach”. Freire argued that such a dialogic and reciprocal method of teaching and learning through shared experiences was culturally responsive because it allowed students to learn about their environments and also fostered a sense of pride of who they are and where they came from (Freire, 1998, p xiv). Thus, the students learned about their own culture by teaching the IVTs about their personal histories and local environment. This also helped the IVTs become more culturally aware and knowledgeable about their students’ lived experiences and community context.

Based on my findings about the limitations and opportunities for culturally relevant teaching in cross-cultural classrooms, the praxis chapter outlined opportunities to expand, enhance and cultivate school environments more conducive to culturally relevant teaching. I developed four suggestions on how to work with the limitations and expand on the benefits of having volunteer teachers in a cross-cultural setting.

The first recommendation explored ways in which teacher efficacy could be bolstered for all the IVTs. I examined the role that the IVTs saw themselves playing in the project and found that their lack of training played a part in how they conceptualized the work on the project as being ‘better than nothing’. To deal with this deficit concept I suggested that by professionalizing the IVTs role on the project notion this could allow levels of teacher efficacy and accountability to increase. I gave three suggestions to help create a sense of professionalism amongst the IVTs.

a) The pre-arrival stage was vital to the project, in so far as the IVTs expectations may be managed so that they might become aware of the duties and goals of role as teacher. Clearly outlining the IVTs professional role as teacher can help to minimize the number of volunteers who are not willing or able to commit to becoming full time teachers.

b) Also I argued for an organized system of checks and balances to require the IVTs to be prepared for their classes with daily lesson plans and weekly assessments. Regulated checks and balances could help deal with issue of classroom organization, preparedness and consistency amongst IVTs. Also it may encourage the IVTs think in the long term because it could require them to prepare to hand over their classrooms to the incoming IVTs.
Lastly, I sought ways to create a culture of collegiality that could help to instil a sense of professionalism amongst the IVTs. I recommended formalized systems could give the IVTs time and space to discuss and share their weekly challenges and successes at their respective schools. These weekly debriefings could also allow for a chance for collaboration amongst IVTs, to join forces, create lessons and share ideas on how to better their classrooms and schools. In this way, these group meetings could not only foster a sense of camaraderie but may create a forum to bridge ideas between teacher development and school improvement (Hargreaves, 1994, p 187).

The following recommendation addressed the external factors hindering the IVTs ability to be culturally relevant teachers. In Chapter 5, I had discussed how the IVTs’ relationships with the local teachers were essential to CRT and sought to develop a way to enhance these relationships. I underlined the relatively insular nature of these communities and asserted that the local teachers were an important link between the IVTs and the communities’ educational needs. As such, I suggested that the INGO place emphasis on building bridges that would make contact between the local teachers and the IVTs more consistent and organized. I saw formal guidelines and orientations of the goals of the local teachers as essential, because they would a) help the IVT be more involved and personally accountable for these goals and, would help to b) give them a sense of direction and purpose at the school. Furthermore, I suggested that weekly meetings be held between the local teachers and the IVTs. Such meetings, would not only maintain consistency amongst the IVTs’ level of preparedness and commitment, but also guide their curriculum so that it could be more locally based and culturally relevant.

Next, I discussed ways to assist IVTs so that they could develop deeper understandings of their students’ cultural backgrounds and lived histories. I suggested that the INGO move beyond promoting respect for the community, as the ultimate goal for the IVTs. I argued that, if the IVTs had a firmer grasp on the ‘socio-historico-political realities’ of their students’ lives, they would not only have a respect for the community but also an understanding of their students as complex and contextualized beings, which is necessary for CRT to occur (Marx, 2008; Mohanty,1991; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). Furthermore, I suggested that students’ ‘socio-historico-political realities’ be viewed in relationship to the impact that education has had on these students lives so that the IVTs become more aware of their potential effect on changing their student’s lives. I
viewed Cathy, the project manager, as the cultural liaison between the community and the IVTs. This is because Cathy had forged a strong relationship with the community and was aware and up-to-date on their expectations and hopes for the school. Also, she was keenly aware of the histories of the community, the Indigenous peoples in Ecuador and of how formal education was changing their lives, for better or for worse. I suggested that she create an information package that would outline the socio-political history of Indigenous peoples in Ecuador and in the local communities and also offer her own perspectives on the effects education has had for the students and the community.

Giving teachers direct information about the students’ and community realities and the impacts the project is having on students’ lives could have a twofold effect. Firstly, it could give the IVTs certain insider insights that might allow them to become conscious and knowledgeable of their students’ particular contexts. Secondly and more importantly, it may help to foster a sense of concern and accountability for their work on the project.

Lastly I discussed how to cultivate the natural learning process that comes from cross-cultural educational interactions that I found occurring on the project. In my study I found most IVTs shared the idea that they came to a foreign land to teach but also to learn. By and large, the IVTs had come to immerse themselves in a foreign language, land and culture, thereby having a shared appreciation for difference.

The desires, of the three IVTs in my study to learn and to acculturate also helped them to value the communities they were teaching in. This idea of value is essential to culturally relevant teaching as it allows for affective teaching to occur. This is because the affective domain goes beyond procedures and pedagogy of the teachers to include the teachers’ ability to value their students’ attitudes, feelings and beliefs and encourage their students to discuss and pursue their personal interests and goals (Shechtman, Z. & Leichtentritt, J. 2004, p 323). I found this affective domain to be one of the most valuable aspects of these international volunteer teachers. Therefore, in this section I showcased how the IVTs love and care for their students could potentially cultivate culturally relevant teaching approaches. I professed that cross-cultural learning was apt to occur because the IVTs were eager to learn about their students, just as their students were eager to learn about them. I outlined explicit and implicit functions that might foster culturally relevant teaching through cross-cultural learning. The explicit approach included
teacher workshops to develop lesson planning, presentations and field trips to give the students the reins to teach. The implicit option enacts artisanal and environmental projects as a more permanent way of integrating culturally relevant learning as part of the students’ education.

**My Research’s Contributions to Global, Cross-cultural and Indigenous Education**

My research findings and recommendations point to the importance of problematizing and discussing the impacts of global development education projects and the notion of Education for All. I found that although there were good intentions and many benefits that came from the INGO’s presence in these schools, there is still work to be done to ensure that the education is relevant, useful and empowering to these students’ lives.

Education is not one-size-fits-all and in a rural Indigenous community certain values and knowledge may be left out if the IVTs are not directed and encouraged to teach to their students needs (Langdon & Harvey, 2009; Mundy, 2009). This statement is much in line with anti-colonial theorists who argue that INGO’s and the IVTs must adapt to the foreign setting and not the other way around (Kempf, 2009; Dei & Asgharzadeh; Langdon & Harvey, 2009). Yet this does not necessarily happen organically. Therefore I explored policies and systems that could be put in place that could make the cross-cultural teaching more responsive and critically aware of this local context. I came to believe that CRT, if purposefully and consciously enacted, would encourage learning through difference which empowers students to learn about themselves and their communities by teaching their teachers.

Cross cultural educational interactions with the IVTs seemed to give the students an opportunity to learn about themselves and about others by virtue of the differences between them and their foreign teachers. Teachers and students alike learned new perspectives, knowledge and alternative ways of living and being. What was frequently noted around the project was there was a broadening of horizons or and expanding of minds that occurred to both teachers and students. Yet, there are also drawbacks that come from these cross-cultural interactions that must be taken into account (Bernstein, 1987). Imposition and neo-colonialism can transpire silently, and this is why I believe criticality and reflection should be an integral component of all levels of global development projects (Apple, 1982; Carnoy, 1974; Kanu, 2005). Most specifically self reflection and criticality must be encouraged in IVTs working in these cross-cultural
environments because it may help them understand their own positionality and underlying biases. This pedagogical strategy of critical reflection applies to P.J Palmer’s (1998) contention that that ‘we teach who we are’. These tenets must be incorporated as a central component of culturally relevant teaching especially in cross-cultural contexts such as these. Critical reflection and CRT might motivate teachers to improve their practices, rethink their worldview in a way that requires them to put the needs of their students above all else.

The concept guiding my research was Indigenous knowledge and education. The reason I have held off on broaching this subject is because during my research I learned very little about the Indigenous knowledge within the communities where I studied. Reflecting on it now, I realize that it was naive of me to think that I would be exposed to local knowledges that are deeply connected to space and the everyday experiences of daily life, generated by the characteristics of the people, environment and political and social history of the space (Mwadime, 1999). This experience is not unique to me; the IVTs also remained outsiders to the local knowledge of the people. Now I see these barriers as an outcome of the Indigenous communities’ motives to retain their knowledge as theirs. It is important to distinguish between the contributions that IVTs bring as outsiders and the Indigenous knowledge that comes from the community. Learning about this local context and its self made boundaries made me realized that Indigenous knowledge is not IVTs’ knowledge to teach. All three IVTs, the project manager and the local teachers understood this distinction as common sense and respectful. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they did not place great importance on IK for Indigenous education; however they were realistic that this had to occur through the family, community members and elders. This is not to say that because IVTs are teaching that IK does not enter the classroom. IVTs are capable of learning, to an extent, certain aspects of the local knowledge and wisdom through the teachings of their students. In this way I see that IK can still be recognized, learned and honoured in a cross-cultural setting such as this.

**Opportunities for Future Research**

International educational aid is a phenomenon that is occurring at a rapid pace. It is also a subject that is gaining further interest in the field of academia (Anderson-Lewitt, 2003; Mundy 2000; Baker, D & Wiseman, 2000). IVTs’ perceptions and enactment of culturally relevant teaching in a cross-cultural educational setting have yet to garner much attention. This study highlighted that
ground level research on IVTs can teach us a lot about the implications and impacts that global development education is having on indigenous students. And this is important if we want to move forward in developing cross-cultural education that is relevant, beneficial and empowering to these students’ lives.

This study was a limited by small sample set, involving only three IVTs, three local teachers, and one project manager and as such is too small to be representative of international educational aid. Furthermore, I was restricted by time and my outsider status, which limited my explorations of the communities’ needs and desires for their children’s education. As such I acknowledge that this study is contained with the boundaries of its relatively small sphere and cannot and should not speak as an authority for the community I was working in. However, this study does show that future research in the area of international educational aid and its relations to Indigenous rights and anti-colonial theory would be useful.

Earlier, it was mentioned that the researcher role when involved with Indigenous communities’ is to ensure that research is “respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful” and actively involved in investigating solutions for the enrichment of the community (Smith, 2006, pp9). Furthermore, for developmental work to be successful it needs to build on the Indigenous knowledge so that it is adapting to the “values, interests, aspirations, social institutions which are important in the lives of people” (Ake, 1998, p 20). Therefore, I recommend that further research be focused on how the international volunteer teachers in cross-cultural educational contexts can develop their pedagogical positions and approaches to better suit the cultural context which they are teaching in. I developed the following four suggestions:

1. Increase teacher efficacy in untrained IVTs’ by professionalizing their notion of volunteer teachers.
2. Enhance IVTs and local teachers’ relationships so that culturally relevant teaching can be encouraged and fostered.
3. Explore ways that IVTs can increase their cultural awareness and knowledge of their students.
4. Cultivate CRT by engaging the differences between Indigenous students and foreign teachers.
This thesis has set out some possible recommendations of ways to achieve these goals, but these once again were based on my particular research experience. In order for these suggestions to be better addressed and developed there needs to be a more longitudinal study with a greater sample set of IVTs. Also a cross-comparison with other INGO’s doing similar volunteer work in the field would help illustrate the variety of practices across different projects and elucidate the impacts of cross-cultural educational aid on a global level. Lastly, it would be beneficial if the research be done in alliance with the community and the local teachers so that they can help direct and guide the aims and goals of the study (Battiste, & Henderson, 2000; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2006). In conclusion, this thesis is a first step towards further research that should be more long term, in depth and comparative, including more IVTs and INGO’s and integrated with the values, thoughts, needs and wants of the communities on the ground level. It is my hope that through further research we may come to understand and identify practical ways in which international aid education can become integrated with Indigenous knowledges so that it is more useful, relevant, decolonizing and emancipatory for the students receiving it. With all this said the next chapter will provide a personal epilogue that elucidates realities I faced as a researcher in order to highlight the difficulties in pursing this type of research.
Chapter 8: Epilogue and Personal Reflection

Now that the collecting, analyzing, constructing and deconstructing of my data is finished I think it is time to reflect on the totality of this study. My journey into this study began when I was in my third year of undergraduate school when I decided to volunteer teach in rural Guatemala. That experience changed my perspective and led me to pursue my interest in the field of international educational aid. Coming to OISE and studying a vast array of comparative, international and development education literature has brought me full circle from when I was an eager volunteer ready to ‘make a difference’ in the world. I now see things more critically and better understand my own positionality; White, privileged and from a dominant European culture, and how this plays into the power politics of cross-cultural education. In this epilogue, I will reflect on my new ideas on cross-cultural research and teaching in contrast to when I started this journey. I will address what research now means to me after living, working and researching in Ecuador and at OISE over the past two years. And finally, I will look at how I personally feel about my contributions and challenges as an IVT and the changes that need to occur within my own practice to make it more culturally relevant, respectful and emancipatory for my students.

Upon taking my first research methodology course almost two years ago I realized with much chagrin that I did not really know what research meant. I learned that it is not simply an investigation into an unknown; it is much more challenging than that. Qualitative research “cross-cuts disciplines, fields and subject matters” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p2). It is complex and ever changing and is continually challenging itself; its methods, representations, purpose and outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). And what’s more, research has a reckless history with objectification, subjugation and oppression of its ‘subjects’. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) so damningly states when referring to the word research, “the word itself it probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous worlds vocabulary...It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism”. Needless to say, I was nervous to even approach the subject area of Indigenous knowledges and decolonization, which I was interested in. Nonetheless, I knew it that the influx of international volunteer teachers was occurring and that it hadn’t really been questioned or dissected in great depth within the field of comparative, international and development education research. Therefore, I decided that I would move along with this study but focus on the international volunteer teachers as my principle participants so that I could avoid the ethical
dilemma of researching Indigenous peoples. I realize now that this focus limited my studies reach and possibility for praxis. This is because, although my study was looking at IVTs specifically, the motive behind it was to search for the best teaching practices that would be beneficial and relevant to the community’s needs. Consequently, my lack of relationship with the community really limited the influence of my findings. I agree with Marie Battiste’s and Youngblood Henderson’s (2000) assertion that research with indigenous communities must involve respect, partnership, consultation and collaboration. I admit now that I did not create these essential connections with the community. This was because of time restrictions which only afforded me two months in the field as well as the language barrier; I do not speak Kichwa, which further limited our lines of communication.

Fortunately, and for which I am grateful, I did have the input from the local teachers, which gave depth to and substantiation my understanding of Indigenous knowledge. Nonetheless, I feel that if this study was to live to its full potential I would need the guidance, involvement and support of the community so that it could be collaborative and well-balanced.

These ethical dilemmas lead me to face the question, how is my research respectful and useful for the community it is purporting to help? I am still unsure of the answer. The purpose of my study was to outline recommendations to better the practices of IVT so that they are more culturally relevant to Indigenous students. However, I now grapple with the fact that my study, though well intentioned, may be imposing a concept, like culturally relevant teaching, on a group of people that do not even know what that approach involves. At the end of this academic journey, I now realize that research is even more complicated and sticky that I could have ever imagined. I now know that I still have a long way to go in order to decolonize my mind and my methodologies so that they are more inclusive, open and flexible so that the voices of those being studied are those voices guiding the study. For me now, this is only way that research can be truly inclusive, engaging and emancipatory for the peoples involved.

My notions of ethical research also transfers to my own conceptions of teaching and learning. The pursuit of respect, partnership, consultation and collaboration with ones students as well as the community, is in my mind essential. As carefully as we should research there should be equal care in teaching, especially when there are power differentials to take into
consideration. Furthermore, this careful consideration must take into account one’s own positionality, as well as their students, i.e. class, race, gender, colonial history, epistemologies. This idea of critical self awareness and reflection is necessary within a cross-cultural educational setting so that teachers recognize the larger context of the impacts of their teaching on their students’ lives. With those sentiments in mind I will speak directly to how difficult this is to achieve.

As I have said, I first started, teaching internationally, without a teaching degree, at the age of 21. Since then I have taught in international aid education projects during my time off from school. During my field research this was no exception as I was asked to fill in, almost on a weekly basis, for IVT who were ill. I am thankful for this opportunity because it truly allowed me to walk in my participants shoes, so to speak. As a result of these experiences I would like to take the opportunity to say that teaching is probably one of the hardest things to do. And when you add language and cultural differences and a lack of formal training it is easy to get overwhelmed, frustrated and at times defeated. And for this, I would like applaud my participants for their hard work and reiterate that although they all had varying degrees of difficulties they were understandable due to the context they were working in.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge my own fortunes, which have allowed me the privilege to study and research in a postgraduate institution which has helped me achieve a language of critical thinking and social justice. My studies have helped to guide me to be more self reflexive and also aware of the socio-historio-political context of the community I was in. With all this said, I still found it difficult to create a classroom atmosphere that was engaging, inclusive, relevant and emancipatory for my students. Most of the time I was simply trying to keep my students interested and under control. What I am trying to say, is that IVTs are in a very difficult position and it is easy for good intentions to go by the wayside. The purpose of this study was not to criticize the three IVTs, who graciously allowed me into their classroom and shared their intimate thoughts. The purpose was, and is to explore how we can make things better.

As my study and my own personal experiences have shown things are not working as harmoniously as they could be in these global education projects. Western knowledge systems
are still being favoured and normalized and universality and standardization are preventing Indigenous knowledge systems from being reclaimed and reintroduced to the world. So, how should we deal with this predicament? I think that there should be an effort to engage with Indigenous ways of learning and knowing so that teacher development moves beyond policy and theory to a more internal and holistic development of the self.

In the most ideal sense, Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, should allow for the possibility of deconstructing hierarchal learning, so that people learn as a community and through the community; it is about constructing wisdom together as a collective (Battiste, 2000; Castellano, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Madjidi, & Restoule). For me, we need this ideal so we may be continually looking towards creating positive change in these classrooms. So although I am romanticizing, the complex and subjective concept of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, the purpose is so that we may have a utopian model to strive towards. Thus, my idyllic Indigenous approach is about forging teacher-students-community relationships so we can collectively come together to learn and know about each other’s minds and spirits and our connection to one another and the land. In this way, teacher development should be about cultivating connections with the people and places they are teaching in. That being said, this will not necessarily come easily or naturally, as Indigenous forms of learning and knowing have been ignored, devalued and delegitimized by dominant Western epistemologies for centuries (Abdullah, & Stringer, 1999; Dei & Asgharzadeh; Hingangaroa-Smith, 2000; Kempf, 2009; Madjidi, & Restoule, 2008; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). And so, the responsibility is on the organizations, the communities and the teachers, that are part of international aid education projects, to be open to different way of teaching that involves love, care, critical awareness, responsibility and collaboration.
References


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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Primary Participants (Pre-Observation)

Personal History: Getting to know you

- Country of Birth/ Current Country of Residence
- Places they have travelled/lived/ worked/studied
- Languages Spoken/ Mother tongue and additional languages
- Experiences with learning another language: when did they learn, where did they learn, methods used to learn?

Educational Background: Tell me about your experiences with education and schooling

- Education as a child/adolescent and adult. Where they were educated, how did they find their education to be fulfilling or not, common teaching styles, methods and/or models they learned through? Important events that shaped your perceptions of education
- Training and education as a teacher. Important events that shaped your perceptions of education and schooling
- Previous experience with teaching as a foreigner
- Reasons for becoming a teacher

Current Teaching Experience: How would you describe your experiences working at this school?

- How long have you been a volunteer here?
- What is the total time you expect to teach here, and why?
- Current teaching position: grade(s), spectrum of ages taught, size of class, and type of subjects taught.
- Describe your daily routine
Responsibilities inside and outside the classroom: How large and/or small do you find these duties to be?

- Describe your role as a volunteer teacher. ie. educational or otherwise
- Reasons for volunteering as a teacher

Indigenous Knowledge: Attitudes and Perceptions

- In your own words how would you describe, broadly, the concept of Indigenous knowledge?
- Can you tell me any experiences you have had with Indigenous knowledge, in the classroom or in the community?
- How much to you feel you know about the local knowledge of this community?
- Do you feel you have learned anything new from your students or from the community you are working in?
- How much local knowledge have you found in the curriculum content?
- How important do you feel it is to have Indigenous knowledge as a part of the curriculum?
- If Indigenous knowledge is also a way of learning, how would you describe the way your students learn? Compare this with your own experience of learning and/or teaching
- As a foreigner teacher do you think extra training would have been useful in teaching Indigenous students?
- How well prepared do you feel you have been trained to teach your Indigenous students?

Teaching Strategies and Methods: How do you teach your students?

- Describe the set-up of your class. How often do you do, a) front of the room teaching b)group work c) individual lessons
- What subject matter do you cover? What would you consider to be the main focus of the curriculum?
- What subjects do your students find most/least difficult? Why do you think this is?
- How often do you teach from a textbook?
• How much do you adhere to a daily lesson plan?

• How much freedom do you have to teach outside the curriculum or lesson plans?

Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture: Learning about these interaction

• How often do you feel the lesson material pertains to your students’ culture and home life?

• How often do you adapt the lessons to pertain to your students’ culture and home life?

• Do you feel the students are connected personally to the curriculum content?

• What is your perception on the quality and relevance of your teaching material to your students’ lives, learning abilities and future aspirations?

• What differences have you found between your students at this school and students in your home country?

• How would you say you teach differently to these students? Elicit reasons for this.

• Have these differences made your teaching experiences more challenging? If yes, how so? If no, why is it easier?

• What other challenges do you face teaching outside of your own cultural setting?

The School and the Community

• What are some positive aspects of being a volunteer teacher in this school? This can come from your relationships with local teachers, students, parents, community members, and the project director.

• What are some negative aspects of being a volunteer teacher in this school? This can come from your relationships with local teachers, students, parents, community members, and the project director.

• What are some cultural challenges that you face as a foreigner in this community?

• How do you address these challenges? Are they issues that you believe can be resolved?
• What expectations do you place on yourself as a volunteer teacher?

• Do you feel you have met these expectations as a teacher?

• What are some cultural expectations of the teacher that you feel the school, community and or INGO has placed on you?

• How has this helped/hindered or both, your teaching approaches and practices?
Appendix B

Classroom and School Observation Guide for Primary Participants

- Date, Time, Classroom (grade, or ages), Subject(s) taught
- Classroom Routines
- Classroom Interruptions, Disruptions or Special Events
- Information on the blackboard or hand outs

- Use of mandated school curricula
- Use of school textbooks
- Type of Textbooks
- Use of non-curricular materials
- Types of non-curricular materials
- Adherence to daily lesson plans
- Noted departures from daily lesson plans? Why and how did they change the lessons

- Pedagogical methods/strategies
- Methods of teaching lessons
- Difficulties teaching lesson
- Ways the teacher connects lesson materials to students’ cultural backgrounds and context
- Successful lessons
- Unsuccessful lessons
- Critical incidents

- Reference to North American Culture
- References to Ecuadorian Culture
• Reference to Communities Culture
• Use/Amount of Local Knowledge Content
• Use/Amount of improvised Local Knowledge Content
• Culturally relevant lesson
• Culturally relevant teaching methods/strategies
• Teachers comfort with culturally based questions
• Teachers probing of culturally based questions
• Other activities involving local knowledge and/or culture
Appendix C

Discussions topics with Secondary Participants: Local Teachers and the INGO’s Project Manager

About the School:

- When the school was opened
- Reasons for opening the school
- Purpose of the school
- Goals (past, present and future) for the school and its members
- Philosophy of the school
- Obstacles and Challenges
- Improvements or setback over the yards
- Effects of the school. On the children, parents, and local community

Curriculum/and Teaching Materials:

- What were the factors that led you to choose this curriculum and these teaching resources?
- Do you believe this curriculum to be teaching effectively and purposefully?
- What would you change to the curriculum if you could?
- What would you change about the school itself if you could? i.e., size, site, space, teachers, volunteers, students
- Do you find the curriculum to be culturally relevant to your students lives? If yes, how so. If no, why not

Volunteer Teachers:

- How useful are the volunteer teachers in the classroom? How much variance do you find between teachers?
- How effectively do you feel the volunteer teachers are being trained to teach their students?
- What qualities do you believe make a good volunteer teacher?
- How well do the volunteer teachers understand/value and adapt to the communities culture, customs, values?
- Describe your expectations of the volunteer teachers and how often do they meet these?
Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Primary Participants (Post-Observation)

I will be using the same guiding questions I used in the Pre-Observation Interview in order to keep the range of answers, experiences, reflection organized, coherent and consistent. Even so, my data collection and analysis will be a simultaneous, reflective and iterative process that will allow me to be more conscious of the variety of questions that should be asked. As such, I will be adding clarifying questions, adapting the original questions to be more context specific and creating new question that spring up due to my in class observations and secondary discussion.

As of yet this preliminary research has not been made so I cannot say exactly what will be asked but I can say they will generated with major research questions in mind and will adhere to an ethical standard that I have detailed in my ethical considerations.

Susan- Specific Follow Up Questions

1. You had an interesting take on the futility of education for educations sake (in you own life and with your career). Now thinking about the students at you school what would you say would be useful, relevant or helpful for them in terms of education?

   In other words, what should be the purpose of these students schooling.

2. You also spoke of your desire to explore the need of education in developing countries. Can you tell me a little about what you have learned while being here?

3. You said you provide a view into the outside world. Could you explain what this view is? Why do you think it’s important for you students to advance beyond the community?

4. You said you made an effort to avoid including Western cultural symbols. But you said it was difficult to include their cultural into you lessons. Why do you think this is? What steps could be taken to be more inclusive of your students’ culture?

5. Curing the day I’ve notice you have the students practice asking questions in English. Why is this important for you?

6. You describe your kids as having a heavy responsibility at home and you speak of pressures of the family. Could you give me an idea of what you are referring to?

7. Could you describe to me each of your students?
Greta- Follow up Questions

1. You said you went from planning your lessons to a more flexible, open system. How have your students responded to this? Has this been beneficial?
2. You also said you think it is good that you are from another country? Why do you think this is important?
3. You mentioned fantasy as a major difference between the students here and at home. What have you deal with this and have you seen any changes?
4. You also said “I try to teach them what I see they don’t know and what they should know”. Can you give me an example of this? What do you think they should know?
5. You also mentioned culture a lot in our interview. This is an ambiguous term. Could you tell me what it means to you?
6. You said you had a lot of freedom in the classroom. You said you could do whatever you want. Do you think, in general, this is a good thing?
7. How do you feel about your students using Kichwa in the classroom?
8. You said it was difficult being an outsider because you didn’t know all the customs and norms. What did you do to acculturate yourself to the community?
9. How would you characterize your relationships with your students?

Monica- Follow up Questions

1. After being here for over a month. How comfortable do you feel with you or comprehension of the local history, culture and knowledge?
2. You said you use lessons mostly from previous volunteers because they have adapted them to the children’s culture. Do you think most volunteers adapt their lessons and instructions to suit their students cultural needs?
3. You say you give students a glimpse into another culture. Why is this important?
4. What does relevance in the classroom mean to you?
5. How would you characterize your relationship with you students?
6. Why has structure and routine been important to you? Has it been beneficial?

Indigenous Knowledge: Attitudes and Perceptions

- How would you describe, broadly, the concept of Indigenous knowledge?
• Can you tell me any experiences you have had with Indigenous knowledge, in the classroom or in the community?

• How much do you feel you know about the local knowledge of this community?

• Do you feel you have learned anything new from your students or from the community you are working in?

• How much local knowledge have you found in the curriculum content?

• How important do you feel it is to have Indigenous knowledge as a part of the curriculum?

• If Indigenous knowledge is also a way of learning, how would you describe the way your students learn? Compare this with your own experience of learning and/or teaching

• As a foreigner teacher do you think extra training would have been useful in teaching Indigenous students?

• How well prepared do you feel you have been trained to teach your Indigenous students?
Appendix E
Guiding frame for Indigenous knowledges taken from the literature

For the sake of this study I generated a working understanding of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) by referring to common agreements on what defines Indigenous Knowledge. This definition will steer away from making dichotomous comparisons of IK against Western knowledge because it does not address to the complexity and interconnectedness of knowledge systems. Nor do I think it assists the process of engaging, legitimizing and strengthening Indigenous knowledge systems. That being said, this definition acknowledges IK as a unique way of knowing and learning that has been mostly left out of mainstream methodological and epistemological knowledge structures.

Working definition
Indigenous knowledge systems broadly refer to dynamic and complex knowledge sets that are developed around the specific conditions of indigenous peoples in a given geographic area. These knowledge systems are continually developing and much is passed down orally and generationally.

Several Important components:
- Experientially based to a locality
- Cumulative through trial and error learning
- Tailored to local culture and environment
- Is not written down directly but transmitted orally
- Holistic, relational to humans and nature
- Dynamic and changing and heterogeneous in nature
- Has its own limitations like all types of knowledges and worldviews

(Grenier, L, 1998; Maurial, M, 1999; Dei, G.J., Hall, B.L., & Rosenberg, D.G, 2000; Wane, 2009; Mwadime, 1999)

Central Themes:
- All things are animate
- All things are interconnected
- Spiritual/ Metaphysical- Knowledge is not a secular process but a sacred one that derives from the individual and the communities connection with the environment

(Grenier, L, 1998; Majjidi, K & Restoule, Castellano, M.B, 2000; Wane, 2009; Mwadime, 1999)

3 forms of knowledge identified:
- Knowledge that is held by all or most individuals of a specific locality (Personal)
- Knowledge that belongs only or mainly to a certain group, clan, tribe, community
- Specialized knowledge which is technical and skilled persons have it

(Mwadime, R, 1999).
Sources of Knowledge:

- **Traditional Knowledge** - transmitted generationally, usually is an oral history of creation/origins of the group. These stories underlie values and beliefs.
- **Empirical Knowledge** - gained through observations of day to day life and the environment. This knowledge is dynamic, and accumulates over time.
- **Revealed Knowledge** - attained through “dreams visions and intuitions”. It is perceived to be from a spiritual/metaphysical source.

(Castellano, M.B. 2000)

Appendix F

Email Script for Project Manager

Dear xxxx,

I hope this email finds you well and that the project is running smoothly. I know how things can become overwhelming as I have also managed an educational project in Costa Rica.

After my role as project manager ended, I was admitted into a Master’s degree program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. My thesis has been influenced by my time on different projects in Latin America. Under the supervision of Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov, I hope to conduct a qualitative research study that explores and examine the first-hand cross-cultural experiences of international teachers with respect to their interactions with local knowledge in the classroom. I hope to invite 3 volunteer teachers working at the school to participate in this study, upon receiving your approval.

As the project manager of the school, I need your consent to work with 3 international volunteer teachers on this project from January 4th to March 4th, 2010. I also know that you are always in need of extra hands at the school so in addition to my research I will volunteer to work on the school during times that I am not gathering data.

I have attached an information letter that provides details on the study’s rationale, the participant requirements, and the terms of confidentiality that would protect the privacy of the participants and the school. Please be assured that you are under no obligation to consent to this study, and you can decline to participate without any judgment.

If you approve of the study, however, please send me a quick email indicating your consent.

Thank you so much for your time, and your consideration. I hope all is well at the project and that you are enjoying your time in Otavalo. I cannot wait to return to work for (name of INGO) and spend time working with you and the volunteer.

Sincerely,

Julia Rao
Appendix G

“On OISE / UT letterhead”

Administrative Information-Consent Letter

Dear xxxx,

I hope all is well you and the projects. Last time we spoke I was entering into my first year of a Masters’ program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. After studying for over year, I have seemingly come full circle and hope to do my study on international volunteer teachers on one of your projects. Under the supervision of Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov, I hope to conduct a qualitative research study that explores and examine the first-hand cross-cultural experiences of international teachers with respect to their interactions with local knowledge in the classroom. I hope to invite 3 volunteer teachers at the school to participate in this study, upon receiving your approval.

Below I have outline in better detail the study I hope to undergo. Also, if you agree to give consent for this research to move forward there is a place for you to sign your approval. Please be assured that teacher and school participation are completely voluntary: you are free to refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

This study has been reviewed by OISE/UT, by the University of Toronto’s Ethical Review Office and will be conducted under the utmost standards of ethical research.

Participants can contact the Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, if they have questions about their rights as participants.

Rationale for the Research

The rationale for this research question stems from my personal experience as an international volunteer teacher. During this time, I observed firsthand the interactions and tensions between Western knowledge systems and Indigenous knowledge system. In my research on global education I have found an abundance of literature which provides statistics on the rise in enrolment rates and literacy rates globally, as well as a range of theoretical debates that focus on the benefits and drawbacks of global education. However, I have felt that ground level experiences, such as mine, have been minimally accounted for in much of the research focused on the current state of global education. Therefore, I felt that my thesis should provide insight into the experiences and challenges that are facing a growing number of international teachers on the ‘ground level’ in light their experiences with indigenous knowledge.

Teacher Participation

If you consent to participate in this study, 3 teacher participant(s) will be asked to meet with me for a minimum of two 45-60 minute interviews at a location and a time that is convenient for them. These interviews will take place during the two month I will be on the project, from January 4th to March 4th, 2010. These interviews will take place during a two month period from January 4th to March 4th, 2008. The teachers’ participation also include allowing me to take field notes on the layout of the classroom for 3-4 hours, once every two weeks, so that I may illustrate a fuller picture of your approaches, practices and experiences. During the interviews, I will ask them to share their beliefs about education, Indigenous
Knowledge, their experiences and challenges with teaching as a foreign teacher and their thoughts on ways in which training and resources may be developed in order to assist international volunteer teachers.

Secondary Participants

Also, I want to include a comprehensive illustration of the philosophy of the school and community on education. I hope to have informal discussions with local teachers, parents, community leaders as well as yourself and the project manager. This will just be done casually though I do have some guiding questions I hope to have answered. These discussions will be unplanned and organic yet nonetheless important since these will inform my understanding of local culture and knowledge.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Information collected during this study will remain fully confidential. Audio tapes of the interviews, written transcripts, and notes taken about teaching materials and the school environment will be stored on a password protected computer and will be accessible only to me and my thesis supervisor. The school and teacher participants will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity, and at no time will real names be used in the thesis or in any presentation/report that may arise as a result of this study. Teacher participants will have access to the interview transcripts to revise any information that they feel would reveal their true identity or does not reflect what they meant to communicate. Since, I will enter the school openly as a researcher, the identities of teacher participants may become known to other members of the school; however, the topic of the research is not considered high risk. All audio tapes, transcripts, and field notes will be destroyed five years after completion of the study. Any materials provided by the teacher participants will not be photocopied or reproduced in any way. The teaching materials are not being assessed for quality; they are being used as another method to gain insight into how teachers approach issues of peace education with their students. Any field notes based on observations made at the school will also maintain student anonymity and the anonymity of anyone who is not part of the study.

Also all secondary participants will be informed of my role as a research and assured that if they would not like their perspectives or stories shared or incorporated into my research that I will respect their wishes. Secondary participants will not be referred to directly but merely be acknowledged as a part of the local community that have informed my illustrations and notions of local knowledge. In no way will any secondary participant be at risk having their identities implicated in my research.

At no time will the school, teacher participants, the community or the organization be judged or evaluated. During the interviews, teacher participants can decline to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time. Teacher participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of negative consequences or judgment. Secondary participants will participate only through informal discussions and will have the option of having their opinions and perceptions omitted from my working understanding of indigenous knowledge.

The school will be sent a summary of the research results via email which should be available to all primary and secondary participants who are interested in my findings.
Why teacher participation is important

Teacher participation is important because there is very little research on how international volunteer teachers on the ground level. Most of the research on global education focuses on theories of development yet I believe that studying the ground level experiences of international teachers would contribute to a deeper and better understanding of the possibilities of cross-cultural education globally.

If you consent to this study, please send me a quick email indicating your approval. Once I am at the project, I will ask you to sign a copy of this letter and will make a duplicate for your files.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Julia Rao                                    Sarfaroz Niyozov
OISE/University of Toronto                  OISE, University of Toronto
Email: julia.rao@utoronto.ca                 Email:sniyozov@oise.utoronto.ca
Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx                        Phone: (416) 978-0079

I have read and understand the above information, agree to participate in the study described above, and have retained a copy of this information-consent form.

______________________________  ________________________________
Signature                      Date

______________________________  ________________________________
Printed Name                   Contact Information
Dear xxxx,

My name is Julia Rao and I am a former volunteer and project manager with (name of INGO). I have worked on projects in Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras, though I have yet to have work in Ecuador and am very excited for that.

After working with (name of INGO) I decided I wanted to pursue an academic career in Education. It seems I have come full circle in that I decided to do my study on the experiences of international volunteer teachers for my thesis. What I really hope to explore is your perceptions, approaches and practices with local knowledge.

I would like to invite you to be a participant in this study which would take place from January 4th to March 4th 2010. I have attached an information letter that provides details on the study’s rationale, the participant requirements, and the terms of confidentiality that would protect your privacy as a participant. Please be assured that you are under no obligation to be in this study, and you can decline to participate without any judgment.

However, if you are interested in taking part in this study, please send me a quick email indicating your agreement to be a participant.

Thank you so much for your time, and your consideration. I hope all is well at the project and that you have been enjoying your time in Otavalo. I cannot wait to return to work for (name of INGO) and spend time with the volunteers in Ecuador.

Sincerely,

Julia Rao
Appendix I

“On OISE / UT letterhead”

Teacher Information-Consent Letter

Dear xxxx,

After three years of volunteering and working for (name of INGO), it inspired me to pursue a Master’s degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in the field of Comparative, International, Development and Education. After studying for over year, I have now reached the stage where I will be starting the thesis portion of my degree. Working under the supervision of Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov, I will conduct a qualitative research study that explores and examine the first-hand cross-cultural experiences of international teachers with respect to their interactions with local knowledge in the classroom.

As an international volunteer teacher, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I have also invited two other teachers at (insert name of school) to form part of the research group. Please be assured that participation is completely voluntary: you are free to refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You can also contact the Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, if you have questions about your rights as a participant.

Rationale for the Research

The rationale for this research question stems from my personal experience as an international volunteer teacher. I formerly volunteered for an International Non-Governmental Organization that established and directed a school for indigenous Mayan students. I have observed firsthand the interactions and tensions between Western knowledge systems and Indigenous knowledge system. In my research on global education I have found an abundance of literature which provides statistics on the rise in enrolment rates and literacy rates globally, as well as a range of theoretical debates that focus on the benefits and drawbacks of global education. However, I have felt that ground level experiences, such as mine, have been minimally accounted for in much of the research focused on the current state of global education. Therefore, I felt that my thesis should provide insight into the experiences and challenges that are facing a growing number of international teachers on the ‘ground level’.

Your Participation

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for a minimum of two 45-60 minute interviews at a location and a time that is convenient for you. These interviews will take place during a two month period from January 4th to March 4th, 2008. Also, your participation would also include
allowing me to take field notes on the layout of your classroom for 3-4 hours, once every two weeks, so that I may illustrate a fuller picture of your approaches, practices and experiences. During the interviews, I will ask you to share your beliefs about education, Indigenous Knowledge, your experiences and challenges with teaching as a foreign teacher and your thoughts on ways in which training and resources may be developed in order to assist international volunteer teachers.

**Privacy & Confidentiality**

Information collected during this study will remain fully confidential. Audio tapes of the interviews, written transcripts, and notes taken about teaching materials and the school environment will be stored on a password protected computer and will be accessible only to myself and my thesis supervisor. You will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your identity, and at no time will your real name be used in the thesis or in any presentation/report that may arise as a result of this study. You will have access to the interview transcripts to revise any information that you feel would reveal your true identity or does not reflect what you meant to communicate. Because I will be open about my role as a researcher, your identity as a participant may become known to other members of the school; however, the topic of the research is not considered high risk. All audio tapes, transcripts, and field notes will be erased five years after completion of the study.

During the interviews, you can decline to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time. Furthermore, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of negative consequences or judgment.

Also, you will be sent a summary of the research findings via email when the study is complete. And have access to a copy of the thesis once it is completed.

**Why your participation is important**

Your participation is important because there is little research being done on the experiences of international volunteer and how intercultural experiences are influencing the type of education that is carried out in the classrooms. Most of the research on global education focuses on theories of development yet I believe that studying the experiences of international teachers would contribute to a deeper and better understanding of the possibilities of cross-cultural education globally.

Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions or any input into my research considerations.

I thank you for your considerations,

Sincerely,

Julia Rao
If you would like to be a participant in this study, please send me a quick email indicating your decision. Once I am at the project, I will ask you to sign a copy of this letter and will make a duplicate for your files.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Julia Rao
OISE/University of Toronto
Email:julia.rao@utoronto.ca
Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

I have read and understand the above information, agree to participate in the study described above, and have retained a copy of this information-consent form.

_____________________________  _______________________
Signature                          Date

_____________________________
Printed Name                          Contact Information
Appendix J

Community Information Letter

(To be explained in Spanish and translated in Kichwa)

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to request approval to conduct a study at the school within the community of xxxx. The research will be primarily done with teachers through interviews and classroom observations. The intent of my study is to examine international volunteer teachers’ perceptions, approaches and uses of indigenous knowledge in the classroom. I hope that by better understanding the experiences and challenges that these teachers may have that we can come to develop a discussion of the tools and resources that may better help international teachers teach to native students.

I also hope that I may speak with local teachers and willing community members about their experiences with education and learning. I hope that through daily conversations that I may come to a better understanding of the local values, perceptions and experiences with learning and knowing. These discussions will all be informal and I will not be collecting personal information on any individuals. Though if for any reason one may want to not to disclose or withdraw information or a conversations from my research material I will respect that right immediately. Also, when I write up my thesis there will be no explicit mention of the school, the community, the International non-governmental organization or the teachers, so to ensure confidentiality.

This study has been reviewed by OISE/UT, by the University of Toronto’s Ethical Review Office and will be conducted under the utmost standards of ethical research.

Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions or any input into my research considerations.

I thank you for your considerations,

Sincerely,

Julia Rao